

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
66 (1), pp. 43-62, 2016

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language and in the Maintenance of the Conscience of National Unity through Sermon. Deacon Coresi, St. Metropolitan Bishop Varlaam of Moldavia, St. Hierarch Antim Ivireanul

Nicușor Beldiman

Nicușor Beldiman

University of Bucharest

E-mail: prnbeldiman@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is a presentation of three illustrious figures of the 17th and 18th centuries who kept alive the idea of carrying on the process of imposing the Romanian language as the sole cultural language in the Romanian Provinces. Coresi was aware of the importance his work had. He used his books as an instrument for spreading the Romanian language, a language that would be understood by all. "Collection of Homilies" by Varlaam exercised an extraordinary influence due to the language used, the narrative art that establishes him as the forefather of our great story-tellers, the force in synthesizing the rules of the literary language of the time, and the introduction of the Romanian language as the language used in the church. Antim Ivireanul is the one who elevated the prestige of the national language. He stimulated the idea of national unity and unity in Orthodox faith through language. A common trait of the three scholars is the concern for the same goals as those of their ancestors, such as: protection and promotion of ancestral faith, development of language and culture in the Romanian language, preservation of the conscience of the national unity of all Romanians.

Keywords

Collection of Homilies, Didahii, Coresi, Sf. Mitropolit Varlaam, Sf. Antim Ivireanul, conscience of the national unity, Romanian culture

Preamble

For almost two thousand years of Christianity, the inspiring word, sermon or homily of all those serving Christ has invigorated the feelings of their listeners, enriched their knowledge and elevated their comprehensibility to a more profound liturgical experience. Aware of the mission that had been assigned to them, Romanian priests cleared away doubts, prejudices and sins, planted confidence and hope and determined spiritual converting, reforms and rebirth, by incessantly preaching the teachings of Christ over a period of nineteen centuries. They stand as role models and unequalled peaks for us, with their passion for spreading the Gospel, the preaching devotion, the ardor and the art of preaching, remarked even today in their written sermons.

Bishop Grigore Comșa of Arad, one of the most prolific preachers in our country, convinced us about the importance of this truth in his work entitled *“The History of the Sermons with the Romanian people”*, where he describes the preaching of the Gospel in the territory of our country and the homiletic efforts of the toilers of the holy altars from the 14th century up to the 19th century. Upon reading this volume richly documented with manuscripts, old and new printings of homiletic nature, accompanied by competent comments, we notice that all three Romanian provinces shared the same preoccupation for sermon and the same goals: protection and promotion of ancestral faith, development of language and culture, and also the preservation of awareness of the national unity of all Romanians. Thus, through their sermons, they laid a solid foundation that undoubtedly will endure forever.

Deacon Coresi

“The Collection of Homilies” holds the most important position in the homiletic literature of Romanian Orthodoxy, due to the prestige and wide

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

circulation of most of them. The oldest homilies preserved in the Romanian language date back to the 16th century. They were translated from the Slavonic language by anonymous priests or monks and circulated in various parts of the country, in manuscript copies, of which some were kept until today in various codices, together with other religious writings. We believe that it is natural to insist on the books that were printed in the Romanian language, owing to which the tireless deacon Coresi enjoys the appreciation of all philologists and historians of Romanian literature:

“groundbreaker”, “founder forever mentioned among the founders of the Romanian language and literature”¹, “the initiator of the Romanian printed book”², “the father of the Romanian literary language”³, one of “the most reputed pioneers in the elevation of the Romanian language to the rank of culture language”⁴, “deacon Coresi was aware of the importance of his work... what he wanted was to make his books work as an instrument for spreading the Romanian language, a language that would be understood by all: this constitutes the existence of a preoccupation for the literary language”⁵.

His originality can be questioned only in prefaces and epilogs, the religious books printed by him being reviews of some old or new translations, translations performed in cooperation with the Romanian priests of Saint Nicholas Church in Șcheii Brașovului, without whom he could not have fulfilled his mission.

By using the printing press to disseminate these works, the progressive spirit of deacon is revealed, because “Romanians are no longer behind other nations, who had, in large part, their holy books translated into their national language”⁶. Simple people, athirst for their ancestral faith could now

¹ Mitrop. Antonie Plămădeală, *Clerici ortodocși de limbă și cultură românească*, Bucharest, 1977, p. 11.

² Nicolae Cartoian, *Istoria literaturii românești vechi*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1940, p. 56.

