The preaching Style of Asterius, Bishop of Amasea

Miron ERDEI

Les discours de l'évêque Astérie d'Amasia, énoncés à l'intérieur de l'église, sont très importants pour les prédicateurs, même de nos jours, parce qu'ils sont très complexes. Plus précisément, ces sermons chrétiens sont perçus à partir d'un fond biblique, des origines bibliques et aussi d'une forme biblique. En outre, en étudiant les discours de l'évêque Astérie d'Amasia, nous pouvons observer le fait qu'il a été un psychologue remarquable, étant donné qu'il nous offre beaucoup d'informations sur les événements, les actions et les comportements des gens qui ont vécu cette période-là. Donc, ces discours sont pareils à un miroir qui reflète en détail la société dans laquelle a vécu et prêché l'évêque Astérie d'Amasia. Cependant, ses sermons présentent une grande valeur littéraire due à son style direct, clair et harmonieux. De ce point de vue, l'évêque Astérie d'Amasia est semblable à St. Jean Chrysostome (" Bouche d'or"); la seule différence étant représentée par le fait que les sermons de l'évêque Astérie évoquent un style plus simple. L'évêque Astérie d'Amasia avait étudié dans les écoles de rhétorique du IV^e^ siècle, en lui décernant une place privilégié parmi les grands savants de tous les temps.

Mots-clés: sermon, prédicateur, stylistique, figures de style.

There are only a few references left regarding the life and work of Asterius, Bishop of Amasea, for which reason certain patrologists consider him less important from a theological point of view[1]. Fortunately, precisely these few references stir our interest towards the life and work of the enigmatic Cappadocian Hierarch, of whom the only reference we have is that he was born in the first half of the 4th Century, his mentor was a Scythian slave who became a justice pedagogue renowned among Greeks and Romans, reason for which it is considered that Bishop Asterius, at his turn, attended law school, practiced law, after which he devoted himself to the ministry of Christ. It is certain that around the year 400 he was a bishop and it is estimated that he had passed away in the precursory period to the Third Ecumenical Synod, considering the fact that the synodal documents from the year 431 are signed by Palladius, Bishop of Amasea of Pont[2].

Unfortunately, the work of Bishop Aster has only been partially preserved. Certain sermons mentioned by the Patriarch Photius (+897) in his monumental

[1] Pr. prof. I. G. Coman, *Patrology*, Bucharest, 1956, p. 188.
[2] Pr. D. Fecioru, *Asterius, Bishop of Amasea. Life and work*, Bucharest, 1938, p. 14-15.

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work “Ta Amphilochia” and “Miriobiblon” no longer exist today. Only 16 authentic sermons have been preserved, which can be categorized according to their essence as follows: I 4 homilies; II 7 thematic sermons; III 4encomiums and IV a religious conference entitled “Image of the martyrdom of the praised martyr Euphemia”. The Archpriest Vasile Stoicov from Russia discovered in the year of 1970, in a Slavic manuscript dating from the XVIth Century, entitled ”Sobornical Church”, a sermon entitled “Word of praise of one of the saints, our Preacher, Asterius, Bishop of Amasea in remembrance of the Saint Apostle and Evangelist Luke”[3]. Throughout the 19 pages of the sermon, the author invites the listeners to be part of the feast of Saint Luke, to whom he brings words of praise following the pure essence of oratorical art. Thus we conclude that 17 sermons of the Amassing Bishop have been preserved.

Starting from the assertion of the Romanian translator of these sermons, pr. D. Fecioru, who stated that “through their style, through the richness of imagery and comparisons and especially through their pronounced ethical tendency, Bishop Asterius is entitled to be seated next to St. John Chrysostom (+407)”[4], we shall analyze our homiletic heritage precisely from this perspective that ensures him a prominent role in the myriad of great preachers of the golden age.

a) The stylistic essence of the asterian sermons

Trained and educated within the rhetorical schools of the IVth Century and gifted with a rich general knowledge, the sermons of Asterius are of a great literary value through their fluent, clear, harmonious and direct style. Asterius resembles St. John Chrysostom from this point of view, except he addresses a simpler, more popular style; although he utilizes rhetorical means, he does not use them excessively[5], ensuring the sobriety of his style, an indispensable feature of a fruitful preaching. The spoken style of his sermons, depicting long phrases comprises the entire essence of the Orthodox homiletic style.

