HOMILIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS, PAST AND PRESENT

Tudorel-Constantin RUSU
tudorelrusu@gmail.com
Université « Al. I. Cuza » Iasi, Roumanie

Résumé *: C'est l'apparente contradiction qui existe entre les étymologies des termes « homélie » et « crise » (krisis est dérivé du verbe krino - « séparer, décider, juger, choisir » ; homilia est dérivé du verbe homilein - « être en relation avec, rencontrer quelqu'un, discuter avec quelqu'un ») qui a représenté le point de départ de la présente recherche sur le discours religieux chrétien-orthodoxe roumain de la pandémie de Covid-19. Elle fait référence à la manière dont la crise pandémique a influencé en 2020 les homélies prononcés lors de la plus grande fête du christianisme - la fête de Pâques ou La Résurrection du Seigneur. Nous y avons analysé, dans la perspective du triptyque aristotélicien ethos-pathos-logos deux des plus représentatives Lettres Pastorales lues et prononcées l'année dernière par des évêques roumains, nous rapportant aussi à d'autres homélies pascales ou prononcées en temps de crise par le plus renommé orateur de l'Église chrétienne, le saint Jean Chrysostome. Quelles ont été les sources d'inspiration discursive des clercs chrétiens-orthodoxes, en pleine période de pandémie, pour la fête de la Résurrection ? Qu'est-ce qui a été gardé, des années précédentes, du point de vue persuasif, dans le discours homilétique pascal en 2020 ? Qu'a-t-il perdu, ou qu'est-ce qu'il n'a pas pu etre utilisé pendant la crise pandémique, dans ce type de discours ? C'est à ces questions que le présent travail essaie de proposer des réponses.*

Mots-clés *: homélie, crise, discours pascal, pandémie, Covid-19, discours religieux chrétien-orthodoxe, Lettres Pastorales épiscopales.*

1. Introduction

One of the most frequent concepts used during the Covid-19 pandemic was and still is the concept of *crisis*. In general, in the case of a pandemic, we are dealing, of course, with a medical crisis, and invariably with a social and economic one and, as was often seen last year, a communication crisis. Regarding the roots of the word *crisis*, "The Oxford Classical Greek Dictionary" presents a list of the different meanings attached to it : a) "separation", "discord", "dispute" ; b) "choice", "decision", "judgment", "sentence", "issue", "event", "outcome" ; c) "trial", "examination", "lawsuit", "a court of justice", "punishment" ; d) "issue", "event", "outcome" ; e) medical : "sudden unlooked-for change in disease, leading to recovery or death". In a paper called "Reflections on the concept of

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

crisis", Jirí Šubrt quotes Reinhart Koselleck who says that the word "krisis" is derived from the verb "krino" which meant to separate, to choose and to decide between two opposing choices like *life and death*, success and failure (Šubrt, 2014 : 71).

As for the etymological history of the term *homily*, as a genre of Christian sermon, starts with ancient Greek "homilos", meaning "crowd" or "assembly" (Gordon, 2015 : 23). Greeks used "homilos" to create the verb "homilein", which means "to be in relation with", "to meet", "to consort with" or "to converse", as well as the noun "homilia" meaning "conversation", "reunion", "dialogue" (Gordon, 2015 : 23). How the "homilia as converse" becomes "homilia as discourse" is shown by Alistair Stewart-Sykes in "From Prophecy to Preaching. A search for the origins of the Christian homily" (2001).

Therefore, if we follow the etymological thread of the word *homily*, which is in contrast with *crisis*, we observe that the discursive persuasion of this type of speech is inextricably linked to an audience present *on the scene*. If we add to this the opinion of sociologist Mirel Bănică (2020) about the "anthropology of the religious gesture" and the fact that "compared to other Christian denominations, Orthodoxy has a much more intimate and direct relationship with the sacred and the symbols in which it is stored", we can easily reach the premise that the Christian Orthodox homilies during the COVID-19 lockdown underwent certain transformations.

2. Sources of inspiration

First of all, it is important to know that the oldest known Christian homily, spoken around the year 160, is that of Bishop Melito of Sardis, a former Jew converted to Christianity, which referred to the feast of Holy Pascha (Stewart-Sykes, 2001 : 2). Suggestively called "About Pascha", Bishop Melito's homily is also identified as the first Christian service of Pascha (Ica Jr., 2008 : p. 853). The text, which has 105 paragraphs, was identified in a collection of papyri discovered in Egypt and published in 1940 by C. Bonner (Ica Jr., 2008 : 853).

