
DEVELOPMENT OF ORATORY BY ANCIENT THEOLOGIANs

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to determine the place of oratory in the Christian sermon of late antiquity, the significance of the works of John Chrysostom in the development of homiletic oratory and the peculiarities of the creative development of the ancient oratory tradition in Russia from a historical perspective. The study uses diachronic, comparative historical and biographical methods. The results of the study show that the Christian sermon in late antiquity began to be perceived as a literary work that requires preliminary preparation, as well as thoughtful verbal formulation, and has the author's attribution. The analysis of oratory development achieved by ancient theologians has shown the necessity of using rhetorical strategies in a sermon along with adherence to the main homiletic principles in order to enhance the verbal impact produced on the listener. The article analyses the activities of John Chrysostom as one of the eminent representatives of theological oratory, whose creative legacy represents the main tenets of Church eloquence. It has been concluded that at present, the oratory of homiletic eloquence together with secular oratory should join their efforts to form the spiritual culture of a personality and overcome hostile rhetoric.

Keywords: rhetoric, sophistry, homiletics, Christian preaching, theology

1. Introduction

At present, classical rhetoric and modern new rhetoric have developed the foundations of effective persuasive speech. Secular oratory has achieved significant success in various genres. However, modern society focuses on cultural and educational tasks in order to develop a spiritual personality. This increases the public attention not only to the secular but also to clerical eloquence.

In modern Russia, Science, education, and secular and religious culture increasingly focus on the development of the spiritual and moral culture of the society and separate individuals in order to involve all their inner forces and resources in the active search for the truth, good, and beauty. Any state or nation exists as an integral whole only in terms of the culture they created. Its

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degradation and destruction inevitably lead to the collapse and disintegration of this state or nation. The foundation of culture is always the spiritual and moral ideal of the society represented by the image of a person they create.

By virtue of their nature, people are receptive to elevated matters and can be brought up in the best possible way if surrounded by sublime and high ideals. This is encouraged by the word — secular and clerical oratory that has deep roots in the world culture.

Oratory of ancient theologians has been studied by scholars who explore different aspects of this subject: history and theory of the ancient rhetoric (J. Herrick [1], Y.V. Rozhdestvenskii [2]), interrelation between rhetoric and homiletics (M.N. Pryakhin [3], N.A. Fedorovskaya [4]), historical continuity between ancient rhetoric and Christian homiletics (P.B. Decock [5], C.L. Troup [6], J.M. Farrell [7], M.A. Tariverdieva [8]), the essence of homiletics as an art of preaching (V.V. Kuklev [9], C. Garrigós [10]).

In the first section of the article, the place of oratory in the Christian sermon of late antiquity is considered. The second section of the article is devoted to the analysis of the works of John Chrysostom in the development of homiletic oratory. The third section presents the features of the creative development of the ancient oratory tradition in Russia from a historical perspective. In conclusion, the main results of this study are formulated.

2. The role of oratory in the Late Antiquity Christian sermon

According to M.N. Pryakhin, oratory originated in Ancient Greece, where it became a vital art for any free citizen [3].

N.A. Fedorovskaya points out the fact that rhetorical principles were widely used in the ancient oratory and described in numerous secular treatises [4]. Eristic (the art of debate) and sophistry appeared alongside rhetoric.

S. Seilbek et al. note that throughout the entire period of ancient culture, rhetoric predetermined not only the style of speech but also attitudes and behaviour as a kind of life philosophy. The works of the ancient orators on rhetoric had a great influence on the further development of the theory of oratory and made a significant contribution to the development of practical eloquence [11].

J. Hadley and S. McElduff point out that the important role of public speech in the life of the elite led to the development of rhetoric teaching in classical Athens and the Hellenistic kingdoms that ruled the Middle East and Egypt after the conquests of Alexander the Great, as well as in Ancient Rome [12].

J. Herrick indicates that sophists were especially popular - they were paid teachers of eloquence and active politicians who promised to teach their students to win in debates and in courts. According to this researcher, abuse of eristic and sophistry, which were often on purpose misrepresented as rhetoric, sparked off heated arguments about the essence and social role of eloquence among philosophers who viewed sophistry as the art of deliberate plausible lies

(Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), on the one hand, and actual sophists (Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias), on the other hand [1, p. 108].

