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The Human Condition in Interwar Romanian Orthodox Preaching

Damian Buchiu [a,1]
[1] *Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest, Romania*

[1] Corresponding Email: damianbuchiu@yahoo.com
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Abstract

The question of what it means to be human has always been central to Christian theology. In many historical contexts, Christian preaching has served as an important way of communicating reflections about human dignity, moral responsibility, suffering, and the relationship between humanity and God. A relevant example can be found in the Romanian Orthodox context of the interwar period. During the first half of the twentieth century, Romanian society experienced rapid political changes, economic hardship, widespread poverty, and ideological tensions that deeply affected everyday life. In such circumstances, religious preaching became an important pastoral response to questions concerning the meaning of life, moral conduct, and the spiritual vocation of the human person. Several sermons from the volume The Wedding Garment: Missionary Sermons (1935), written by Bishop Grigorie Comșa (1889–1935), an Eastern Orthodox hierarch and prominent preacher, illustrate how biblical interpretation and moral reflection present the human person as a moral and spiritual being called to faith, responsibilit, and transformation. Although shaped by the Romanian Orthodox context, these sermons address larger theological concerns about dignity, freedom, suffering and the search for meaning in times of social change.

Keywords

Christian anthropology, Orthodox Homiletics, Human condition, Orthodox Christianity, Romanian religious history, Theological anthropology

INTRODUCTION

The question of what it means to be human has occupied Christian theology across centuries, yet it becomes especially urgent in times of social instability, moral uncertainty, and collective suffering. In such moments, theological reflection often moves from abstract definition toward pastoral speech, moral exhortation, and spiritual consolation. This is one of the reasons why preaching deserves attention as a source for theological anthropology. Sermons do more than transmit doctrine; they interpret the human condition in a concrete historical setting and address fear, suffering, and hope.

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This question gains renewed significance in the context of contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence. Recent interdisciplinary reflection in psychology, ethics, and theology has renewed questions about human uniqueness, agency, and intelligence.[1] Current AI systems operate through computational models and data processing, raising questions about whether functional performance can be equated with consciousness, moral discernment, embodied experience, or genuine interpersonal relation.[2] These developments give renewed urgency to the need to clarify what constitutes the human person. From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, this technological context also forms part of a significant anthropological challenge. One recent study, drawing on Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, presents anthropology as one of the most important tasks facing Orthodox theology in the twenty-first century and connects this challenge explicitly with artificial intelligence, neuroscience, biotechnology, and genetics.[3]

The theological understanding of the human person in three sermons by Bishop Grigorie Comșa forms the focus of this study. The texts are taken from the volume *The Wedding Garment: Missionary Sermons* (*Haina de nuntă. Predici misionare*), published in Arad, Romania, in 1935, the year of the author's death. Although his life was relatively short, ending at the age of 46, Bishop Comșa was one of the most active Orthodox preachers of interwar Romania and a major advocate of missionary preaching in the Romanian Orthodox Church. His sermons therefore offer valuable material for exploring how Orthodox preaching interpreted the human person in a period marked by economic hardship, social disorientation, and ideological tension.

The analysis concentrates on three sermons from this volume: "The Purpose of the Human Person" (*Scopul omului*), "Sin" (*Păcatul*), and "Jesus the Savior — The Christian's Friend" (*Iisus Mântuitorul - Prietenul creștinului*). The first presents the human person through the themes of divine vocation, dignity, and life in God. The second shows freedom, moral responsibility, the corruption caused by sin, and the possibility of renewal through grace and repentance. The third presents how authentic humanity is restored in communion with Christ, whose friendship,

[1] John Senior and Éva Gyarmathy, *The Ethics, Psychology, and Theology of AI: Exploring the Notion of Singularity* (London: Routledge, 2026), 9.

[2] Senior and Gyarmathy, *The Ethics, Psychology, and Theology of AI*, 13–14.

[3] Dănuț Jemna and Dănuț Mănăstireanu, "Reimagining Ecumenism for the 21st Century—Stăniloae's Theology as a Source and Inspiration," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 7, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060725.

sacramental presence, and redemptive work reveal the relational and Christological fulfillment of human existence. These sermons present the human person as created for communion with God, wounded by the misuse of freedom, and restored through Christ.