For the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR), the culmination of the crisis caused by COVID-19 last year was the non-participation of the faithful in the Vigil of the "feast of feasts" of Christendom - Great and Holy Feast of Pascha or Holy Easter. It was for the first time in the history of BOR when such a drastic decision was taken, and the priests served the Pascha services without the participation of the faithful. Of course, the services were broadcast online, BOR assuming the phenomenon of *Internet Christianity* many years before and confirming that there is no medium of communication incompatible with the "good news" - the Gospel. However, the feast of Pascha in 2020 was an atypical one. It was a historical fact in BOR that the parish – *i.e.* the community of Christian practising believers - was an exclusively virtual one. In this context, from a discourse point of view, the Pastoral Letters and bishops homilies for the Pascha Vigil, for the services of The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, represent the most representative and authoritative discourses of BOR during the pandemic crisis.

The purpose of any speech is to convince the audience and gain credibility. Considered "the art of discovering persuasive arguments", Aristotelian rhetoric "constitutes its probative sources : some belong to the art of rhetoric, others are independent of this art". (Salavastru, 1996 : 37). The technical evidence, which is "provided through speech" (Aristotle, 2007 : 38), which "comes from within the art of oratory" (Salavastru, 2010 : 37), is of three kinds : "for some are in the character of the speaker, and some in disposing the listener in some way, and some in the speech itself, by showing or seeming to show something" (Aristotle, 2007 : 38). We find here the short

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

presentation of the well-known Aristotelian triad *ethos* (speaker), *pathos* (auditor) and *logos* (language, speech), which is significant to any oratory approach. In the case of the triad ethos-pathos-logos, it is worth mentioning that these three major discourse categories of Aristotelian rhetoric are not placed in the same framework and "the relative share of rhetorical means characteristic of each of the three components is determined by historical and cultural variables, by the type of text and also by the individuality of the speaker" (Zafiu, 2009 : 27). Moreover, following extensive research of American professors Ronald J. Allen and Mary Allice Mulligan of Christian Theological Seminary entitled "Listen to Listeners", it was pointed out that "each listener shows a tendency to receive the homily through one of the three rhetorical coordinates (*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*) and not through a fusion of them" (Ciobotă, 2010 : 61).

Before analyzing discursively two of the most important 2020 Pascha Pastoral Letters of the bishops of the Metropolis of Moldavia, I considered it necessary to refer to some sources of traditional inspiration for Pascha homilies in general and homilies in times of crisis. The most representative model of homiletic inspiration for the Eastern Christian Church is Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople. Saint John is one of the Great Holy Fathers of the Christian Church. Originally from the Syrian city of Antioch (he was born circa A.D. 350) and later archbishop of Constantinople, he was named due to his eloquence "Chrysostom", which means in Greek "Golden Mouth" (Lemon, 1783). „A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies", says that the nickname of "Golden Mouth" has long surpassed the baptismal name of the great Antiochian father and completed it, so that, although it is not known when it was first used, it is used in common use before the end of the fifth century. John Chrysostom, who is also the author of the most widely used Orthodox Liturgy, is recognized for his religious, historical and social teachings, both by Christians and non-Christians. (Constantelos, 1991 : 81). A noteworthy aspect is a fact that Saint John Chrysostom studied rhetoric in his youth with Libanius (314-393), a famous Hellenist and central figure of the second sophistical movement (Killian, Timmerman, 2005 : 97), a close relative of the Roman emperor Flavius Claudius Iulianus, also known as Julian the Apostate. Libanius had opened a school of philosophy and rhetoric at Antioch in 354, after having previously led the most important school of rhetoric in Constantinople (Gheorghiu, 2004 : 9). Thus was possible the meeting of young John with the rector Libanius ; John's mother, Antuza, wanted her son to study at the school of "the most famous magister of that time" (Gheorghiu, 2004 : 9). Information about this is given by both Socrates ("Church History", VI, 3, MG, 67, 665) and Sozomen ("Church History", VIII, 2, MG, 67, 1513). (Fecioru, 2004 : 29). Moreover, because of his intellectual and oratorical qualities, Libanius would have wanted John to be his successor in leading the rhetorical school in Antioch. On his death, according to Sozomen, when he was asked by some friends whom he would like to leave as his successor, Libanius was replied : "John, if the Christians had not stolen him from me" (Fecioru, 2004 : 29).

