



NATIONAL UNITY AND UNITY OF FAITH IN THE SPEECHES OF PATRIARCH MIRON CRISTEA

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ABSTRACT

By remembering Patriarch Miron Cristea, we do not only recall a person, or a hierarch, but we actually evoke a lifetime of work and activity, abnegation and sacrifice, humbleness and spiritual elevation – a lifetime dedicated to calling, like an apostle, the whole Romanian Orthodox nation to follow his example. A distinguished scholar, keen on studying, endowed with great willpower and capacity for effort, an orator with a calling, loving our ancestral faith and language, an enlightened patriot, a fighter for justice and for national freedom: these are the main features that characterize his outstanding personality. As it is known, the name of the first Patriarch of Romania, Miron Cristea, is forever inscribed in the Golden Book containing the names of the great Romanian men who were part of the golden generation that forged the Great Union of 1 December 1918, at Alba Iulia. The historic events occurring in late 1918 found Miron Cristea at the bishopric see of Caransebeș, where he had been elected in 1909, but where he could be installed only in 1910, because the government of Budapest had delayed acknowledging the elections.

Keywords: Patriarch Miron Cristea; union; faith; identity;

PRELIMINARY FACTS

The Romanian Orthodox Church has had a major contribution to promoting national consciousness and fostering the shared sense of the Romanian identity and spiritual unity. This has always supported the Romanian people and fed its aspirations. The great historian Nicolae Iorga wrote:

“Metropolitans, bishops, hegumens, and so often the humble monks or the lowly priests were the ones who equipped the people with virtually all its education; who offered the nation its literary language and its sacred literature, with an art in agreement with its tastes and needs; who supported the State without becoming subservient to it; who guided and led the nation along its earthly ways, however never losing sight of the heavens (...) From their ranks came scholars, calligraphers, wood carvers, silversmiths, state officials, fighters, martyrs and saints”¹.

Cultivating the sense of national and faith unity, the Romanian Orthodox Church contributed to paving the way for the great historic events, aimed to achieve the national union of Romanians: the Union of Principalities of 1859, the State Independence of Romania (1877-1878) and the Great Union of 1918 – a crucial event in the edification of the unitary national state of Romania.

¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoriei Bisericii românești și a vieții religioase a românilor*, vol. I, ediție revăzută și adăugită, Ed. Ministeriului de Culte, București, 1928, p. 4.



The current year - 2018, marks the Centennial of the Union of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, in the year 1918, in the aftermath of the First World War. By joining this world war (4/17 August 1916), Romania actually aimed to achieve the full union of the nation, and the establishment of the unitary national state.

This year, we commemorate the authors of the Great Union of 1918: in Bessarabia – Ion Inculeț, Pantelimon Erhan, Pantelimon Halippa, Ion Buzdugan and Ioan Pelivan, in Bukovina – Iancu Flondor, Sextil Pușcariu, Dionisie Bejan and Doru Popovici, in Transylvania – Vasile Goldiș, Ștefan Cicio-Pop, Alexandru Vaida-Voievod, Iuliu Maniu, Octavian Goga, Ion Flueraș and Vasile Lucaciu, to mention only a few of the most distinguished founders of the Great Union. We also highlight the contribution of the Romanian hierarchs, most notably **bishop Miron Cristea** of Caransebeș, the future Patriarch of Romania, as well as many Orthodox clergymen, to the Great Union of 1918².