A close reading of the selected sermons makes it possible to trace the main lines of Comșa's theological anthropology through recurrent theological themes, biblical citations, moral language, and patristic resonances. The sermons are also read in relation to the broader interwar Romanian context, since their pastoral force depends in part on the world they address and on the homiletic culture in which preaching was expected to offer doctrinal clarity, spiritual consolation, and moral formation. The discussion therefore first situates Comșa's preaching within its historical and homiletic setting and then turns to the three selected sermons.

HISTORICAL AND HOMILETIC CONTEXT

Bishop Grigorie Comșa's missionary sermons were written and published within a Romanian world deeply marked by the consequences of war, territorial expansion, economic fragility, and spiritual unease. The volume *The Wedding Garment: Missionary Sermons* appeared in 1935, during the mature interwar period and in the final year of Comșa's life. The theological and pastoral force of these sermons becomes clearer when read against the historical realities that shaped their reception.

In the aftermath of the First World War, Romania underwent a major political and territorial transformation. Fighting alongside the Entente, the country emerged from the conflict with expanded borders that included Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina. This development fulfilled the long-standing national aspiration of a greater Romanian state uniting large Romanian populations within one political body.[4] At the same time, the enlarged kingdom incorporated substantial ethnic and religious diversity and entered a regional environment marked by insecurity and competing territorial claims. The resulting tensions affected both political life and public consciousness.[5] For the Romanian Orthodox Church, this new national reality created both opportunity and responsibility. Ecclesiastical life developed in a state

[4] Mark Axworthy, *Romania: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.
[5] Axworthy, *Romania*, 13.

that was larger, more complex, and more demanding in terms of social cohesion, moral guidance, and pastoral presence.

The war and its aftermath placed severe strain on Romanian society. Military survival depended not only on resistance at the front but also on difficult efforts of reconstruction, economic adaptation, and agricultural support under extreme conditions. Much of the population endured deprivation, displacement, and insecurity, while the countryside remained marked by poverty, uneven development, and economic vulnerability well into the interwar period. Agriculture had to sustain civilians, refugees, and the massive military presence stationed in Moldavia.[6] In such a setting, sermons addressing hunger, illness, labor, and uncertainty spoke directly to lived reality. When Comșa evokes hardship and suffering, he is naming a concrete social experience familiar to large segments of the population.

The interwar decades brought further pressures that deepened social anxiety. The Great Depression intensified public insecurity, while political radicalization and ideological agitation contributed to a broader sense of moral and institutional fragility.[7] This background helps explain why Comșa's preaching consistently treats the human person through categories such as soul, purpose, sin, judgment, repentance, and communion with God. In a society marked by poverty, instability, and moral disorientation, such themes carried immediate pastoral force, offering both consolation and orientation.

The ecclesial setting is equally important. In the first half of the twentieth century, Orthodox preaching in Romania developed under the pressure of major political, social, and confessional changes. In Transylvania and Banat, church life had passed from the final years of foreign rule into the new context created by the Union of 1918, which brought both institutional freedom and new responsibilities for the Romanian Orthodox Church within the enlarged national state.[8] Homiletic activity was expected to contribute to spiritual renewal, ecclesial consolidation, and the maintenance of religious and national consciousness in a society undergoing rapid reconfiguration. One scholar has observed that, within this socio-political and cultural framework, the Romanian Orthodox Church developed an especially productive

[6] *România în anii Primului Război Mondial,* vol. 2 (București: Editura Militară, 1987), 832.

[7] Axworthy, *Romania*, 22.

[8] Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. Compendiu*, 3rd rev. ed. (București: BASILICA, 2013), 483-510.

homiletic activity with major implications for sustaining the ecclesial and national consciousness of the Romanian people.[9] At the same time, Orthodox clergy in the Romanian regions of Transylvania and Banat had to respond to an increasingly complex interconfessional environment. Theological education and pastoral formation became important because priests were expected to answer doctrinal challenges with competence, scriptural knowledge, and clear public teaching.[10] Missionary preaching acquired a sharper profile in the early twentieth century: it was meant to communicate Orthodox teaching clearly, strengthen believers, answer rival influences, and address the concrete concerns of the faithful.