Every year, in all the Eastern Orthodox churches around the world, during the service of "Pascha Matins", also called "Resurrection Matins" (Paschal midnight office), as is specified in the Pentecostarion book, the priest reads the most famous Christian Easter homily - "Paschal Catechetical Homily of Saint John Chrysostom" or, in any sources, "The Paschal homily of Saint John Chrysostomos". The homily, which is considered a Christian model of eloquence, is included in the "Greek Patrology" among the disputed texts (Spuria) (Papageorgiou, 1998 : 93) and it appears in the texts of the Pascha liturgical services for more than 1500 years. Whether or not it was uttered or written by Saint John

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

Chrysostom, it was validated and recognized by the Church, being preached and read at the most important holiday of Christianity from generation to generation (McCarty, Seminar Talk : 8). Referring to the Pascha sermon of Saint John Chrysostom, the actual Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, stated that it "continuously inspires and strengthens an Orthodox Church, as a divine gift" (Bartholomew I, 2011 : 31). The first translation into Romanian of the text, in a printed version, belongs to Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldavia, in "Romanian Book of Education", Iasi, 1643 (Bobu, 2013 : 178).

In the Pascha homily of Saint John Chrysostom, *anaphors,* which are part of the category of *repetition,* are wide presents. Aristotle points out that, although in the written text, repetition may seem naive, in its speeches it has oratorical value : „On comparison, some written works seem thin in debates, while some speeches of (successful) orators seem amateurish when examined in written form. The cause is that (their style) suits debate. Thus, things that are intended for delivery, when delivery is absent, seem simple-minded, since they are not fulfilling their purpose ; for example, asyndeta (absence of connective words) and constant repetition are rightly criticized in writing but not in speaking, and the orators use them ; for they lend themselves to oral delivery". (Aristotle, 2007 : 227).

Even from the first anaphoric construction, which represents the *ex-abrupto* exordium of the Pascha homily, Saint John Chrysostom uses a rhetorical process with which he tries to win the goodwill of the listeners and to influence emotionally each listener by integrating him into a certain category. Of course, as a syntactic figure, the paragraph is a *gradation*, which has a *passionate* effect because it orders the words in the discursive sequence to present the facts in an ascending way, ensuring a special impact on the audience (Salavastru, 2010 : 391) :

> "Whosoever is a devout lover of God, let him enjoy this beautiful bright Festival. And whosoever is a grateful servant, let him joyously enter into the joy of his Lord. And if any be weary with fasting, let him now receive his reward. If any has toiled from the first hour, let him receive his just debt. If any came after the third, let him gratefully celebrate. If any arrived after the sixth, let him not doubt ; for he too shall sustain no loss. If any have delayed to the ninth, let him come without hesitation. If any arrived only at the eleventh hour, let him not be afraid because of his delay ; for the Master is gracious and receives the last, even as the first". [1]

In this first paragraph, Saint John Chrysostom also alludes to "The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard", narrated by the Evangelist Matthew in chapter 20. The parable is thus understood by Aristotle as "a comparison or application of easy-to-assume cases and those that occur in real life, to illustrate the matter in question" (Stefan-Sebastian Maftei, 2011 : 399). What does Saint John Chrysostom pursue by telling the biblical parable if not the construction of emotional scenarios and the contextualization of Christ's message? The orator is staging the biblical parable before their eyes, making it contemporary to the listeners. In this sense, Aristotle also uses this "bringing-before-the-eyes" as a technical term : "Furthermore, [urbanity is achieved] by means of «bringing-before-the-eyes» [proommaton poiein, "visualization"] ; for things should be seen as being done rather than as going to be done. [To achieve urbanity in style] one should thus aim at three things : metaphor, antithesis, actualization [energeia]". About the *spiritual words*, which are expressed by metaphor, analogy, Aristotle says that "it is necessary to say what we

[1] In this example and the following, we used *News Agency Basilica* English translation.