³ Dan Simonescu, *Problema originii limbii literaturii române în cărțile bisericești*, in „Studii Teologice”, year XIII (1961), nr. 9-10, p.553.

⁴ Stela Toma, *Coresi, Psaltirea slavo-română (1577) în comparație cu Psaltirile coresiene din 1570 și din 1589*, Publishing House of the SRR Academy, Bucharest, 1976, p. 7.

⁵ Al. Rosetti, Mihai Pop, I. Pervian and Al. Piru, *Istoria literaturii române*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1964, p. 290.

⁶ Sextil Pușcariu, *Istoria literaturii române. Epoca veche*, Eminescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987, p. 65.

understand the religious service and the sermon in church. The language used in the printings of Coresi establishes the Munteanian dialect from the south-west part of Ardeal and Țara Românească. Through the effort of deacon Coresi, two collections of homilies were printed: the first was printed in 1564, and was entitled *The Significance of the Gospel*, translated into Romanian after the work of Petrus Melius Juhasz in 1563. Only two copies remain today, and these have missing pages. The book forms an in-folio volume, the pages are not numbered and it consists of two parts: the first part comprises speeches for the entire year, starting from Easter Sunday, and explains the text of the evangelic parables; the second part comprises the "Romanian service book"⁷. The collection of homilies also comprises an alphabetical index, which also illustrates the contents: the summoning of the apostles, the Church's research, the kindness of God, the danger of richness, eternal life, fasting etc. Its dissemination was quite limited, because it was suspected of infiltrating certain heterodox teachings. We know that deacon Coresi was its printer, not its editor, two Calvinists being involved in its editing, Forro Miclăuș and Luca Hrăjilă.

To illustrate the evolution of the sermon in Romanian language we will present a series of considerations regarding the last book printed by the deacon from Târgoviște in Brasov, between December 14th, 1580 and June 28th, 1581. This book is entitled in short *The Gospel with teachings* or *Second Collection of Homilies*, Coresi also assigning an explanatory title: *The book that is entitled Gospel with teaching, selected from all four evangelists and from many divine scriptures and given to the Church of God, to be read on all Sundays, as well as on the celebrations of the Lord and of other saints, to serve as teaching for Christians, for the righteousness of their soul and body.*

Exegetes considered it "the most stately of all Coresi's works"⁸, because "it was precisely the book that Romanian Orthodoxy in Transylvania needed at the time"⁹. The publishing of the *Second Collection of Homilies* is based on the *Gospel with teachings from Zabłudov*, which had been

⁷ I. Bianu și N. Hodoș, *Bibliografia românească veche, 1508-1830*, t. I, Bucharest, 1903, p. 51.

⁸ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii religioase a românilor până la 1688*, Bucharest, 1904, p. 91.

⁹ Pr. Ioan Turcu, *Evangelhia cu învățătură din anul 1581. Considerații, precizări, accente*, in „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, year XCIX (1981), nr. 7-8, p. 889.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

printed in 1569 by Ivan Feodorov, a Russian from whom Coresi translates almost the entire preface as well and which highlights the importance of preaching God's word. In order to do the translation, the Brasovians borrowed the copy of the book from the metropolitan bishop of Târgoviște, Serafim, being advised in this respect by the metropolitan bishop Ghenadie of Alba-Iulia. The necessary funds were provided by the mayor of Brașov, Lukas Hirschner. It contains homilies from the collection of Ioan Caleca, patriarch of Constantinople. As Arnold Huttman and Pavel Binder noted, *The Gospel with teachings* contributed to the replacing of the Slavonic language with the Romanian language in the church¹⁰.

The Gospel with teachings comprises the "text of the evangelic parables from the Sundays over the entire year and some holidays, together with the related comments"¹¹. The prayer *Our Father*, followed by the *Creed* and *Decalogue* are added at the end of the book, prayers that are so useful to all Christians at any time in their life. The book was edited in the Latin alphabet in 1914 in Bucharest, under the care of philologists Sextil Pușcariu and Alexie Procopovici. The volume begins with the Gospel on the Sunday of the Custom Officer and Pharisee, and ends the cycle of the liturgical year with the 32nd Sunday following Pentecost. As remarked on several occasions, the sermon on the Orthodoxy Sunday is, however, missing. Also, some other evangelic parables from five of the church year Sundays are also left out. In addition, Coresi introduced a sermon about the Holy Sacrament, one on Lazar's Sunday, other thematic sermons about the Holy Communion on Easter Monday and on the day of the Lord's Ascension. Coresi was blamed for the fact that he ignored the holidays dedicated to the saints, thus proving once again that he was under the influence of the reformed.