Comșa's own understanding of preaching reflects this wider development. Even before becoming bishop, he had already shown a strong concern for the social and missionary significance of the sermon. In the prefatory reflections to *Istoria predicii la români*, he argued that the proclamation of the divine word becomes an urgent necessity in difficult circumstances and that preaching must descend into the concrete conditions of life, into the wants, anxieties, and conflicts of the working world, in order to bring it into living relation with Christ.[11] He also insisted that good preaching required careful preparation, observation of everyday life, and sustained attention to the major moments and needs of the faithful.[12] These principles are clearly visible in the sermons examined here. Comșa does not construct an abstract anthropology detached from his listeners; he begins from hunger, labor, sorrow, temptation, fear, and the instability of earthly existence, yet interprets these experiences within a theological horizon centered on soul, grace, repentance, and eternal life. His wider career confirms the centrality of this missionary vision. As preacher, writer, and bishop, he was closely associated with catechesis, apologetics, and the strengthening of Orthodox identity. *The Wedding Garment* belongs to this broader effort and reflects the missionary priorities of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the interwar period.[13]

[9] Filip-George Albu, Opera omiletică a Episcopului Grigorie Comșa al Aradului (Arad: Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu", 2010), 45.

[10] Miron Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania, în prima jumătate a sec. al XX-lea*, 2nd ed. (Oradea: Editura Cogito, 2010), 356.

[11] Comșa, *Istoria predicii la români*, 3-4.

[12] Comșa, *Istoria predicii la români*, 282-283.

[13] Albu, *Opera omiletică a Episcopului Grigorie Comșa al Aradului*, 45.

The volume itself makes this missionary intention explicit. In the preface, Comșa presents the book as a collection of twenty-two missionary sermons dedicated to the priests of the Diocese of Arad and born from his pastoral activity among village communities. He explains that, after nearly ten years of preaching and serving in 404 churches, he wished to leave visible traces of this work and to respond to the requests of priests and intellectuals who had asked him to publish the sermons delivered in rural settings. The preface also clarifies the dominant spiritual emphasis of the volume: preaching must call the Romanian people to repentance, reminding them of the transience of life, the reality of sin, the mercy of God, and divine judgment.[14]

The table of contents confirms the broad pastoral range of the collection, which includes sermons on the purpose of the human person, sin, divine providence, judgment, repentance, suffering, death, resurrection, and eternal life. This wider structure helps explain why the three sermons selected here are especially relevant for theological anthropology. Two features of this context are especially important for the present study. Comșa preached to communities marked by poverty, insecurity, and moral unease, and he belonged to a homiletic culture that expected sermons to provide doctrinal clarity, consolation, and moral formation. His anthropology therefore takes shape as pastoral speech: the human person appears as historically burdened, spiritually accountable, and called beyond immediate suffering toward communion with God.

THE HUMAN PERSON AS VOCATION, FREEDOM, AND RESTORATION IN SERMONS II, III, AND V

To clarify Comșa's understanding of the human person, the following section considers three sermons from *The Wedding Garment* which together articulate a coherent anthropological pattern: humanity's divine vocation (Sermon II), the distortion of the person through sin (Sermon III), and the restoration of authentic humanity in communion with Christ (Sermon V). These sermons suggest that, for Comșa, the human being is defined by vocation, moral freedom, and participation in divine life.

[14] Grigorie Gh. Comșa, *Haina de nuntă: Predici misionare* (Arad: Tipografia Diecezană, 1935), 5–6.

Sermon II ("The Purpose of the Human Person") and the Definition of the Human Being within Theological Anthropology

In Sermon II, entitled "The Purpose of the Human Person," Grigorie Comșa articulates a strongly teleological theological anthropology in which the human being is understood from the perspective of divine origin, ontological dignity, and ultimate fulfillment in God. The sermon opens with a comparison between the beauty of nature and the superiority of the human person, explicitly affirming that "more beautiful is the human being, the crown of all these things and creatures."[15] This formulation is essential for understanding Comșa's vision of the human person: the human being occupies a privileged place within creation, and this position does not derive from worldly power, possession, or success, but from the human relationship with God. Comșa grounds this argument in Psalm 8, where the human person is described as crowned with glory and honor, thus possessing a dignity that surpasses the merely natural order.