By remembering Patriarch Miron Cristea, we do not only recall a person, or a hierarch, but we actually evoke a lifetime of work and activity, abnegation and sacrifice, humbleness and spiritual elevation – a lifetime dedicated to calling, like an apostle, the whole Romanian Orthodox nation to follow his example. A distinguished scholar, keen on studying, endowed with great willpower and capacity for effort, an orator with a calling, loving our ancestral faith and language, an enlightened patriot, a fighter for justice and for national freedom: these are the main features that characterize his outstanding personality. During his tenure was achieved the church unification in the newly united Romanian state, our Church was organized as a Patriarchate, and the *Statutes for the organization and functioning* of the Romanian Orthodox Church were voted in 1925. During his tenure was resumed the publication of the „Romanian Orthodox Church” Journal (1921), the Journal „Apostolul [Apostle]” was launched, the *Synodal Bible* of 1936 was translated and printed, as well as new editions of the *New Testament*. He supported the printing of theological books at the Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, established the Theological Seminary „Patriarch Miron” in Câmpulung-Muscel (1922) and the Academy of Religious Music in Bucharest (1927). The first to envisage a Cathedral of National Salvation was Patriarch Miron, one of the fiercest advocates of the Union. As early as 1920, during a festive session of the Holy Synod, the idea put forth by the Primate Metropolitan of Romania and even the name of Cathedral of National Salvation were accepted enthusiastically³. On becoming a patriarch in 1925, Miron Cristea began to concern himself with the construction, arguing that a Patriarchal Cathedral could no longer remain in a place of worship (beautiful as it might be) such as the metropolitan Cathedral on the Patriarchate Hill, erected in 1655 by Șerban Constantin Vodă⁴.

Volumes of sermons. Fully aware of his mission and responsibility, he was a tireless preacher of the Gospel’s words. His sermons were compiled in the following volumes: *Cuvântări și predici ale unui teolog, mai târziu cleric român în țară sub stăpânire străină* [*Speeches and sermons delivered by a theologian, later a Romanian clergyman in a*

² †Daniel, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, *Unitatea națională – un dar sfânt și o responsabilitate comună*, <http://basilica.ro/unitatea-nationala-un-dar-sfant-si-o-responsabilitate-comuna-text-integral>.

³ Pr. asist. dr. Nicușor Beldiman, *Predica în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Muntenia în secolul al XX-lea. Analiză și evaluare*, Editura Episcopiei Giurgiului, 2013, p. 48.

⁴ Acad. Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, „Catedrala Mântuirii Neamului”, in „B.O.R.”, year CXXII (2004), no. 1-4, p. 84.



country under foreign rule]⁵, *Pastorale și cuvântări ale unui episcop român în țară sub stăpânire străină* [Pastoral letters and speeches delivered by a Romanian bishop in a country under foreign rule]⁶, *Trei ani de propovăduire. Pastorale și cuvântări* [Three years of preaching. Pastoral letters and speeches]⁷, *Pastorale, predici și cuvântări* [Pastoral letters, sermons and speeches]⁸, *Pastoral letters, sermons and speeches*⁹, *Pastoral letters, sermons and speeches*¹⁰.

The volume ***Cuvântări și predici ale unui teolog, mai târziu cleric român în țară sub stăpânire străină*** [Speeches and sermons delivered by a theologian, later a Romanian clergyman in a country under foreign rule]¹¹, authored by the one who was to become the first patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, includes numerous addresses delivered on various occasions, as well as a number of sermons. The book cover informs us that they spanned 20 years of pastoral activity (1889-1909). The author confesses that these speeches render his accumulated pastoral experience, as well as his sustained efforts not only in the realm of church affairs, but also in the educational, cultural, economic, social, artistic realms, and most notably, his efforts to „awaken and cultivate the national sentiment of the Romanian people, to safeguard its existence”¹².

Themes and current ideas. In this anthology of sermons, Miron Cristea addresses a highly diverse and wide range of issues: *religion, Christianity, prayer, the role of school education in the life of a nation, the teachers' duties, the benefit of school examinations, labour and industriousness, excessively lavish funerals, the importance and significance of a cathedral, the importance of the church as a worship place and its role, family, the Lord's Resurrection, social and religious practices*, and last but not least, *the sufferings of the Romanian people and its patriotism*. As it is known, the name of the first Patriarch of Romania, Miron Cristea, is forever inscribed in the Golden Book containing the names of the great Romanian men who were part of the golden generation that forged the Great Union of 1 December 1918, at Alba Iulia. The historic events occurring in late 1918 found Miron Cristea at the bishopric see of Caransebeș, where he had been elected in 1909, but where he could be installed only in 1910, because the government of Budapest had delayed acknowledging the elections¹³. However, a few years previously, in his pastoral letter for the Lord's Nativity of 1913, he had uttered prophetic words announcing the events of 1918: „Rejoice! If not tomorrow, anyway very soon what is rightfully ours must be surrendered to us!” On the eve of 1 December, Miron Cristea led thousands of the Banat Romanians to Alba Iulia – the city of our national aspirations, and the place that witnessed the great „miracle” willed by more than one hundred thousand Romanians, arriving from every part of Transylvania. Before them, the bishop of Caransebeș uttered a prayer which „brought tears of joy to the eyes of all those present”. Having announced to the crowds the Decision of Union between Transylvania and Romania, Miron Cristea delivered a fiery speech addressing the „Great Romanian Nation”.