Y.V. Rozhdestvenskii says that ancient rhetoric, having come a long way of development encouraged by regular oratory practice, changed according to the requirements of real life, continuously progressed and, at the 2nd – beginning of the 3rd centuries, due to some historical reasons, having lost the connection with specific realia, transformed into a universal tool, which expanded the opportunities for its use in various spheres of social life [2, p. 165].

M.A. Tariverdieva points out that from the very beginning of Christianity a sermon has been a matter of utmost importance. The teaching about the contents and rules of composition of a Christian sermon and the science about clerical eloquence received the name ‘homiletics’. Christ’s Sermon on the Mount became a model speech in homiletics [8].

According to archpriest N.A. Favorov, homiletics is “the science that states the rules of the clerical interview and directs one to conduct successful preaching service”. Homiletics includes requirements in the following areas: 1) the subject of a clerical interview; 2) its form; 3) spirit, or internal character; 4) presentation, or external character; 5) delivery and composition of sermons addressed to the people; 6) preaching without written preparation, i.e. improvisation [13].

A clerical orator was considered a broadcaster of God’s intentions. Thus, thinking about the delivery of a clerical speech in advance was not important and even frowned upon as negligence of the highest calling of a spiritual herald. However, when Gospels appeared, the process of gradual reconciliation between homiletics and rhetoric started and the usefulness of oratory for missionary work was admitted. Citation of the texts of Gospels led to the rationalization of the contents of sermons and required preliminary preparation for their delivery [9].

At the time of an outstanding Christian theologian, Origen (185–253 AD), the tradition appeared to write down the speeches delivered by the best preachers with the help of stenographers. Thus, the attention to such literary categories as contents and form of the sermon increased. Origen highlighted the active role of preachers and, hence, the necessity for their language preparation. Later, other distinguished clerical thinkers supported this viewpoint [5].

Therefore, during this period a sermon was treated as a literary work, which is a result of human thought requiring preliminary preparation and elaborated verbal form and is attributed to a specific author.

Saint Augustine (354–430 AD) also recognized certain achievements of ancient rhetoric. It is considered his merit that rhetoric was not rejected by Christianity and developed further. St. Augustine approved of orators who addressed the souls and psychology of pupils, valued the didactic possibilities offered by the seven liberal arts, and offered to teach Christian clergymen using the programs of rhetoric schools. Nevertheless, he dismissed the ancient traditions of speech ornamentation and did not share the fascination with fabricated ideas by proving that the central place in the sermon should belong to the Bible [6].

In the fourth book of the treatise ‘On Christian Doctrine’, Saint Augustine reflects on the role of rhetoric in the interpretation of the biblical teachings and involvement of Christian preaching. He consistently proves the idea that the success of preaching depends rather “on pious prayers than orator’s abilities” [7, p. 272]. Saint Augustine postulates that it is possible to improvise in the course of delivery of a clerical sermon in order to achieve the desired effect since if one prepares for the sermon beforehand, it is difficult to predict the composition and moral state of future recipients.

According to C. Garrigos, the Christian sermon has adopted consistent organization of materials from ancient rhetoric. The text of a sermon had a clear traditional structure and included at least three compulsory parts: introduction, main body, and conclusion. Apart from that, the Christian sermon supplemented the range of figures of speech with real-life material, such as comparisons borrowed from real life (construction, farming, etc.). Such techniques made sermons comprehensible for people of various social backgrounds [10].

The work of Saint John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople (344–407 AD), was a manifestation of a genuine union of rhetoric and homiletics. On the one hand, he pointed out that rhetoric was only busy teaching how to speak well and earn money instead of guiding the soul and developing the mind. However, Saint John Chrysostom introduced a lot of achievements made by rhetoric as science into church service and clerical literature [14]. We are going to take a closer look at his contribution to clerical oratory.