A first central element of the sermon is the idea that the human person cannot be properly understood apart from the question of the purpose of existence. Comșa begins from the universal experience of suffering, injustice, and the burdens of life, asking, "what is the role of the joys and sorrows in this world?"[16] For him, this question has an existential and soteriological weight. He presents human life as a meaningful journey, oriented toward participation in the blessedness of God, rather than a random succession of trials. For this reason, his answer is framed in terms of creation and communion: God "brought us also from non-being into being, in order to make us partakers of His glory."[17] Here the human person is defined as a being created for communion, participation, and fulfillment in God.

The sermon then develops this idea in an explicitly sacramental and Christological form. Comșa states that God "clothed us in the wedding garment of innocence" and "gave us the holy mystery of baptism so that we might be clothed in Christ."[18] The human being appears as a creature called to likeness and restoration in Christ. From this perspective, his anthropology brings together the themes of creation and baptismal restoration. The human person is understood as bearing a noble nature while at the same time receiving a concrete spiritual vocation: to preserve "the

[15] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 12.
[16] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 12.
[17] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 12.
[18] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 12.

wedding garment of the soul" and to live according to the calling received.[19] For a theological reading of the sermon, this point is particularly important, because it shows that the question "what does it mean to be human?" receives an answer inseparable from the economy of salvation. The human person is a being created by God, yet also a being called to remain in Christ. Comșa's account can be situated within the Orthodox understanding of the imago Dei as dynamic and teleological. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the image of God is understood as a vocation directed toward likeness and union with God, a process that reaches its full realization in Christ. Human beings are called to reflect God in their actions, will, and thoughts, while theosis remains a gift of divine grace rather than an autonomous human achievement.[20] This clarifies how Comșa brings together created dignity, baptismal restoration, and "life in God" within a clear account of the human vocation.

A second important core of the sermon is its critique of reducing the human person to material existence. The author directly challenges the idea that "the purpose of the human being is to possess earthly things and to use them with pleasure."[21] Against such an understanding, he offers a moral and spiritual critique of materialism. Earthly goods are presented as insufficient and incapable of granting true fulfillment, since the desire for possession generates permanent dissatisfaction: the human person "would always want more," while remaining "continually dissatisfied."[22] Anthropologically, this is highly significant: the human being cannot be defined by consumption, accumulation, or sensory satisfaction, because these do not correspond to the true structure of human existence. For this reason, the preacher formulates one of the densest statements in the whole homily: "Therefore, the human person must have a purpose that all can attain, and that can comfort and make all blessed. This purpose is life in God."[23] This affirmation condenses the heart of his anthropology. The true purpose of human life must be universally accessible, independent of wealth or status, and capable of bringing genuine consolation. Only "life in God" fulfills these conditions. Authentic humanity is therefore realized through the orientation of existence toward God.

[19] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 13.

[20] Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz, "The Imago Dei as a Work in Progress: A Perspective from Paleoanthropology," *Zygon* 49, no. 1 (2014): 149–50, https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12066.

[21] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 13.

[22] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 13.

[23] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 13.

The sermon also insists on the noetic dimension of human existence. The purpose of life is further expressed as "the fullest possible knowledge of God," because "it alone gives us peace and consolation." [24] This knowledge is not abstract, but contemplative and existential. The author uses the example of the Muslim guide who sees the "traces" of God in creation, and then evokes Augustine's restlessness, his search for true rest beyond the sensible world.[25] Through these examples, the sermon shows that the human being is structurally oriented toward transcendence. The human person does not find fulfillment in self-sufficiency, but in seeking, openness, and the recognition of God's traces in the world. In this sense, authentic humanity presupposes a movement beyond the immediate and toward ultimate meaning.