⁵ Vol. I, Bucharest, 1923.

⁶ Vol. II, Bucharest, 1923.

⁷ Vol. III, Bucharest, 1923.

⁸ Vol. IV, Bucharest, 1938.

⁹ Vol. V, Bucharest, 1938.

¹⁰ Vol. VI, Bucharest, 1938.

¹¹ Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, Bucharest, 1928, 380 p.

¹² †Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici ale unui tânăr teolog mai târziu cleric român în țară sub stăpânire străină 1889-1909*, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, Bucharest, 1928, p. 381.

¹³ Ilie Șandru, „Miron Cristea și Marea Unire”, în ziarul „Națiunea”, Serie nouă, Anul VIII, 13, 2013, p. 1.



The speech of the bishop of Caransebeș evoked the troubled history of the Romanians in Transylvania, especially the „enslavement of Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary, their bondage which lasted for a thousand years”¹⁴.

“I would upset your souls too much, I would trouble and spoil the joy of this beautiful celebration, if I rendered a too detailed picture of our long-standing sufferings over these ten centuries”¹⁵, because „blinded by the chimera of a Magyar national state, Hungarian politicians did not refrain from devising the most devilish ways and means, in order to destroy the Romanian nation and turn us Hungarian (...) The black count Julius Andrassy, whom the Hungarian republic intends to delegate for the peace negotiations, has declared in the Hungarian Parliament: „the issue of nationalities in Hungary is a matter of power, not justice or rights”! Especially their attitude towards us in the recent years, is unacceptable (...) Most painful was the oppression against our Romanian souls and the abuse against our schools which were closed down, for we have never forgotten for a moment the warning of our great Bărnuțiu in 1848: „The more Romanian pupils will learn in foreign schools, the more sons our nation shall”¹⁶.

The great dream of national unity was achieved at long last, after centuries of sacrifice and much Romanian blood spilled in terrible battles. Because – as Miron Cristea said:

“the ideal of any people inhabiting a compact territory, must be its national and political unity. We would be mere ignorants, deserving disdain and scorn, if in today’s circumstances we pursued other goals. It is only through the union of all Romanians that the products and manifestations of our national genius will be able to emerge, and contribute to the progress of mankind through their specifically Romanian qualities” (...) Despite the strength of the Carpathians’ wall, which has so far separated us from our brothers, here and now – in the footsteps of Michael the Brave – I can only say with the writer Rădulescu Niger: „Today’s boundaries are transient and short-lived,/ and time disdains them;/ for it can see their future fate,/ to become open forever”¹⁷.

„The moment of opening them has arrived”! Miron Cristea exclaimed. „We cannot, and need not bring down the Carpathian Mountains, for they are and must remain the very core of the Romanian nation; but I feel that today, through our unanimous voice, we will open wide the Carpathians’ gates, forever, so that the warmest Romanian life may flow freely...”¹⁸.