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

mean by bringing-before-the eyes and what makes this occur. I call those things «before-the eyes» that signify things engaged in activity" (Aristotle, 2007 : 222). The examples and the evidence in the discourse produces *logos* persuasion : "Persuasion occurs through the arguments [logoi] when we show the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case. (...) In the case of persuasion through proving or seeming to prove something, just as in dialectic there is on the one hand induction and on the other the syllogism and the apparent syllogism, so the situation is similar in rhetoric ; for the paradeigma ["example"] is an induction, the enthymema a syllogism". (Aristotle, 2007 : 40). Returning to the etymology and the meaning of the word *crisis* posited by Reinhart Koselleck, we can see that in most Pascha homilies the audience is put, in general, to choose, to judge and to decide between two opposing options : *Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection*, which is seen as a *universal resurrection* or *universal life* and *universal death* or *hell.*

In the "Paschal Catechetical Homily", Saint John Chrysostom amplifies the superiority of Christ's Resurrection over death and hell by using *antitheses* and *opposites* and "such a style is pleasing because opposites are most knowable and more knowable when put beside each other and because they are like a syllogism, for refutation is a bringing together of contraries" (Aristotle, 2007 : 216). So, we have *paradoxical situations* :

> "Your rich and poor, rejoice together. You temperate and you heedless, honour the day. You who fasted, and you who did not, rejoice today".
>
> "Let no one grieve over sins ; for forgiveness has dawned from the tomb".
>
> "Let no one fear death ; for the Death of our Saviour has set us free".
>
> "He has destroyed it by enduring it".
>
> "It took a body, and it discovered God. It took earth and, behold! It encountered Heaven".
>
> "It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it could not see".

There are also *eulogies* in Chrysostom's homily, which consists in superiority, in the words of Aristotle :

> "Christ Is Risen, and You (death) are annihilated. Christ Is Risen, and the demons have fallen. Christ Is Risen, and the Angels rejoice. Christ Is Risen, and life is liberated. Christ Is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of the dead ; for Christ, having risen from the dead, has become the first fruits of those who fall asleep. To Him be the glory and the dominion to the Ages of Ages. Amen".

The Homily of Saint John Chrysostom abounds in *personifications*, especially those relating to hell and death, which, once humanized, can be defeated :

> "He despoiled Hades when He descended thereto. He embittered it, having tasted of His flesh. (...) You, O Hades, have been embittered by encountering him below. It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was annihilated. It was embittered, for it is now made captive".

Listing the situations when the question can be used in discourse, Aristotle (2007 : 247) emphasizes that it is opportune to ask when a premise is obvious. This is done by Saint John Chrysostom through the following two rhetorical questions, which have a persuasive effect both logically and emotionally :

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

> "O death, where is your sting?
> "O Hades, where is your victory?".

Nothing is accidental in the word of the great Antiochian preacher. Wanting to make a strong impact, the orator creates repeated emotional peaks, using short pauses to bring calm and not to tire the audience. However, immediately after these breaks, the emotional impact returns even stronger, the amplification reaching maximum levels and producing a special effect among listeners.

Coming back to our crisis theme, Saint John Chrysostom is also the author of the most famous *crisis homilies*, known under the title "The homilies on the statues to the people of Antioch" or, in simpler words, "On the statues". In the "Preface to the Benedictine Edition", rev. W. R. S. Stephens describes the context in which these 22 crises homilies were spoken. Stephens (1978 : 440) says that among the events which occurred in the time of Saint John Chrysostom, there is none more memorable than that sedition of the inhabitants of Antioch (387), in which the Statues of the Emperor Theodosius and Flacilla his wife were thrown down and dragged about the city. The emperor was so exasperated by their behaviour that was even thinking of destroying the city entirely. Chrysostom compelled as he was to adapt his style to circumstances as they arose, almost always without preparation, delivered on the spur of the occasion. At one time his object is to console a people struggling with present distress ; at another, to strengthen minds terrified by danger ; and above all, by repeated admonition, to persuade the people of Antioch, on the occasion of the threatening calamities, to correct the vices and to wipe away the crimes that had thus provoked God's wrath ; endeavour which on the part of Chrysostom certainly ended in results that met his desire, as he sometimes acknowledges. (Stephens, 1978 : 440). Through his highly dramatized messages complete with heroes and villians, John communicated his view of *social reality* by interpreting to his audience the spiritual meaning he saw in the events of the crisis. His rhetoric was characterized by the use of dichotomies such as *God* and *Satan*, *good* and *evil*, *heaven* and *hell*, *Christian* and *pagan*, *rich* and *poor*, *hope* and *fear*. The crisis was a time for genuine repentance and social and spiritual reformation (Radke, 1988 : 3). Saint John Chrysostom was convinced that if God's people responded appropriately then the evil of the crisis would be transformed into a great spiritual blessing :

> "For the fear of the former does not permit us to be relaxed by listlessness, but the consolation of the latter does not allow us to sink under the weight of sadness, and by both these means, God provides for our safety. He Himself hath armed magistrates with power ; that they may strike terror into the licentious ; and hath ordained His priests that they may administer consolation to those that are in sorrow". (Homily VI)