The popular style represents the most important feature of the homiletic style characterizing great preachers. Through this kind of sermons, Bishop Asterisk reaches all levels of his audience. This fact is certainly due to his legal training; profession which he exercised before becoming a bishop. Taking into consideration the intellectual level of his auditory, he utilizes simple introductions in order to avoid wearying them and stirs their interest by winning their attention: “Has the thought of questioning and understanding for which reason we are gathered here entered everybody’s mind?”[6]. He confesses that “our purpose is not to flannel

[3] Prot. Vasile Stoicov, *Lesser renowned sermon of Saint Asterius of Amasea*, in ”Patriarchal Periodical of Moscow”, no. 2, 1971, p. 77-79.

[4] Asterius of Amasea, *Homilies and sermons*, translated by pr. D. Fecioru, Bucharest, 1946, p. 16.

[5] Deacon Ene Branişte, *Teachings from the patristic sermon as source of inspiration for today’s sermon*, in rev. ”Romanian Orthodox Church”, no. 1-3, 1947, p. 54.

[6] Asterius of Amasea, *Homilies and sermons, Sermon against covetousness*, p. 71.

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somebody by means of oratorical art, but we strive to present to you the true virtue of God loving souls"[7]. The conclusions are brief yet dense, of pure essence, in order to imprint the mind of the listeners: We fulfilled our duty towards Stephen; if you consider the greatness of the martyr, then I have not completely accomplished my duty; yet if you consider the diligence of the speaker, then I have accomplished it sufficiently, "To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen"[8].

The biblicity of the style is depicted by the biblical vision of his 15 sermons which include 297 references to biblical texts from the Old and New Testament, "thus substantiating through quotations, allusions, examples, parables or paraphrases, the teaching given through sermon"[9]. Asterius teached the biblical text through assertions such as: "Even Zechariah prophesied to us today, revealing the great mysteries of the Only Begotten Son"; he warned over the fact that "this parable is not a story told with the purpose of frightening, but an example taught to future generations"; he realizes multifarious comparisons between different texts, inviting the listeners "to read a different chapter of the Holy Scripture", in order to seize "the end of this sin of greed"[10]. He testifies that the texts revealed from the Bible represent a "rich thesaurus of teachings" and he urges them to listen to Moses "who proclaims God's will" and to Paul who preaches that: "...God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13, 4)[11]. We can strongly affirm that the one who appreciates, qualifies and gives sentence is not the Bishop Asterius, but the revealed word of God, reason for which he urges us "to read the Gospels and to learn the meaning of caring and goodness mirrored by their teachings"[12].

The purity of the language characterizes the entire asterian writing by evasion of barbarisms and neologisms, preferring an accessible vocabulary that embellishes with refinement a pleasant literary language, free from grammatical errors. The refinement in presenting certain situations or people, emphasizes this characteristic note of his style: "Nero would have been more affected if someone had deprived him of pleasure than if he had been taken down from the imperial throne. More than others, he was a seeker of pleasures and delights, admirer of flute music, spineless and womanizer, the ruler of adulterers and not the king men. For how could he master others, if he could not master himself?"[13].

The clarity by which he exposes his ideas and presents his teachings of faith, constantly captivates the attention of his listeners, who are not driven away from the subject through unnecessary digressions, but are engaged in a logical sequence

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[7] Idem, *Words of praise to the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul*, p. 147.

[8] Idem, *Words of praise to Saint Stephen the First Martyr*, p. 234.

[9] Gabriel Popescu, *Homiletic observations on the sermons of Bishop Asterius of Amasea*, in rev. "The voice of Church", no. 7-8, 1961, p. 611.

[10] Asterius of Amasea, *cit*. *op*., p. 73, 82 and 75.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 73 and *Sermon on the text of the Gospel of Matthew:"If the separation between husband and wife is tolerated on any ground"*, p. 120.

[12] Idem, *Urge to repentance*, p. 246

[13] Idem, *Words of praise to the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul*, p. 183-184.