Within the same logic, he formulates a critique of the "three lusts of the world": "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."[26] These express, in fact, three forms of the degradation of the human vocation: the reduction of the human being to pleasure, possession, and vain self-assertion. The preacher goes beyond moral condemnation, interpreting these attitudes as deviations from the proper purpose of human existence. The human being loses himself when he confuses the beauty of the body with the beauty of the soul, outward wealth with inward richness, or worldly glory with "the glory of God."[27] From this point of view, the sermon offers a very clear moral anthropology: authentic humanity is preserved through discernment, ascetic struggle, and orientation toward the spiritual good.

A particularly relevant passage for the theme of the human person is the one in which he states: "The more the mind is illumined by the grace of God, the better it will know the deeds by which it departs from God."[28] Here the human being appears as a creature capable of moral self-knowledge, and this knowledge grows in proportion to divine illumination. The sermon presents an anthropology oriented toward movement and transformation. The human person is described in relation to both present condition and future becoming, as one called to inner purification and a gradual approach to "the light of Christ." [29] In the language of theological

[24] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 14.
[25] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 14.
[26] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 14.
[27] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 15.
[28] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 15.
[29] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 15.

anthropology, one may say that the human person discovers his own truth insofar as he enters into a process of illumination and moral rectification.

Sermon II may therefore be read as a foundational text for Comșa's theological anthropology. It presents humanity as dignified by creation, marked by baptismal vocation, and directed toward "life in God." Yet this vocation remains fragile, as Sermon III shows through the problem of sin.

Sermon III ("Sin") and the Distortion of the Human Person

In Sermon III, titled "Sin," Bishop Grigorie Comșa develops a distinctly theological understanding of the human condition by presenting sin as the fundamental distortion of the human person. If Sermon II defines the human being teleologically, in relation to humanity's purpose in God, Sermon III shows what happens when that purpose is rejected. The sermon is structured around a dramatic contrast between divine calling, forgiveness, and the human struggle for virtue. He describes the life of the Christian as unfolding in three "pages": first, the page of sins; second, the page of forgiveness through Christ; and third, the page of virtues, that is, the life purified through struggle against sin. This image frames human life as morally and spiritually dynamic. Human identity is not fixed in a static essence alone, but revealed in the drama of fall, grace, and transformation.

A central claim of the sermon is that sin represents a fundamental rupture in the relationship between the human person and God. The author defines it explicitly: "Sin is the rebellion of man against God, transgressing God's law by free will."[30] This is important for understanding his theological anthropology. Sin arises from the misuse of human freedom and expresses a disordered exercise of the will, revealing that it belongs to the inner structure of the person rather than to external circumstances. The sinner, he says, "does not recognize God as master, but deifies himself."[31] Sin appears as a theological and anthropological rupture at once: it breaks communion with God and falsifies the human person's relation to self. Humanity, created for obedience, communion, and likeness to God, becomes curved inward upon itself in an act of self-idolatry. The bishop implies that to be human is to be morally responsible and spiritually accountable. The sermon rejects any reduction of the person to mere passivity. One of its most important themes is synergy: the

[30] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 17.

[31] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 17.

cooperation between divine grace and human effort. He criticizes those who expect spiritual healing from the Church alone while continuing to live in sin. Through the story of the sinner and the elder carrying the sack of grain, he makes the point that salvation cannot be accomplished without the active participation of the believer. Grace and human effort are intrinsically linked in the process of restoration.

The sermon also offers an account of the inner effects of sin. Comșa presents sin as a force that disfigures the soul from within. Using a series of natural images, he compares sin to a cold wind that paralyzes, to autumn stripping leaves from trees, and to flowers withering under decay. Such imagery underscores the fact that sin is anti-human: it removes vitality, beauty, and harmony from the soul. In one of his strongest formulations, Comșa insists that "sin is more dreadful than death, for death is only the consequence of sin."[32] Sin has an ontological seriousness. Death is not the deepest tragedy; the deeper tragedy is the corruption of the soul and the loss of its orientation toward God.