3. Saint John Chrysostom as a symbol of homiletic oratory

For many generations of believers the name of Saint John Chrysostom has been a symbol of homiletic oratory. Saint John Chrysostom lived and worked in the Late Antiquity when Christians and Christianity were persecuted (the 4th century AD). He went the whole way from a young monk to archbishop of Constantinople, from a student in the oratory school founded by the famous teacher Libanius to a Christian preacher and author of homiletic works that comprise the golden fund of Christian doctrine, from a secular lawyer to a spiritual guide and clerical orator whose name has become a symbol of unequalled oratory.

The book ‘Lives of Saints’ says: “His teachings were so powerful that listeners could not have enough of them... John was such a gold-mouthed orator and amiable teacher that there was not a single person in the city who did not want to listen to his talks, and when people found out that John wanted to give a speech, they joyfully flocked to the church. City governors and judges stopped doing their tasks, merchants stopped the trade, craftsmen left aside their crafts and hurried to listen to John’s teachings trying not to miss a word coming from his mouth. Everybody considered it a big misfortune if they could not listen to sweet John’s talks.” [14, p. 101-102]

As time went by, stenographers started writing down Saint John's sermons and later gave or sold them to everyone interested. Saint John's spiritual school was flourishing. Saint John Chrysostom himself said that like a diseased man longs for fresh water, an estranged person longs for their friends ('The Speech on the Parable of the Talents'). In his sermon, he called his lay people 'beloved' and said that "his heart is captivated by the beauty of their souls, which is why he always carries their image in his heart, and even in his dreams he does not part with them". During these years, his pedagogical talent reached its height, when obedience was proved not by loud applause, which John forbade, but by silence filled with the mutual understanding that until now is called "temple silence" [Sv. D. Rostovskii, *The life of our Holy Father, St. John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, zhitie* 998, 1907, <https://pravoslavie.ru/66135.html>].

Saint John Chrysostom continued his written teaching successfully as well. He wrote ecclesiastical works that became jewels of the Christian doctrine, including 'Three Words to the Man of Faith Stagirus' and reflections 'To a Young Widow', where he spoke as an advocate of strengthening the spirit in the fight against temptations of the flesh. The treatise 'On the Priesthood', which we are going to analyse further, has become a reference book not only for priests but also for everyone interested in eloquence [15].

Slavic peoples absorbed Saint John's legacy. For instance, the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon compiled a famous book 'Zlatostruj' from his quotations and speeches. Twenty extracts are included in famous 'Supraslskaya Letopis' ('The Suprasl Chronicle') written in the 11th century. One extract is included in 'Izbornik of Svyatoslav' ('Svyatoslav's Collection') of 1073. 187 extracts are included in the 'Lives of Saints' compiled in the 15th century, etc. In 1898, the most complete collection of works by Saint John Chrysostom in Russian was published in 12 volumes. It was reprinted in 1991 in Moscow by the publishing house 'Pravoslavnaya kniga' and was many times reprinted after that.

Today the time has come to reflect on the works of the Church fathers including Saint John Chrysostom in order to restore the best classical spiritual traditions of the past. Therefore, we will conduct an analysis of an extract from the treatise 'On the Priesthood' devoted to the eloquence of a clergyman.

The famous work of Saint John Chrysostom 'On the Priesthood' [16], particularly Book V, is a unique source of the preacher's reflections on the art of oratory and homiletics of a priest. Brought up in the spirit of the best ancient rhetoric and philosophical standards by his teachers Libanius and Andragafius, Saint John reflects on the important role and difficulties of clerical eloquence, the purpose of which is 'fighting for the truth'. He is guided by the famous formula created by Aristotle, who determined the following components: "Speech consists of three elements: the orator himself, the subject he is talking about, and the person he addresses" [16, p. 42].

First of all, Saint John focuses on psychological characteristics of the audience, their reluctance to take up the modest position of pupils, instead claiming to be spectators watching a secular performance who are having fun

and evaluating the speaker as judges but not learning spiritual truths as they should be. Then he warns a clerical orator that people often do not forgive if the orator adds some extracts of works written by other authors to their speech, which can result in their unfair reprimands and accusations. Thus, a clerical orator has to be courageous to hold the audience rather than indulge its whims and silly ideas.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, there are two ways to achieve that: disregard for audience's praise and the power of the preacher's word. He studies this issue thoroughly and notes that teaching filled with 'divine grace' can be provided only by a person who despises praise, does not long for applause, who speaks to do good rather than to please people. Thus, the well-known ancient postulate about ethos (ethics) of an orator is confirmed by the homiletic works written by Saint John Chrysostom.