In addition to its dogmatic contents, the work also has a moral contents, tending to mold the soul in the spirit of the biblical teachings and to save it from sin and annihilation, because "the spring and root and mother of all evil is the sin"¹² Moreover, greed is condemned: "For man, when

¹⁰ Pavel Binder și Arnold Huttman, *Geneza Cazaniei a II-a (1581) și legăturile diacoului Coresi cu tipografia latină din Brașov*, in "Studii de limbă literară și filologie", Bucharest, 1969, p. 257.

¹¹ Pr. Silviu Hărăguș, *O carte de doctrină și pietate ortodoxă: Evanghelia cu învățătură*, in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", year LXXXVII (1969), nr. 7-8, p. 744.

¹² Diaconul Coresi, *Carte cu învățătură*, published by Sextil Pușcariu and Alexie Procopovici, Bucharest, 1914, p. 245.

caring about wealth and the concerns of this world, lose sight of God”¹³. He is not astounded by the love for money, but especially by the incessant need for wealth: “Because he who rich becomes, happy does not become, but rather he who does not want for richness, happy will be”¹⁴. The book opposes, in fact, all human vices, evil in general. It preaches love as the supreme law of Christianity, love for your fellow men, friends or foes, and love for God, peace and solidarity between people. Both dogmatically and morally, the text of the *Second Collection of Homily* reveals precisely the evangelic teachings, insisting on the duties of the clergy, who, through sermons, must teach and draw the Christians onto the path of salvation.

Let us also refer to the style used. The translators kept a series of artistic comparisons, such as: “our life passes and vanishes, like the leaves and flowers”, our “holy” language, “the language of the old homilies”, as Alexe Mateevici defined it, is the live, popular, simple language, “a language sufficiently vigorous and flexible”¹⁵, though still including some terms of Slavonic origin, a fact that bestows on it that archaic savor. Everywhere, however, there is a tendency to modernize the language by adapting it to its language and times¹⁶.

St. Metropolitan Bishop Varlaam of Moldavia

The great personalities of the 17th century kept alive the idea of continuing to impose the Romanian language as the only language of cultural life in the Romanian provinces. During the first half of this century, marked by late Renaissance and the affirmation of humanism, Moldavia witnessed an auspicious cooperation between the REIGNING PRINCE and the metropolitan bishop, between the Church and the State, in circumstances that were propitious for the development of the Romanian culture, language and literature. The period in which the Saint Metropolitan Bishop Varlaam of Moldavia carried out his activity, between 1632-1653, is closely connected to the flourishing reign of Vasile Lupu (1634-1653),

¹³ Diaconul Coresi, *Carte cu învățătură*, p. 53.

¹⁴ Diaconul Coresi, *Carte cu învățătură*, p. 431.

¹⁵ Pr. prof. dr. Spiridon Cârdea, *Diaconul Coresi, simplu tipograf sau și traducător al cărților tipărite de el?*, in “Mitropolia Ardealului”, year VII (1962), nr. 3-6, p. 340.

¹⁶ Pandele Olteanu, *Contribuții la problema începuturilor și promovării scrisului românesc. 400 de ani de la apariția „Tâlcului Evangheliilor” al lui Coresi*, in “LL”, year XVI (1964), nr. 2, p. 200.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

“an educated man and a Good Christian, who was keen on edifying works of art and cultural settlements in the City of Iași, which would make his name be forever remembered, and who, on the plane of ideas, supported the church and literary activity”¹⁷.

In the *Chronicle of Moldavia from Aaron Vodă to the present*, the great magistrate and logothete Miron Costin covers a period of 65 years (1595-1661) during which 22 REIGNING PRINCES succeeded on the throne of Moldavia, the most significant of all being the 20 year reign of the REIGNING PRINCE who took his royal name from the Byzantine imperial tradition, namely Vasile, described by the Moldavian historiographer as follows: a REIGNING PRINCE “of high statute”, in whose time the country enjoyed “all the goodness and wealth”, a proud and ambition man who especially liked a life of glamour. In these apparently peaceful times, when the Turks were battling in Asia, he was able, with his love for culture and with his devotion as a good Orthodox Christian, to accomplish the things that made him unique.