As is explained in a recent paper, Saint John „considers the existence of the State and obedience to authority to be beneficial in structuring societal complexity and as formatively and spiritually laden factors, part of God's loving oeconomy". (Popescu, 2020 : 92). But first of all, a Christian's duty is obedience to the Church, whose Head is Christ, first and foremost (Popescu, 2020 : 92). As a mother, the Church is frightened at the thought of the emperor's wrath, but also as a mother has the duty to console and encourage her children - the faithful :

> "Here, there is no need of the sponge as with physician, but instead of this, we employ the tongue. No need of fire here, that we may warm the water ; but instead of fire,

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

> we make use of the grace of the Spirit. Suffer us then to do so today. For if we were not to comfort you, where else could ye obtain consolation? The judges afright ; the priests, therefore, must console! The rulers threaten ; therefore must the Church give comfort! Thus it happens with respect to little children. The teachers frighten them, and send them away weeping to their mothers ; but the mothers receiving them back to their own bosoms, keep them there, embrace them, and kiss them, while they wipe away their tears, and relieve their sorrowing spirits ; persuading them by what they say, that it is profitable for them to fear their teachers. Since therefore the rulers also make you afraid, and render you anxious, the Church, which is the common mother of us all, opening her bosom, and cradling us in her arms, administers daily consolation ; telling us that the fear of rulers is profitable, and profitable too the consolation that comes from hence". (Homily VI) [2]

It is also interesting that the events in Antioch take place during Lent (like last year's quarantine), and Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance and *pedagogy* of this match :

> "And not only will this fast be of the greatest assistance to us in influencing the Emperor in our favour, but also towards enduring what befalls us with fortitude ; for we reap no small consolation from this sacred season". (Homily VI)

3. What was kept

As we said before, the Pascha Pastoral Letters have been the most representative and authoritative discourse of BOR in the pandemic year 2020. As a definition, the Pastoral Letters refers to those "festive letters, composed by the bishops of dioceses on the occasion of the Nativity and Pascha and sent to all parishes and monasteries under their circumscription, to be read on the day of the feast, during the Holy Liturgy" (Gordon, 2015 : 401). Pastoral Letters are considered by the literature a special homiletical genre, as they have tangents with all other homiletical genres, but cannot be integrated with any (Gordon, 2015 : 401). The tradition of pastoral letters comes from the apostolic period. The letters sent by the Apostle Paul to his disciple Timothy in The New Testament are considered to belong to this homiletic genre. In the history of the Christian Church, "the oldest notes on this type of writing is mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea, regarding the *festive epistles* composed by Dionysius, Patriarch of Alexandria (188-230)" (Gordon, 2015 : 401). In these epistles, the author talks about the feast of Pascha exposing a calculation rule for eight years on the date of Easter, depending on the spring equinox. Regarding the Romanian Orthodox Church, the first pastoral report on the territory of our country is that of Metropolitan Daniil (1720 - 1738) from Wallachia. The letter has 4 pages, and the historian Mircea Păcurariu considers it authentic (Pacurariu, 1994 : 447).

The 2020 Pastoral Letter of His Eminence Teofan, Archbishop of Iasi and Metropolitan of Moldova and Bukovina, "The Resurrection of Christ - The victory over death", begins with the following presentation :

> "† TEOFAN, by the grace of God Archbishop of Iasi and Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina"

[2] In this example and the following, we used the Oxford translation revised by Rev. W. R. W. Stephens, "Saint Chrysostom : About the Priesthood ; Ascetic Treatises ; Select Homilies and Letters ; Homilies on Statues" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Parents*, Series I, Volume 9, Editor Philip Schaff.

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

In this specific situation, the presentation is referring mainly to the orator's *ethos*, which indicates that the speaker has institutional and moral authority to address the audience. In this title, *pathos* is also present. Referring to his ecclesial dignity, the Metropolitan of Moldova and Bukovina states that it is "by God's grace". The mode displayed in these words is designed to create *proximity* between the speaker and the audience by reporting both categories to a value that unites them : *faith in God*. Moreover, the presence of the phrase "God's grace" in the speech tries to induce among the listeners a state of emotion, safety and peace.
Further, the formulas for addressing the audience in the beginning of the pastoral letter is intended to provoke the feeling of brotherhood, of a community closely linked to values such as love and religious belief :

> "To the beloved priests of the parishes, the pious living of the holy monasteries and the faithful people of God from the Archdiocese of Iasi : grace, joy, forgiveness and help from the glorified Trinity God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit ".[3]
>
> "Beloved priests brothers,/ Beloved people of God in the Archdiocese of Iasi".