Saint John urges the orator, who he calls the 'leader' of people, to have a perfect command of speech, especially when facing strong criticism and revealing faults in the views held by the audience, which, in its turn, will not forgive him any flaws, such as shyness, lack of confidence, stuttering, poor vocabulary, etc., and will be indignant at what is being said, thus downplaying the benefits of the "genuine preaching" [16, p. 451]. Saint John warns the preacher, who he compares with a father of young children, against hatred and envy on the part of the audience, advises neither to exaggerate nor diminish its role, but to "extinguish it as soon as possible" [16, p. 452], destroy the ill fame, and persuade the accusers to the highest extent possible. He repeatedly underlines that "the valiant and honourable" [16, p. 454] can be accomplished only by a person who does not lose their heart, does not weaken their soul by sadness, is not charmed by praise and does not regret when loses it.

Saint John Chrysostom highlights that only few people possess the power of words and they should, even more than others, continuously improve their skills by constant exercise ("the power of words is built up by education" [16, p. 459]). According to Saint John, the most educated people should work more than others, since for even smallest flaws they can be severely reprimanded by listeners, who judge the sermon not by its contents, but by their opinion about the preacher, and do not forgive any mistakes on the part of the speaker. Saint John warns that often something very small and unimportant "diminishes the glory of many great men" [16, p. 462] because people do not forgive talented speakers even for small flaws. He regretfully states people's dislike for those who are honoured by everybody - it also applies to a church preacher who has to bear it stoically without being annoyed or weakening oneself by negative worries. Saint John is convinced that a real orator should judge their own works as a professional who is responsible for their deeds. He places an increased focus on the preacher's state of soul that should not get weaker because of hard work or lose the desire to control words and at the same time despise people's praise for the sake of truth that shall prevail.

These shrewd psychological observations resonate with the unique theory of emotions developed by Aristotle in his works, particularly in 'Rhetoric', which has not lost its value now, when the interest in classical humanitarian rhetoric is being restored.

Surely, "much toil, rewarded by scanty praise, is sufficient to cast down a man who cannot despise praise, and put him into a deep lethargy", underlines Saint John [16, p. 467]. In his opinion, one needs 'almost divine', 'adamant' soul not to be cast down or be seized by hatred. Saint John Chrysostom points out the growing love for eloquence in the hearts of Christians and sincere veneration for people who have a perfect command of words. He warns that orators should make many efforts to 'overcome the wild beast' of vanity, remain strong, calm like 'in a serene haven', and preserve the soul from passions. As if talking to modern orators, Saint John warns that there other difficulties that can be described only by people who have faced them in real life.

Therefore, works by Saint John Chrysostom are a great school for those who wish to learn the secrets of homiletic and secular oratory. Saint John's legacy contains the main postulates of clerical oratory: speeches designed for people require hard work; one should despise praise; one should constantly and persistently strengthen the power of words; the gift of eloquence should be not only acquired but also maintained by work and exercise; the higher a preacher's talent for words is, the more they should work on it; a preacher can rise above the crowd's discussions by realizing their own talent.

4. The oratorical legacy of ancient theologians from Ancient Rus to the present time

Ancient Greek-Latin-Byzantine oratory tradition was creatively developed in Ancient Rus, the historical legacy of which is of special significance from the perspective of the formation of modern oratorical culture.

Over the 11th-12th centuries, Kievan Rus developed an oratorical ideal based on the principles of Christian religion and ethics — the idea of personal modesty. However, ancient Russian orators were spiritual and intellectual guides, leaders of the society who generated socially significant ideas and values and taught ordinary people and the establishment in the name of patriotism, consolidation of the statehood, reinforcement of Christian faith and ethics.