Closely related to this is Comșa's understanding of conscience. He shows conscience as an inescapable witness within the sinner, describing its torment in vivid language: "The reproach of conscience is like a stinging whip, like a burning fire, like a biting serpent."[33] The human person is inherently moral. Conscience is not a social convention imposed from outside, but an interior structure of personhood. Even when sin becomes habitual, conscience remains a sign that the human being is made for truth and goodness. The anguish of conscience reveals that evil never becomes fully natural to the person, even if it is repeated. Sin wounds the soul precisely because the soul was made for communion with God. Comșa's understanding of conscience can be read alongside recent reflection in Orthodox moral theology. A recent study connects the *imago Dei* with the inherent dignity of the person, responsible freedom, and conscience, describing conscience as an inner witness to God's will and as a bridge between divine law and human agency.[34] This helps clarify why, in Comșa's sermon, the reproach of conscience is more than an experience of psychological distress: it indicates that the sinner remains morally accountable and capable of recognizing the good, even when habitual sin has weakened the will.

[32] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 17.

[33] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 18.

[34] Alexander Kriebitz and Stefanos Athanasiou, "Orthodox Moral Theology and Shared Metanorms: A Philosophical-Theological Reading of the Social Ethos Document," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 54, no. 2 (2026): 164–66, https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.70021.

Another major anthropological theme in the sermon is the weakening of the will. The preacher describes the will as "the most noble good of man," because through it the person chooses the path of the good.[35] Yet sin darkens and weakens this faculty. He develops this with a powerful metaphor: divine grace is like the light of the sun, while the human will is like the lesser light of the moon; when thick clouds intervene, the moon's light is obscured. In the same way, sin covers the soul "like a thick cloud," weakening the will and preventing the illumination of divine grace.[36] This metaphor is theologically rich because it shows that the human person is neither autonomous nor mechanically determined. Human freedom depends upon a living relation to divine grace. When separated from that light, the person becomes spiritually immobilized, "like a dead man, without power and unmoving."[37]

Grigorie Comșa reinforces this point through the Augustinian quotation about the will in bondage: good actions performed by the sinner resemble the efforts of someone trying to rise from sleep, only to collapse again under its weight. This makes clear that sin is not a set of bad acts, but a condition of captivity. The person remains human, but lives below the fullness of humanity. Habitual sin becomes tyrannical; citing Saint John Chrysostom, he says that the "tyranny of habit" becomes "a second nature."[38] This is one of the most striking ideas in the sermon, because it explains how sin gradually reshapes the moral life. Sin extends beyond isolated acts, gradually forming habits that enslave the person and dull moral awareness.

At the same time, the author does not leave the hearer in despair. The sermon remains deeply pastoral and ultimately restorative. Its final movement recalls the image of *The Wedding Garment* and the necessity of preserving the soul's purity.[39] The true tragedy is not that the human being is weak, but that he may mock grace and remain in sin without repentance. Yet the sermon ends with a call to repentance and sacramental renewal: believers are exhorted to wash their sins through the mystery of repentance so that their souls may shine again.[40] This conclusion is important because it shows that Comșa's anthropology is not pessimistic. The human being is

[35] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 18.
[36] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 18.
[37] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 18.
[38] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 19.
[39] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 20.
[40] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 21.

deeply wounded by sin, but not abandoned. Grace can renew what sin has damaged, and repentance can restore the person to spiritual beauty.

Sermon III therefore presents sin as the deformation of freedom and the weakening of the soul's orientation toward God. Yet Comșa's account remains restorative: conscience, repentance, grace, and moral struggle show that the wounded person is still called to renewal. Sermon V then identifies Christ as the one in whom this renewal reaches its fullness.

Sermon V ("Jesus the Savior — The Christian's Friend") and the Relational Meaning of the Human Person

In Sermon V, "Jesus the Savior — The Christian's Friend," Grigorie Comșa develops a distinctly relational and Christ-centered theological anthropology. If Sermon II defines the human person in terms of purpose and orientation toward God, Sermon V deepens that vision by presenting Christ as the one in whom authentic humanity is restored, guided, nourished, and fulfilled. The sermon does not describe the human being primarily as an isolated rational subject, but as a vulnerable, tempted, and historically situated person whose life reaches its meaning only in communion with Christ. In this sense, Comșa's homiletic anthropology is not only moral but relational: to be human is to travel through life with Christ, to receive his friendship, and to shape one's existence according to that friendship.