By specifying geographically-territorial faithful for which he is accountable to God, Metropolitan Teofan produces an emotional impact and greater adherence among the audience.

The exclamative sentences present in the introduction or exordium are another category for appealing to *emotions* and gaining the *trust* of the audience :

> "Come, receive the light!".
> "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!".
> "Big words ; golden words ; much light shining in the darkness within us and between us!".

Like Saint John Chrysostom in his "Paschal Catechetical Homily", Metropolitan Teofan of Moldavia and Bukovina tries to influence passionately each listener by integrating him into a certain category. Another syntactic figure, the *gradation* is also present in the following paragraph :

> "This year we hear the witness of these words from different places. Priests at church, believers at home. In spirit, we try to be together and understand the signs of the times".

Emotional scenarios are also present in Metropolitan Teofan's Pastoral Letter through *narrative sequences*, some at present. For example, the bishop tries to give the impression that Jesus Christ is in the middle of the narrative, that He is *contemporary* to the audience. Metropolitan Teofan also uses *analogies* (*logos* persuasion) between *pandemic lockdown* and *Apostol lockdown* after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ :

> "In many cases, we stay hidden for fear of being contaminated, as the disciples of the Lord were locked in a room for fear of being discovered."

[3] The Pastoral Letter was published in *Candela Moldovei* magazine, March - April 2020, XXVIII, no. 3-4.

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

"Now, as then, Christ God comes among us, the doubtful, frightened and scared, addressing us : *Peace be with you!* ; *Take heart, it is I ; do not be afraid!* ; *But take courage ; I have conquered the world!* ; *I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live*". [4]

"Amid the confusion, anxiety, and lack of light, Christ appears dead and risen. Even in our inner hell of fear, darkness, and meaningless, Christ God descends, takes our hand, and lifts us to the light. *Come to me*, He says, *all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest*".

As all *crisis discourses*, the Pastoral Letter of the metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina makes the audience choose, judge and decide between *two opposing options* :

"The difficult situation we are going through is not entirely new. In history, there have been many moments of disarray, confusion and chaos. There were invasions and wars, earthquakes and huge floods, plagues and all sorts of unknown diseases. In the face of such situations, people had *different attitudes*".

"Those who didn't have God in their lives have fallen by fear, anxiety, and fright. And Christ spoke about them, saying, *People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken*".

"The same misfortunes and allurement was poured out on the faithful. Having faith in the Resurrection of Christ, they did not waver so hard. The life lived in the light of the Resurrection gave them the strength not to give in to their suffering or those around them. Even though they fell, they had the strength to get up and continue on their way. They believed that Christ had risen, and because of this truth, they believed that their life would not end in this world".

Like Chrysostom's "Homilies on the statues to the people of Antioch", in Metropolitan Teofan's Pastoral Letter, a crisis is a time for genuine repentance and social and spiritual reformation :

"During Lent, lay Christians were deprived of concrete participation in the Holy Liturgy. It was a great test, which we hope to overcome as soon as possible. After the deadly plague will pass, we will return to our churches, confess more often, and share in the Divine Eucharist."

In another Pastoral Pascha Letter[5] of the bishops of the Metropolis of Moldavia and Bukovina, Archbishop Pimen of Suceava and Radauti[6] speaks to his faithful, as before in Antioch Saint John Chrysostom, about *the relation between Church and State* in *time of crisis* :

"The remedy for this situation is to obay the recommendations and guidelines of doctors, respecting prophylactic measures, taking into account the principle of Holy Scripture *But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual*." (I Corinthians 15 :46)

[4] We used the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the *Bible*.
[5] The Pastoral Letter was published in *Candela Sucevei* magazine, March - April 2020, XXX no. 3-4.
[6] It was the last Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Pimen of Suceava and Radauti. His Eminence died on Wednesday, May 20, 2020, at the Matei Bals Infectious Diseases Institute in Bucharest.

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

The closing formula of Archbishop Pimen's Pastoral Letter has a *passionate* effect because it presents the facts in ascending and positive, desirable way :

> "Yours intercessor to Christ the Lord and wishing you everything good,
> † PIMEN
> Archbishop of Suceava and Radauti".