Miron Cristea delivered a masterful speech, brief but substantial, to greet in the Gara de Nord (North Railway Station) in Bucharest, the delegation of Transylvanian Romanians (Vasile Goldiș, Al.Vaida-Voievod, Miron Cristea and Iuliu Hossu) bringing the Declaration of Union of Transylvania and Romania:

„When we last met here – Miron Cristea said – no one of us dared to dream that your next visit to the capital of Romania would have the historic mission to join the entire Romanian territory: Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș, to the motherland – our cherished Romania!(...) We extend our deepest, eternal gratitude for everything you have done for us – now and during the past centuries, from voivode Stephen the Great (Bishopric of Vad), Radu IV the Great (Bishopric of Geoagiu), Michael the Brave (Bishopric of Alba Iulia) to Constantin Brâncoveanu and king Carol I. We thank the merciful God for allowing us,

¹⁴ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, Editura Basilica, București, 2018, p. 24.

¹⁵ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 24

¹⁶ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 26.

¹⁷ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 30-31.

¹⁸ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 31.



today's generation, to live the greatest days in the entire span of the almost 2,000 years of our nation's life"¹⁹.

Miron Cristea delivered his third address, on the same occasion, standing next to the statue of Michael the Brave, before an immense part of the Bucharest population:

„On behalf of the National Assembly of Romanians in Transylvania, Banat, Crişana and Maramureş, we the four messengers have come before His Majesty the King to submit to him these Romanian lands. We have come to the heart and centre of Romania, to proclaim from here our great joy at having withstood a bondage that lasted for almost ten centuries"²⁰. Miron Cristea made known to the crowd the Decision issued at Alba Iulia, on 1 December, namely „the definitive union of our entire ancestral land with the motherland, our beloved Romania (...)"²¹.

„We, the Romanians across the Carpathians, are coming to you, our brothers, with the warmest trust and brotherly love to join the august Romanian dynasty, with the firm belief that we will find in Your Majesty the best and most affectionate father, who – in the greatest but also the most difficult moments in the life of our nation, pursued the loftiest ideals of the entire Romanian people"²².

In his address delivered in the Aula of the University of Bucharest on the first anniversary of the Great Union, the future patriarch stated:

„Today, everyone's most patriotic duty is to close ranks and solidify the internal solidarity, for the respect we command among other nations depends on our ability to demonstrate our worth; our national dignity can be safeguarded and maintained only by the force of our solidarity"²³.

In writing his speeches, in order to support and corroborate his statements, the preacher quoted mainly lay authors, some of them foreign but most of them belonging to the corpus of Romanian literature²⁴.

Romanian poets are remembered, too: in speaking of the danger of other languages infiltrating everyday life, but especially the liturgical services conducted in the Romanian Orthodox Church, the author illustrates it with the verses of Bolintineanu: „In our monastic cells/ And our ancestral Church/ Alien, foreign languages are now heard"²⁵. The great poet Vasile Alecsandri is quoted, in relation to the cause and effects of forsaking the ancestral faith: „gradually, the national character is lost/ when it people stray from the faith of their ancestors"²⁶.

The manner of **sermon delivery** aims to convey the meaning and define the chosen topic as clearly as possible, by means of explanations, arguments and illustrations. Here are a few relevant instances: the national Church is described as the „safe haven of Romanians"²⁷; in addressing the woman's role and position within the family and society, the speaker points out that „a true woman is like a sun that constantly casts light on man's path and enlightens his life"²⁸. National consciousness is perceived as a duty, by which

¹⁹ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 34.

²⁰ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 34.

²¹ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 34.

²² † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 34.

²³ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvinte despre Marea Unire*, p. 42.

²⁴ Pr. asist. dr. Nicuşor Beldiman, *Predica în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Muntenia*, p. 49.

²⁵ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări şi predici*, p. 37.

²⁶ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări şi predici*, p. 111.

²⁷ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări şi predici*, p. 18.

²⁸ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări şi predici*, p. 45.



„each one is bound to preach love for our language, our faith and our land, for the institution of the Church... for everything that pertains to the specific character of our national life”²⁹. The role of school is described in the following terms: „the school is called to equip children with teachings addressing both their minds and their hearts, educating them to observe God’s moral commandments and establishing in their young hearts, the Christian foundation for the loftiest feelings”³⁰. The duties of teachers and professors are many and varied. Beside their mission to „stir the religious sense in the tender souls of the young”³¹, they must also contribute to „improving the material and moral welfare of the people”³²; to support the mission of the school, all formative factors must cooperate - „the people, the teachers, and the state authorities”³³.