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of the speech. This stylistic quality is guaranteed by a profound knowledge of the believers' psychology in particular and of human nature in general, proven by Asterius in all circumstances: "In truth, the man who does not prove mercy and compassion when confronted with hunger and disease is nothing but a cruel beast, an evil force embracing a human appearance, denying his human nature by his actions"[14]. For him, poverty has a dual connotation: the privation of his basic needs and the humility of his way of being; the disease of greed is the cause of all inequalities; she seeks victims even where she cannot find them; she describes in detail the disparities that still exist between Christian men and women; the enemy of chastity, debauch, is unveiled and severely condemned while the transformation of Saul, the moral decay of Nero and the martyrdom of Stephen are described in detail, as by someone who had witnessed the events. Referring to Lent, he offers us a plain and logical reasoning, which excludes any debate: "I do not claim that the year should be divided into two parts. On the contrary, I dedicate approximately ten months to the materialistic side of life. I only demand forty days of sobriety, in order to free myself from the filthiness, tempering the flesh through restraint"[15].

The naturalness of speech represents a constant style feature in the work of the amasean bishop in that his ideas and sentiments are in perfect harmony with the natural way of reasoning and sensing of a veritable preacher; quality arisen from his intense intellectual activity: "What came into my mind after long meditations..."[16] and "After reading for a long time and my mind got tired... After I prayed..."[17], true confessions denoting his passion for the comprehension of the revealed truth. His addressing formulas such as: "Christian men and partakers of the heavenly calling", "Oh, most blessed", "For you are aware disciple, diligent reader of the Holy Scripture", "You know diligent"[18] etc., are equally affectionate and familiar, emphasizing the sincerity note of the preacher seeking a complete opening towards his sons.

The accuracy is attained through the organized and concise exposition of ideas, a voiding deviation from the subject and expressionless phrases that would hinder the perception of the message of the sermon. He utilizes a precise tone, does not fable, but departs from concrete events, in order to estrange the Calvary they have generated, evoking personalities in order to highlight the role of virtue in perfecting of human being. Endowed with a vast culture, he provides precise information on geometry, astronomy, medicine, anatomy, history and geography, in the purpose of gaining the trust of his listeners: "All the wild Scythians, those who live beyond the Black Sea continent, inhabitants of the region around the Sea of Azov and the river

[14] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The story of the rich man and Lazarus*, p. 46.

[15] Idem, *Word at the beginning of fasting*, p. 267.

[16] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The iniquitous treasurer*, p. 69.

[17] Idem, *Image of the martyrdom of the great martyr Euphemia*, p. 217.

[18] Idem, *Sermon against covetousness*, p. 71, *Words of praise to the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul, p. 184 and Words of praise to the saint martyrs*, p. 208 and 212.

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Don, all those who live inside Bosphorus and who are spread towards the Fus river, they all serve the gardener"[19]. Aware of the danger of digression, he utilizes it in order to clarify certain concepts, yet without exaggerating when he suddenly states: "And this is enough for today" or "Yet, concluding the preaching this very moment, let us praise our Savoir"[20].

The variety is the decisive quality of a perfectly harmonized style, mastered only by the great preachers, whose fortune consists of a vast reading culture and twice the number of sermons preached. As a former lawyer who was aware of the principle of Latin rhetoric: "Varietas delectat", Bishop Asterius insists that the background and the literary substance of his sermons be as varied as possible; fact which "certifies his literary taste and fine culture"[21].

b) The figures of speech represent the precious stones spread along the entire homiletic creation of the amasean preacher, due to the fact that their role is to change the distribution of words inside a sentence, so that the listener should notice the beauty and the value of the delivered message. In this regard, he frequently utilizes the repetition in order to warn us over the fact that we are only temporary administrators of the belongings gifted to us by God, yet which hold us "very responsible" because we should wait incessantly for our Lord, while "humbly preparing our testimony". He emphasizes through repetition the fact that "we are not our own masters, only the caregivers of our being"[22]. Repetition is often used along the asterian writing, in order to imprint the listeners' mind with the virtues and spiritual values indispensable to salvation.

The rhetorical interrogation is utilized when Asterius aims to clarify a question or to highlight the gravity of a matter: "Throw rocks at the corner stone (I Peter I, 6), that united the two walls of the Old and New Testament?"[23]. Raising a plea through the addressed questions, he provides competent responses, of doctrinal, moral, as well as literary value.