'Izbornik' ('The Anthology') of 1076, 'A Word on Reading Books', 'The Instruction for the Rich', 'Sermon for the Brotherhood' by Luka Zhidiata, 'Sermon on Law and Grace' by Hilarion, 'A Word on Patience, Love, and Lent' by Theodosius Pechersky, 'A Word on Princes', 'A Word on the Death of the Russian Land' by Kirill Turovskii, 'On the Lack of Faith' by Serapion of Vladimir, etc. are all full of high thoughts and noble feelings [17-19].

Oratorical prose of Kievan Rus produced two main genres of eloquence - didactic spiritual preaching and complimentary epideictic speech - mainly for collective and individual reading. The social significance of the contents and form of the prose can be traced in the following titles of rhetorical anthologies:

‘Zlatoust’ (‘Golden-mouthed’), ‘Izmaragd’ (‘Emerald’), ‘Zlataya tsep’ (‘The Golden Chain’), ‘Zolotaya matitsa’ (‘The Golden Beam’), etc. These works were created by orators, clergymen, and the most educated people of the time.

At present, ancient homiletics textbooks (in clerical eloquence) have become the foundation for new publications that develop classical postulates by saints John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Gregory the Theologian in a creative way.

In 1998 in Saint Tikhon’s Orthodox University (Moscow, Russia), the departments of homiletics released a series of lectures ‘The Art of Speech’ by the priest Artemii Vladimirov [20], which looks at the issues of spiritual speech, quotations from the Holy Scriptures, elocution, epistolary genre, meaning of imagery in the art of preaching, figurative language of the Bible, etc.

It should be noted that technologically secular and clerical eloquence have a lot in common. In particular, it applies to logical aspects, speech culture of the orator, elocution, etc. Differences (in favour of homiletics) are the most apparent at the level of contents and spiritual focus of speeches (homiletics). Secular speeches lack these qualities, especially in the political, judicial, academic, and other spheres.

The Russian school of eloquence is developing successfully based on the international and post-Soviet secular and clerical rhetoric by focusing on spiritual and moral personal culture. The principles of Christian ethics are used in pedagogics and psychology. Rhetoric based on the principles of Christian ethics is also developing in Russia; a growing number of researchers draw the attention of young people to the issue of the spiritual potential of rhetoric and eloquence.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study show that the Christian sermon in late antiquity began to be perceived as a literary work that requires preliminary preparation, as well as thoughtful verbal formulation, and has the author's attribution. The analysis of the oratorical development of the theologians of the ancient period demonstrated the need to use the tools of rhetoric in the church sermon and, at the same time, observe the basic tenets of homiletics to increase the effectiveness of verbal influence on the listener. One of the outstanding representatives of theological oratory, who formulated the basic tenets of Church eloquence, was Saint John Chrysostom, whose creative legacy was perceived and found its creative development in the Russian school of eloquence.

Nowadays, the social interest in classical values, including the verbal art of homiletics and the science of preaching, is being restored; the school of secular and clerical eloquence is being developed. The government supports innovative activities conducted by talented educators and scientists dealing with eloquence since the improvement of rhetorical culture will become a significant factor in the humanization of the society. It will help members of the society to find common views through constructive dialogue, reach a consensus when

looking for solutions for topical issues. It will fill people with respect for their counterparts with different opinions, improve the argumentative culture of debaters in spiritual and secular spheres, increase the responsibility of each speaker for their rhetorical actions, help people to be guided by principles of Christian ethics.

Oratory of homiletic eloquence together with secular oratory represent a joint powerful instrument that allows overcoming hostile rhetoric and ‘wars of words’ that have often led to bloodshed, wars, and reciprocal destruction.

Science, culture, education, art, religion, and mass media should join their efforts to develop personal spiritual culture by means of oratory and spiritually driven eloquence as a guarantee of the spiritual revival of people. The mission of Christian orators, teachers, politicians, and public figures is to overcome the chaos of discord by the word and the mighty power of Christian rhetoric of love. The time has come to reconsider human values on the global scale in terms of formation of the spiritual and moral culture of the society. It is important to raise the question about the accumulation of spiritual and intellectual powers of the society in order to preach the values of brotherhood for the sake of the welfare of Russia, including its flourishing in terms of pedagogics of virtue and Christian ethics.

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