But let us return to a field in which he made a brilliant figure as servant of the Christian and Orthodox belief, because, as Nicolae Iorga mentioned, “it was through Varlaam that the revolution of the Romanian book in Moldavia in the time of Vasile Lupu occurred fully, without the hesitations and abatements of Teophil of Ungrovlahia”¹⁸. We wish to highlight the assertions of the historia, who observes that the Metropolitan Bishop Varlaam printed only Romanian books. *The Collection of Homilies* of 1643 is metaphorically entitled a “unique monument of our literature, belonging to the clerical Orthodox spirituality as well as to the laic literary heritage”¹⁹. The full title of the work printed in Iași is *A Romanian book of teachings for the Sundays over the year and for the royal celebrations and for the days of the great saints, proclaimed and funded by Vasilie, Prince and REIGNING PRINCE of Moldavia, from several scriptures, translated from the Slavonic language into the Romanian language by Varlaam, Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia. In the royal printing press, in the Monastery of Trei Svetiteli, in Iași, in our Lord’s year 1643*²⁰.

¹⁷ Stela Toma, *Cazania lui Varlaam după 350 ani (1646-1993)*, in “Studii Teologice”, year LXXII (1993), nr. 1-2, p. 48.

¹⁸ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Românilor* VI, Bucharest, 1938, p. 127.

¹⁹ Pr. prof. dr. Vasile Gordon, *Repere importante ale prediciei în Biserica noastră, de la începuturi, până în secolul al XX-lea – Studiu cu exemplificări*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, year CXIX (2001), nr. 1-6, p. 216.

²⁰ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, Literature and Art Publishing House, Bucharest, 1943, p. 1.

The sources of inspiration, as the high-ranked Orthodox clergyman himself shows in the title of the *Collection of Homilies*, were “several translated scriptures” or, as he explains in the *Preface*: “We have collected material from all great translators of the Holy Gospel, teachers in our church”²¹. Therefore, the work can be considered a compilation with original elements, mainly of the *Homilies* of Calist, of those previously printed by Coresi, collections of the stories of the lives of saints or other writings in the Neo-Greek language by Maximos Margunios, Ioanichie Cartanos, as well as of the book entitled *The Treasure* by Damaschin Studitul, giving “the strong impression of a unity in conception and personal achievement in form of expression, creating the originality of the Gospel with teachings”²². The book consists of two parts: the first part includes 54 homilies on the Sundays of all three liturgical period, Triode, Pentecostal and Octoich, while the second part has 22 homilies for various holidays.

The title page is followed by *Stihuri la stema Moldovei (Verses in the herald of Moldavia)*, where it is explained that the power of REIGNING PRINCES was represented by the head of the wisent, at the same time praising “REIGNING PRINCE Vasile”, who, through his contribution, has become “immortal”.

The first preface belongs to “REIGNING PRINCE Vasile”, *A joint word addressed to the entire Romanian nation*, from which we give a quote illustrating how highly appreciated Varlaam’s work was: “Of all the gifts that God, in his mercy, has given us, we in turn make this offering to the Romanian language: a book in the Romanian language”²³. He hopes that their efforts will be remembered for generations to come: “remember us and do not forget in your prayers to include us”²⁴.

The second preface, a *Word to the Reader* of the “humble’ metropolitan bishop, underscores the necessity of printing for the sake of many nations and of Romanians in particular: “The more need our Romanian language has, in the absence of any book in this tongue, to understand the books of other languages”²⁵. Ascertaining the lack of “teachers and teaching”²⁶, at

²¹ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, p. 5.

²² Pandelescu Olteanu, *Unul din izvoarele neogrești ale „Cazaniei” mitropolitului Varlaam (1643): Comoara lui Damaschin Studitul*, in “Romanoslavica”, year XVIII (1972), Bucharest, p. 173.

²³ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, p. 3.

²⁴ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, p. 3.

²⁵ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, p. 5.

²⁶ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, p. 5.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

the same time being conscience of the talent that God had gifted him with, he gives his life, puts it in the service of enlightening the people, guiding it on the path of Christian morale, “for all the time I have left until I go to the house of clay of my forefathers”²⁷.

Having a pronounced didactic character, the author pursues, with each “teaching”, a certain structure, a “very logical and clear distribution”²⁸, a persuasive purpose: first, an introductory part that refers to the significance of the respective day, then the enunciation of the topic followed by the presentation of the evangelic parable and its elaboration by means of the technique of comparison, demonstration and example, and the concluding end containing the moral teaching that must be followed by the listeners, advice for giving up vices, life lived in sin, urges to do good deeds, as proof of our love for our fellow. The stories and illustrations used in introducing the homilies capture the attention of today’s readers and listeners, even though their requisites in terms of form and contents of certain sermons are higher.