In order to emphasize the qualities and imperfections which characterize the biblical characters or the world he lived in, Bishop Asterius utilizes the antithesis, highlighting the fact that "One was overflowing with abundance and wealth while the other was poor as a Church mouse"; the rich man "Was asking for mercy, him who did not show mercy when he had the chance to be charitable; he was asking that Lazarus should be sent to him as protector against the flames; he was praying to be allowed to take a sip of the leprous' soaked finger"[24]. In another circumstance

[19] Idem, *Words of praise to the saint martyr Foca*, p. 194.

[20] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The iniquitous treasurer*, p. 69 and *Word against the celebration of Calends*, p. 105.

[21] PhD Ion I. Popa, *Asterius of Amasea as preacher*, in rev. "Theological Studies", no. 5-6, 1971, p. 372.

[22] Asterius of Amasea, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke…*, p. 57, 58 and 63.

[23] Idem, *Sermon on the man blind from birth*, p. 133-134.

[24] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The story of the rich man and Lazarus*, p. 48 and 53.

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"The poor man finds himself close to this agonizing man; he begs for a morsel of the wheat about to turn bad, yet he refuses to offer him the slightest gobbet. Or if he agrees to share, he only gives avariciously and apathetically, since he is completely bound to his wheat", the emperor Julian apostasies "revealing his comic drama" while the contrast between the poor and rich man reappears periodically and strikingly: "One is poorly dressed, wearing ragged clothes while the other has plenty of suits, tapes trying his walls with purple plaques. The pauper is deprived of the daily bread, while the rich man lays a silver table, thrilled by its brilliance... One lacks oil to light the lamp, while the other may consider himself rich only through the multitude of chandeliers"[25].

The virtues and weaknesses are presented antithetically "dispraising caducity with juvenile habits while admiring youth from an old man's point of view... I am throwing the defeated at the feet of the conquerors: the Egyptian harlot at the feet of Joseph, the mistress of the free slave; the dishonest elders at the feet of Susan. They shall become pedagogues of chastity; on the one hand, the virtue of women and, on the other hand, the chastity of men..."[26]. He disavows the idea of inherited human traits, considering the fact that "a philosopher's child may become ignorant while the child of a libertine may become a philosopher". The old priest's children from ancient times disregarded the education given by their worthy father; Timothy "turned out to be a sweet fruit out of a bitter root" while Avesalom "proved to be a malicious son out of gentle father"[27], excelling in wickedness as his father in gentleness. He repels those who disregard certain occupations, such as fishing, due to the modest tools disposed, given that the value of a trade lies in its fulfilment, which brings rich harvest. The strong argument is represented by the fisherman Peter, the first of all men to walk upon the face of the waters.

Each and every sermon mirrors the constant intention of the author to give words an improper, figurative meaning (tropes), in order to widen their semantic field and ensure their expressiveness. Therefore, speeches abound in metaphors intended to present characters and situations within an exceptional vision: "the root of vice", "the defilement of vain glory", "sealed vocal cords, "a human remainder", the experience as a "truthful teacher", "the misery of sin", "eternal salvation", "the one who is sane in the evening will no longer be touched by the morning light", "apostasy rod", "One group follows another group, the calling of calling, the detriment of loss", "the glowing flame of faith", "the foundation of faith", "the sparkles of faith", Athens is "the heart of science", St. Apostle Paul "keeping the word in the candlestick, lit up the great fire of evangelical knowledge", the martyrs "would turn the other chick to those who were hurting them", St. Stephen preached to "those uncircumcised at heart", God is "the high arbiter of the great battle", St. Stephen urged not to be frightened "when he is hurt by stoning for Him", for he is "the deacon of the corner stone", the nations have been punished by "a great

[25] Idem, *Sermon against covetousness*, p. 80, 84 and 87.
[26] Idem, *Sermon to the prophet Daniel and Susanna,* p. 125 and 126 -127.
[27] Idem, *Words of praise to the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul,* p. 150-151 and 160.

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number of afflictions", let us fast by "tempering the flesh through restraint" and he who forsakes God "shall be whipped with this kind of name"[28]. Through the use of metaphors, Asterius refers to realities and characters through a series of differences and similarities in the same time.

c) Illustration within the asterian creation

In order for the sermon to be understood by all categories of listeners, the great amasean preacher utilizes a series of intuitive images, depicting an expositive character rather than a decorative one. Accordingly, recitals accompany the enlightened text of the homily, which emphasizes the presence and power of light. He does not stick solely to reciting the biblical facts and events, yet he approaches the heart of the matter, offering competent explanations, as one who had been an attentive witness or as an expert who provides specific details with respect to objects and occupations.