4. What was lost

From a persuasive point of view, in the Pascha homilies of the pandemic year 2020, the Orthodox Christian bishops and priest could not use persuasive elements related mainly to *ethos* and *pathos*.

The divine services of the night of Pascha, commence near midnight of Holy Saturday. At the Ninth Ode of the Canon of Nocturn, the bishop or priest are vested in the brightest garments. The faithful stand in darkness. Then, one by one, they light their candles from the candle held by the priest and form a great procession out of the church. Choir, priest and people, led by the bearers of the cross, banners, icons and Gospel book, circle the church. The bells are rung incessantly and the angelic hymn of the resurrection is chanted. The procession comes to a stop before the principal doors of the church. Before the closed doors the priest and the people sing the Troparion of Pascha, "Christ is risen from the dead…", many times. Even before entering the church the priest and people exchange the paschal greeting : "Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!". This segment of the paschal services is extremely important. Finally, the procession of light and song in the darkness of night, and the thunderous proclamation that, indeed, Christ is risen, fulfil the words of the Evangelist John : "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1 : 5). The doors are opened and the faithful re-enter. The church is bathed in light and adorned with flowers. It is the heavenly bride and the symbol of the empty tomb.

It is known that the stronger the *distance* from the other, the stronger the passion (Michel Meyer, 2010 : 243). Of course, Michel Meyer considers in this statement the discursive distance, but also the reduction or reconfirmation of the spatial proximity can produce effects of ethos and pathos among the audience. Normally, the Paschal midnight homily is delivered not from the ambon of the church, but outside, on the esplanade or the summer altar. The speaker is in this situation *centrally located*, in a place where he can be seen by a lot of people and where he can maintain eye contact with the crowd, which is mainly related to the integration of the audience.

On the Paschal midnight office, the bishop or priest appears before the faithful vest in the white garments, holding in his hands a large lighted candle, usually adorned with green branches and flowers, symbols of life. The clergy have appeared last year in the same way in services broadcasted online or TV transmissions. However, given that the Pascha homily is one related to the resurrection, light, joy, victory, all these passions could not be *amplified* by gathering the faithful together, holding candles in their hands. The image of priests and believers together in darkness with lighted candles usually produces in the audience an emotion of *unity*, *belonging*, and a sense of *security*.

Also, audience integration normally occurs right from the beginning of the Pascha Night homily. In general, this type of discourse begins with the Pascha greeting "Christ has risen!", uttered three times by the bishop or priest in three different directions, immediately followed by a response from the audience : "He has risen indeed!". The greeting is accompanied at the same time by the preacher's gesture of blessing into the form of the

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

cross in all three directions, a gesture that is successive and symmetrical, an "echo gesture" (Grecu - Gheorghiu, 2014 : 129), which attracted the symmetrical reaction of the faithful. Normally, the involvement of the collective receiver ends with *gestures of coordination* of the speaker, who begins to sing the Troparion of the Resurrection, urging the faithful to support him. Usually, in this case, there are extensive gestures of the speaker, with the left hand, with the open palm facing upwards, with slight successive movements of the left-right body. The concrete attitude of action of the listeners is immediate : they accept to sing together with the bishop or the priest the Troparion "Christ has risen!".

5. Conclusion

The strongest rhetorical passion is not desire, but fear, because it relates to the existential dilemmas, says Michel Meyer. Following this, we can say that in the homilies analysed in this paper the orators, the orthodox bishops, tried to bring to the audience different types of *crises* : life (resurrection - heaven) - death (hell), hope (trust) - fear (distrust), virtue - sin. All these antithetical images have the role of triggering a concrete action-attitude on the part of the faithful, who are to judge, to choose what is morally correct. At the same time, since the audience of religious discourse is undifferentiated, and, as Meyer says, what persuades the most is always very particular, all the speakers we mentioned are trying to build different discursive categories to include from an emotionally point of view the majority of the listeners. The rhetorical figure used in this sense is the image, which works by stimulating the imagination of the audience.

As for the Paschal homilies during the pandemics of 2020, given the fact of non-participation of the faithful at the "Feast of feasts" services, suffered because the religious discourse is mainly related to the liturgical space, which influences and involves the collective receiver, helping him to empathize with the speaker. From another perspective, pandemic times, as well as moments of fear lived on a biger scale, are a discursive chance for any speaker. Such circumstances ensure the presence of an audience that often desperately seeks answers on how to handle the situation. For the priests and bishops, pandemic times are, for example, an opportunity to tell their faithful to judge and choose correctly and to turn crises into a spiritual resurrection.