The sermon opens with the extended metaphor of human life as a river. Human existence begins from a small spring, grows into a stream, then into a river, and finally advances toward its destination, just as "the child becomes a youth, a man, and an old man."[41] Human life is a journey, a process, and not a static condition. It unfolds through time, passes through barren and beautiful places alike, and encounters obstacles, temptations, and suffering. He writes that human life moves "among the rocks of evil inclinations, toward pride, anger, and impurity," yet it is also carried by "an unseen power, a wondrous power, the power of God."[42] The human being is presented as both fragile and guided: fragile because exposed to moral danger, and guided because divine providence does not abandon the person in the movement of life.

[41] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 26.
[42] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 26.

The decisive theological move of the sermon appears when the preacher states that God "has done more" than merely sustain human life: "He sent His only-begotten Son to be our friend on our journey, protecting us from temptations and helping us in our needs."[43] This is crucial for understanding the anthropology of the sermon. Christ is not only the Savior in a distant doctrinal sense, nor merely Judge or Lawgiver, but "friend." Bishop Comșa thus uses friendship as a theological category through which the relation between Christ and the human person can be expressed. This is a clear anthropological claim. It means that human existence finds its truth in communion, trust, fidelity, and loving dependence upon Christ. Humanity is here defined through relationship rather than autonomy. The sermon reinforces this point by citing John 15:15: "I no longer call you servants... but I have called you friends." [44] In his interpretation, Christ's friendship reveals something essential about the dignity of the human being. The person is called into intimacy with the Son of God. The incarnation itself is interpreted in these terms: "Through His birth, Jesus Christ the Savior became our brother."[45] Christ enters human history not from above in splendor, but in poverty and humility, "born poor in order to make us rich" and "born weeping in order to wipe away our tears."[46] Thus, the human person is shown to possess such value that the Son of God assumes human nearness, kinship, and solidarity. In anthropological terms humanity is worthy of divine condescension, care, and companionship.

A second major theme of the sermon is that Christ's friendship is not sentimental but sacramental and redemptive. The author emphasizes that Christ is "more than a friend," because "He gives Himself to us as food in Holy Communion."[47] The sermon here moves from relational language to Eucharistic theology. Human beings are spiritually nourished by Him. By invoking John Chrysostom's image of the shepherd feeding the sheep with his own flesh and blood, Comșa describes the Eucharist as the deepest form of divine friendship. The human person is not self-enclosed but eucharistic in vocation: made to receive life from another, and ultimately from Christ himself. Humanity is fulfilled not through self-possession but through sacramental participation in divine life.

[43] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 26.
[44] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 27.
[45] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 27.
[46] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 27.
[47] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 27.

The third dimension of the sermon concerns the cross and redemption. Christ's friendship is proven by self-sacrifice: "On the holy Cross, the Savior gave Himself as the price and redemption for us."[48] Comșa continues by describing Christ as the one who "took the punishment so that we might be forgiven" and who "was forsaken on the Cross by all so as to take us into His saving bosom."[49] A central insight of the sermon is that the human person is a being in need of salvation, incapable of self-redemption, and dependent upon the reconciling love of Christ. Humanity is therefore defined by woundedness. To be human, in Comșa's vision, is to be both beloved and fallen, both called and in need of rescue. The cross makes visible the seriousness of sin, but even more the depth of divine love. The sermon then extends this Christological and soteriological vision into an eschatological anthropology. Christ not only becomes brother, friend, nourishment, and redeemer; he also grants heaven as the final destiny of the faithful. "He makes us partakers of His glory and His kingdom," Comșa says, and "counts us as His brothers."[50] The human person is defined by a destiny beyond the present world. Human life is not exhausted by its earthly struggles, nor is its meaning reducible to suffering, failure, or even death. The ultimate meaning of the person lies in participation in Christ's glory. This is especially important for a theological account of the human condition: personhood is teleological and eschatological. The human being is made not only for moral effort but for communion in divine blessedness.