In order to condemn the waste of the unmerciful rich man, who would exuberate in purple and fine linen clothes, he explains how much effort it takes to earn these ephemeral assets, characteristic to luxuriant existence which represents "an obstacle towards a virtuous life"[29] and affects soul's eternity. He emphasizes the necessity of the mystical interpreting of the expressions "Abraham's womb" and "the abyss" between them; which are describing two spiritual concepts. He highlights the fact that not every pauper is righteous and not every rich person is condemned, except for the one resembling Lazarus or his contemporary rich man.

He considers an admonishment the Apostles' question addressed to the Savior regarding the reasons for which a man has been born blind, explaining that the person was not punished for his parents' sins, for God does not punish one in place of another, nor was he condemned for his sins since no one sins before birth. This misfortune "does not represent the punishment of certain sins, yet a preparation for future dispensation, namely that the One considered simple man expiated for our sins beyond human understanding and the Creator of all things, after His first act of creation, would find again the reason to re-create"[30]. Through this miracle, Jesus Christ testified the fact that He was not a simple carpenter, but the Creator and the Sovereign over all things. He healed the blind man through spit so that all those who were to insult him later by spitting should be frightened.

He compares the phrase "You are Christ, the Son of the living God" to a mustard seed, which although small, "if you place it on your tongue, lights you up from head to toe"[31]. Through this brief confession, St. Apostle Peter announced his understanding of all points of faith. Therefore, he had been left neither unrewarded

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[28] Idem, *Homilies and sermons*, p. 40, 47, 58, 62, 64, 67, 87, 163, 179, 178, 183, 199, 226, 227, 228, 229, 262, 267, 282.

[29] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The story of the rich man and Lazarus*, p. 44.

[30] Idem, *Sermon on the man blind from birth*, p. 136.

[31] Idem, *Words of praise to the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul*, p. 163.

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nor uncrowned, but he was beatified by the most Blessed, explains persuasively Bishop Asterius.

Exposing the recital of the killing of deacon Stephen, Asterius portrays a dreadful scene of the first Christian martyrdom: "Dragging out of the city the man representing Christ, who was wearing patience as Jesus Christ was wearing the cross, heals all evil committed by evil, attempting to escape killing through killing and stones are added to the sacrifice at the cross. They seated on lowland three times blessed Stephen, the tall body, and the great trophy of disciples... The Jewish hand committed murder. The target of those who were throwing stones was the martyr, who was standing in the middle as the targeted mark for archers. His bleeding body, wounded from all sides could not stand upright; he was losing balance and threatening to fall down, as a high poplar cut down by numerous woodcutters…"[32]. Through the prayer uttered for them by Stephen, the action of those who wounded was beneficial, those who were throwing stones at him were delivering, those who were killing were giving life and those who were separating him from the dust were sending him to the Kingdom of Heaven, the great preacher concludes.

Not irrelevant for depicting the singularity of the epoch are the descriptions, through which we learn that the people of the 4th century used to wear exuberant and speckled habiliments, imprinted with countless biblical figures; they would decorate the doorstep, divans and doorways of their homes with high-priced fabrics; they would serve sophisticated dishes prepared from expensive pheasants out of golden and silver vessels, supplementing them with spices brought in from India and seasoned wine from Phoenicia. The servants consisted of waiters, cupbearers, stewards, musicians leading them, singers, dancers, flute players, clowns, sycophants and all kinds of parasites. The guarding and hunting dogs were nourished with great care by their caretakers, were provided shelters and sleeping beds[33]. Fortunes were being wasted on beasts' fights and training. A lot of money was spent on racehorses' breeding, jugglers, clowns and all kinds of sycophant's fools[34]. We discover that people used to explore the sky and the air in order to forecast the weather, searching for optimum methods for the dry maintenance and protection of wheat from weevils. The parsimonious people would throw away the surfeit of their harvest into the sea, while others were starving. Some of them were the landlords of miniature palaces, provided with baths and various luxurious chambers, while other were lacking a roof over their head...[35]. New Year's Feast was subject to great displeasure, for which reason is considered a false celebration: "Commoners and mendicants, jugglers and dancers, divided into groups and bands, disturb every house; under the pretext of congratulating them and wishing theme

[32] Idem, *Words of praise to Saint Stephen the First Martyr*, p. 229-230.