Bibliography :

ARISTOTLE, (2007), *On Rhetoric. A theory of vivic discourse*, translated with Introduction, Notes, and Appendices by George A. Kennedy, Second Edition, New York, Oxford University Press.

BARTHOLOMEW I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, (2011), *Speaking the Truth in Love : Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, New York, Fordham University Press.

BOBU, Ana G., (2013), „Genealogia Omiliei la Paşti a Sfţntului Ioan Gură de Aur în literatura română veche. Istorie, paternitate, autenticitate", in *Revista de istorie şi teorie literară*, VII (1-4), Bucureşti, Editura Academiei.

BULACU, Pr. Mihail, (1946), *Omilia despre predica a Sfântului Ioan Hrisostom*, Bucureşti.

CHRYSOSTOM, John, (1978), "On The Priesthood ; Ascetic Treatises ; Select Homilies and Letters ; Homilies On The Statues", translated by W. R. W. Stephens in Vol. 9 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Philip Schaff (Ed.), 14 vols., Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans Publishing Company.

CIOBOTA, Pr. Marius Daniel, (2010) „Dimensiunea interpersonală a comunicării omiletice", in *Studii Teologice*, Seria a III-a, Anul IV, Nr. 4, Bucureşti.

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)

CONSTANTELOS, Demetrios J., (1991) "John Crysostom's Greek Classical Education and its Importance to Us Today", in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Volum 35, Nr. 2.

GHEORGHIU, Virgil, (2004), *Gura de Aur, atletul lui Hristos*, traducere Maria-Cornelia Ica Jr., Sibiu, Editura Deisis.

GORDON, Pr. Vasile, (editor), (2015), *Omiletica*, Colectia „Cursuri, Manuale si Tratate de Teologie Ortodoxa", Bucureşti, Editura Basilica.

GRECU, Anamaria (Gheorghiu), (2014), „Co-functionarea gestualitate-limbaj in discursul religios de ocazional actual, in vederea argumentarii", in *Analele Stiintifice ale Universitatii Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi* (Serie Noua), Sectiunea a III -a, Lingvistica.

ICA Jr., Diacon Ioan I., (2008) *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, Volumul 1 : „Canonul apostolic al primelor secole", Sibiu, Editura Deisis.

LEMON, George William, (1783), "English Etymology : Or, a Derivative Dictionary of the English Language", Printed for G. Robison, in *Pater Noster Row*, Londra, literele CH-CI.

MEYER, Michel, (2010), *Principia Rhetorica. Teoria generala a argumentarii*, Colectia „Cicero", Iaşi, Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza".

PAPAGEORGIOU, Fr. Panayiotis, (1998), "The Paschal Catechetical Homily of St. John Chrysostom : A Rhetorical and Contextual Study", in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Brookline, Mass : Holy Cross School of theology, Hellenic College, Volum 43, pp. 93-100.

POPESCU, Ierom. Drd. Alexandru, (2020), „Relatia dintre Biserica si Stat pe timp de pandemie. Raspunsuri din trecut ale Sfantului Ioan Gura de Aur pentru vremea noastra", in "Teologie şi Viata", Nr. 9-12, septembrie-decembrie, Iaşi.

RADKE, Douglas B., (1988), *John Chrysostom, On the statues : a study in crisis rhetoric*, Dissertations and Theses, Paper 4051.

SALAVASTRU, Constantin, (2010), *Mic tratat de oratorie*, Iaşi, Editura Universitatii „Al. I. Cuza".

SALAVASTRU, Constantin, (1996), *Rationalitate si discurs*, Bucureşti, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

SARDIS, Melito, (2001) "On Pascha. With the Fragments of Melito ant Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans", translated, introduced and annotated by Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Popular Patristics Series*, Number 20, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, Crestwood.

SUBRT, Jiri, (2014), "Reflections on the concept *crisis*", in *Economic and social changes : facts, trends, forecast*, 6 (36), Institution of Russian Academy of Science Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of RAS (ISEDT RAS), pp. 70 - 84.

ZAFIU, Rodica, (2009), „Ethos, pathos si logos in textul predicii", in Lucrarile Conferintei Nationale *Text si discurs religios*, Editia a II-a, Iaşi, Editura Universitatii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza".

A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies, Grand Rapids, MI, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Public domain, http ://www.ccel.org/ccel/wace/biodict.html.

BDD-A32351 © 2021 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:47:28 UTC)