In another speech on the human character and ways of shaping it, as a special set of qualities possessed by every person, preacher Miron Cristea describes the purpose of school education based on the assertions of great pedagogues and educators: „producing religious and moral characters”³⁴. Shaping one’s character presupposes developing discernment and a moral sense and educating the will to follow it. Parents ought to be the most authentic examples of moral life, while the duty of school education is to cultivate and foster the moral sense and moral discernment of pupils. The main objective of religious education is to instill in pupils’ souls the awareness of God’s existence and cultivate trust in Him³⁵. All disciplines have their own clearly-defined formative role. Learning history, for instance, strengthens the moral sense by providing examples worth following, while literature offers models of moral (and also ideal) lifestyle³⁶. Addressing the issue of welfare, the preacher Miron Cristea shows great interest in the prosperity of the Romanian nation – to be gained through labour because „an idle people has no future, however favorable the external circumstances, however rich the natural environment might be”³⁷. Work requires a degree of skill in order to exploit natural resources rationally, and this ability is pursued by school education, which has to enlighten minds so that the people may employ their material means correctly³⁸. According to the author of these speeches, the Orthodox people are „the foundation of the Church”³⁹. Compared to other institutions, the Church has a noble purpose: it pursues the salvation of the faithful. Beside its attributes as a „safe haven” and: „shelter and protection for the entire people”⁴⁰, the Church is „the spring that offers refreshing water to all those who are thirsty and burdened by life... as no other institution or cultural establishment bestows such comfort upon the souls afflicted with the tribulations of this life, as does the Church with its pious, healing and comforting prayers...”⁴¹.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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- ²⁹ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 60.
³⁰ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 63.
³¹ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 67.
³² † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 73.
³³ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 75.
³⁴ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 178.
³⁵ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 181.
³⁶ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 182.
³⁷ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 218.
³⁸ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 218.
³⁹ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 258.
⁴⁰ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 260.
⁴¹ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 259.



This collection of speeches dedicated to various occasions, evince a special quality of their author, patriarch Miron Cristea: his ability to surprise his listeners, by selecting topics that are religious but also have a cultural impact, outlining and substantiating the tenets of national identity and the process of awakening. A few examples illustrate this: in explaining the reasons for building a national cathedral and its importance for the life of the Romanian people, he argues that this effort demonstrates to the future generations „the worth of those who made this sacrifice to construct, complete and adorn it”⁴², and is „the visible token of their zeal, dignity, and fervor as a nation and as a Church”⁴³, ultimately serving as „a symbol of our Romanian Orthodox people’s unity in faith”⁴⁴. Another special characteristic of this preacher is his manner of explaining the reasons for establishing a fund for the Romanian theatre, with a view to promoting morality through Romanian culture. The national theatre is described as „a temple where the major arts, in harmony and concerted endeavour, oppose the social evil, fight against vices and passions and, most importantly, shape characters”⁴⁵ as well as „an institution with a cultural mission to accomplish”⁴⁶. The preacher pleads for those plays inspired from the life of the Romanian people, so that „our greatest and rarest gifts should be celebrated on its altar”⁴⁷. In another speech, he addressed the role of a museum in the life of a nation. A museum entails remembering the past as a source of self-confidence for a people, and consequently the museum becomes „an altar cultivating national traditions... a temple commemorating and preserving the traces of the old ways of living”⁴⁸. The author presented, in every detail, the contents of the museum he envisages, and indicated all its departments as guidelines for edifying such an institution.

His penchant for beauty, his patriotism evinced by the ardent speeches delivered by patriarch Miron Cristea before he was installed in office, announced like a sunrise all his actions and projects which he later undertook as the first patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

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⁴² † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 134.

⁴³ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 134.

⁴⁴ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 135.

⁴⁵ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 171.

⁴⁶ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 173.

⁴⁷ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 174.

⁴⁸ † Miron Cristea, *Cuvântări și predici*, p. 192.