[33] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The story of the rich man and Lazarus*, p. 42, 45 and 48.

[34] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The iniquitous treasurer*, p. 64.

[35] Idem, *Sermon against covetousness*, p. 79, 86 and 88.

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happy new year, they keep on remaining at tradesmen' doors without losing patience, until the besieged, annoyed, is persuaded to give away all his silver coins, to the last dime. They are approaching the doors at a time, following one another, preventing you from reposing until late at night, due to this disturbance"[36]. Children learn, on this occasion, to be greedy for silver, walking from house to house to offer gifts, "silver-plated apples", in order to receive back twice as expensive gifts. The majority leaves the city during this period, in order to avoid being hit and insulted on the street by drunks who does not forgive anyone. The soldiers "spend their retribution to a cured wound and their war pay" next to comedians, dressing and talking like women. This debauchery of society is tasted by famous consuls as well, who waste "heaps of money" on sin. They are not ashamed of any dishonest gain, which is then spent on "the drivers of racing carts, the wretched flute singers, the buffoons, dancers, wicked men, women selling their bodies in public and, on top of that, they throw away their gold on dishonourable and wasted gladiators and even beasts"[37]. All these wasters of fortunes are urged to direct their generosity to the poor, to the widows and orphans, so that they shall be remembered by God.

Other illustrative[38] means encountered within the opera of the amasean preacher are represented by allegories (to emphasize the qualitative relations), comparisons (to emphasize the quantitative relations) and analogies (envisaging reports from different worlds of existence). Greed is compared to a beast, from which the ones captured by it can hardly escape, the same as with ivy, from which you cannot escape even when dried, seeing that it folds around man, like a snake. Soldiers are compared to lions; the Grace of the Holy Spirit is compared to the waters of a river, streaming towards eternal life; the soul of the prophet Daniel is compared to a pearl wrapped in seashells, to the gold hidden in the depths of the earth, to a beautiful bride covered by the bridal veil; defamation is a many-faceted dragon; St. Apostle Peter, the fisherman, surpassed, after his first sermon, the philosophers Socrates and Demosthenes; St. Apostle Paul is compared to general who is urged to make daily conquests for his emperor; compared to Moses, St. Paul is greatly appreciated, seeing that not only did he climb a mountain but, most of all, he was raised to heaven; if St. Apostle John rested on Jesus in the flesh, St. Paul rested daily on the spiritual Word; David conquered Goliath and St. Stephen conquered the devil as well through the stones thrown at him; for his greatness, St. Stephen is compared to a tall poplar cut down by many woodmen; Christians are alike swimmers whose aim is to save from drowning the ones who cannot swim; Pharisees are alike wild horses who cannot stand to be touched by others; youth out of control is alike the fire that overcomes the several arms of firemen while the Pharisee compared to the tax collector is like a jabberer who sees herself as an

[36] Idem, *Word against the celebration of Calends*, p. 97.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 100.

[38] See also Gabriel Popescu, *Homiletic observations on the sermons of Bishop Asterius of Amasea*, in rev. "The Voice of Church", no. 7-8, 1961, p. 619-621.

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eagle when flying alongside a lilac or like a fox who sees herself as a lion considering that she is greater than the field mice[39].

d) Particularities of the assertion work

Alongside these stylistic and literary qualities of Asterius sermons, his work is characterized by a series of inedited formulations of addressing biblical characters or of analyzing specific situations. Confronting St. Apostle Luke's affirmation regarding the arrival of the poor man Lazarus into Abraham's bosom, he enquires rhetorically: "Please confess, Apostle Luke, –since I am addressing you as if you were standing in front of me and I could see you –the reason why, seeing that there are various righteous people even older than Abraham, you deprived of this honor those who have lived before him?..."[40] He reproaches to the apostles the fact that the question regarding the reason why the man was born blind was not "addressed correctly"[41].

Evoking the martyrdom of St. Stephen, he urges "Do not object, Peter! Do not grieve, Jacob! Do not worry John!"[42], given that the victory of athletes is the glory of the trainer. St. Apostle Paul reproaches his complicity to the martyrdom of St. Stephen, avouching that "I shall laugh sumptuously when I hear you talk about the sufferings endured for the Gospel"[43], yet he emphasizes that he has been forgiven seeing that he himself accepted to be "killed with stones" for Christ[44].