At the ethical level, the sermon also asks what it means to remain in the friendship of Christ. Comșa gives two principal answers: first, one must flee from sin; second, one must love Christ with the whole heart. Sin is described as the force that drives away divine grace and estranges the soul from God. This part of the sermon shows that friendship with Christ involves moral agency and fidelity. Friendship with Christ must be preserved by a life of repentance, love, and constancy. To be human is also to be responsible. This moral responsibility is dramatized through the long and striking narrative of Judas. The Judas episode is one of its strongest anthropological moments. Judas represents the tragic possibility of misused freedom, betrayal, and spiritual collapse. He is portrayed as increasingly cut off from human, cosmic, and divine communion: rejected by his mother, cast into darkness, unable to drink from

[48] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 27.
[49] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 27.
[50] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 28.

the spring, and ultimately driven to despair and suicide. Nature itself appears to recoil from him. In literary and theological terms, Judas functions as the negative image of personhood: the human being who rejects friendship with Christ becomes alienated from others, from creation, and from himself. In contrast to the person who finds rest in Christ, Judas becomes the person of disintegration. The sermon shows that true humanity is inseparable from fidelity to Christ, while betrayal leads to inner ruin.

The conclusion of the sermon returns to a more positive and pastoral tone. The author exhorts his listeners: "Let us flee from the path of Judas, let us not betray the Lord."[51] Christ remains the one to whom believers must run in sickness, blindness, suffering, and even at the hour of death. This final movement is important because it shows that Christ's friendship is not confined to a single sphere of life. It accompanies the whole human journey: bodily, emotional, moral, and existential. The closing prayer attributed to Fénelon further deepens this point. It expresses abandonment, trust, and surrender before God: "I no longer have any desire except to fulfill Your will."[52] In that prayer, the human person appears most fully as creature, child, and worshipper, one who does not possess ultimate mastery over life but finds peace in entrusting the self to divine love.

Sermon V completes Bishop Comșa's anthropological vision by presenting Christ as brother, redeemer, nourishment, and companion of the human journey. Through the figure of Judas, it also shows the tragic consequences of betrayal and alienation. For the author, authentic humanity is fulfilled through faithful communion with Christ.

CONCLUSION

This contribution has sought to clarify Bishop Grigorie Comșa's understanding of the human person in three sermons from *The Wedding Garment: Missionary Sermons* (1935), read within the historical and pastoral context of interwar Romania. The analysis has shown that Comșa's preaching articulates an Orthodox vision of humanity through three movements: vocation, deformation, and restoration. Sermon II defines the human person through divine purpose and orientation toward God; Sermon III reveals the inner damage caused by sin and the need for repentance, grace, and moral struggle; and Sermon V completes this vision by presenting Christ as

[51] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 30.

[52] Comșa, *Haina de nuntă*, 30.

brother, friend, nourishment, redeemer, and companion of the human journey. Although Grigorie Comșa does not offer a systematic treatise on anthropology, his preaching communicates a clear theological answer to the human question. The person is created with dignity, endowed with freedom, threatened by spiritual deformation, and called to healing in Christ. This vision is inseparable from the world in which Comșa preached. His sermons addressed communities shaped by poverty, political change, social uncertainty, and moral anxiety. For this reason, his anthropology is pastoral as well as doctrinal: he speaks of soul, freedom, conscience, repentance, suffering, and hope because these realities belonged to the lived experience of his listeners.

This historically rooted character also allows his sermons to speak beyond their Romanian setting. Although interwar Romania and contemporary Indonesia are distinct contexts, both raise questions about communal life, religious identity, economic inequality, social transformation, and the preservation of human dignity. Comșa's preaching can therefore enter into conversation with wider concerns about selfhood, community, responsibility, and spiritual belonging. Its strongest contribution lies in its relational vision of personhood: the human being unfolds through relation to God, to Christ, to conscience, to neighbour, to the Church, and to final destiny. This also offers a theological counterpoint to contemporary debates about artificial intelligence and technological reductionism, since the author defines the human person through conscience, freedom, repentance, relationality, and communion with God.

In the end, Grigorie Comșa's answer to the question of being human is pastoral and theological. To be human is to receive life as a gift, to live under the responsibility of freedom, to struggle against the deformation of sin, and to seek fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The human person is a pilgrim: dignified yet fragile, wounded yet redeemable, historically situated yet called to eternal life. For this reason, interwar Romanian Orthodox preaching can still contribute to a global conversation about humanity today, reminding us that authentic personhood is found in the movement from vocation, through repentance, toward communion with Christ.

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