Through these audacious interpellations, the ingenious preacher introduces his listeners to past events, depicting the essence of things and the contemporary of the biblical facts and miracles, for a better understanding.

Bishop Asterius distinguishes himself also through the words of wisdom which he introduced inside his creation, pointing the axiology of Christian morality, whose purpose is eternity: "This life represents a cultivation of commandments; the future life represents the harvest time of the fruits of this cultivation"; "Who does not know that every human activity, apart from virtue, is designed for the sake of the other and not for itself?"; "For marriage is an act of union and not separation"; "Men as well as women should preserve chastity, the unbreakable chain of marriage"; "Good deeds engage good deeds while bad deeds their correspondent"; "Thus, people contemplating each other are mirroring each other's deeds"; "If the eye hadn't existed, the nature would have grown old in the absence of witnesses"; "Everything one owns represents a great fortune. The belongings of the poor are also part of his fortune"; "Wealth is recognized by the

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[39] Asterius of Amasea, *Homilies and sermons*, p. 76, 99, 122, 124, 127, 154, 179, 181, 182, 224, 226, 230, 278, 283, 302.

[40] Idem, *Homily to the pericope of the Gospel of Saint Luke: The story of the rich man and Lazarus*, p.50.

[41] Idem, *Sermon on the man blind from birth*, p. 136.

[42] Idem, *Words of praise to Saint Stephen the first martyr*, p. 222.

[43] *Ibidem*, p. 231.

[44] Idem, *Urge to repentance*, p. 241.

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work performed"; "Priesthood does not refer to despotism, but rather to servitude towards the others"; "The victory of athletes is the glory of the trainer"; "There is no better remedy against rage and rebellion than a mild and measured word"; "The disgrace of sons troubles parents more than it troubles the sons. The grace of children is the grace of their parents, the same being true regarding shame"; "...Angels are close guardians and keepers of the house of those who fast"; "Everyone who lives in debauchery is not virtuous"; "Lent is the companion of saints; fasting is the beginning of every good deed"; "The soul is nourished by abstention from food while the body by saturation with food", "The nature of abstinence consists of freedom of will and reflection, not of an ignoble vicleim that only gives appearance of abstinence"; "Nothing that comes naturally is impossible to bear"; "The refrained and sober way of living represents an image of the imperishable future life", "For youth, luxury is the path leading to debauchery"; "Perfection is not reflected in the abnegation of evil, but in performing the best deeds"[45].

A less common element encountered throughout the homiletic literature is the comicality of speech or manners, which Bishop Asterius does not elide, yet he utilizes it in order to ironize people or criticize mores: "If someone cannot borrow money seeing that his credit is non-existent...starts to lament as one who is sold in auction, to mourn as one captured by thieves, he isolates himself inside the house, starts punching himself in the head"[46]. Due to the inappropriate behaviour of certain slanderers on the occasion of New Year's Eve, people "are constrained to escape the city and to avoid returning to it as much as possible, running away from it faster than racing rabbits"[47]. After the martyrdom of St. Stephen "The devil, however, returned defeated, terrible, confused…by the events which the more expected to diminish the number Christians, the greater the number of martyrs proclaimed"[48]. Describing the grace of God, he strongly emphasizes "Our Father's abundant grace"[49], rewarding impartially everybody after their merit.

The sermons of Bishop Asterius of Amasea represent a true source of inspiration for preachers today regarding the biblical essence, approach and substantiation of the Christian sermon. Furthermore, he succeeded through his remarkable talent, of a refined psychologist, to depict in a masterly manner, facts and events characteristic of his time, so that his work becomes an accurate mirror of the society in which he lived and preached. All these considerations determine us to explore the work of the great cappadocian preacher and to reconsider appraising his patristic creations, which represent a perpetual, veritable moral, homiletic, stylistic, literary and historic thesaurus of the Church of Christ.

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[45] Asterius of Amasea, *Homilies and sermons*, p.68, 80, 109, 119, 127, 138, 139, 159, 160, 180, 222, 225, 255, 259, 260, 265, 266, 268, 269, 270, 282, 302.

[46] Idem, *Word against the celebration of Calends*, p. 97.

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 98.

[48] Idem, *Words of praise to Saint Stephen the first martyr*, p. 231.

[49] Idem, *Homily on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son*, p. 280.

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