Ion D. Popa considers that this “*Book of teaching* comprises all the homiletic genres known in the history of the Romanian history”²⁹: the exegetic homily (the first homily), the thematic sermon (the seventh homily), and the panegyric, especially in the second part of the *Collection of Homilies*³⁰. The exegetic homilies are considerably valuable, because they confer interpretations forever valid to certain texts of the scripture. The author’s interpretations are much simpler and comprehensible to the listeners as compared to the difficult exegesis of the homilies in the Coresi Collection of Homilies and in the Govora ones. In order to aid his listeners, the scholar hierarch uses artistic examples inspired from everyday life. At times, before the scripture text which he explains, there is a preliminary introduction which is meant to make the immediately following evangelic text understood. Thematic sermons have dogmatic, moral and historical contents. Like modern sermons, homilies that refer to a moral theme have, as main goal, to form the Christian life of their listeners. In the panegyrics, the author presents, with particular literary talent, the life of the respective

²⁷ St. Mitrop. Varlaam, *Cazania*, p. 5.

²⁸ Atanasie Popa, *Care este contribuția lui Varlaam la Cazania sa din 1643*, in “Mitropolia Moldovei și a Sucevei”, year XLVIII (1972), nr. 3-4, p. 173.

²⁹ Ion D. Popa, *Valoarea omiletică a Cazaniei lui Varlaam*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, year LXXXIX (1971), nr. 5-6, p. 560.

³⁰ *Collection of Homilies*, pp. 351-498.

saint or just certain significant aspects of his life. These panegyrics are all the more attractive for the souls of the Moldavian Christians, since two of the saints on the celebration of whom Saint Varlaam holds sermons, are more attached to the life of their Church, namely Saint Paraschiva and Saint John the New from Suceava³¹.

Let us take into consideration several aspects related to the language used by Varlaam, “the people’s tongue he learned in the Mountains of Putna and, later on, as a hermit, in the vicinity of the Secu Monastery”³², a careful form of expression, that is, at the same time, expressive. The style is both common and literary beautiful. It is simple, clear, descriptive, at times with powerful notes of the sublime. The author uses many artsy images, nature descriptions, figures of speech and literary beauties, for the purpose of sensitizing ideas and understanding the teachings. For example, the action of the Holy Spirit exerted on the Christians is compared to that of the rain that makes the earth fertile. The Old Testament is compared to the ploughers who prepare the soil for the seeder; the arrival of our Savior is compared to the arrival of spring.

His extraordinary influence is due to the language used, the narrative art that establishes him as the forefather of our great story-tellers, to the force with which he manages to synthesize the rules of the literary language of the time, and to the introduction of the Romanian language as the language used in the church. Finally, to substantiate the importance of consolidating and unifying the Romanian literary language, we should point out that this book had a wide circulation in all three Romanian provinces, being re-edited, looked up and still read today with pleasure. In this respect it is enough to mention Eminescu, a poet of the 19th century, who had read the *Collection of Homilies* by “poor” Varlaam and proposed its acquisition for the Central Library in Iasi, where he held the position of director³³.

In addition to this contribution of the *Book with teachings* by Varlaam to the unity of the Romanian language and the formation of the literary language, the Orthodox teachings included in the contents, which explain the Holy Scripture, constituted a solid foundation for the knowledge and

³¹ Chițu Viorel, *Însemnătatea Cazaniei lui Varlaam*, in “Glasul Bisericii”, year XIX (1960), nr. 9-10, p. 780.

³² Ion D. Popa, *Valoarea omiletică...*, p. 111.

³³ Grigore Botez, *Eminescu bibliotecar*, in “Prima sesiune științifică de bibliografie și documentare, 15-16 decembrie 1955”, Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1957, p. 171.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

preservation of the unity of our ancestral faith. The mastery of the great Varlaam, who had thorough knowledge of the Holy Scripture, of the writings of the Holy Parents, of the protestant ramblings which he rebutted with texts from the same Holy Scripture, made *The Romanian Book of Teachings* a true popular book of teachings about our ancestral faith for the entire Romanian nation. An explanation of the Orthodox doctrine based on the Holy Scripture, pausing for reflection upon the significant moments of our religious life throughout the church year, reaches the soul more deeper and more thoroughly than the abstract notions of a *Catechism*, which proves itself biased in rebutting different ramblings³⁴. Teaching on providence and the work of redemption are presented in the most authentic patristic sense. The Metropolitan Bishop Varlaam, by describing the providential and redemption work aimed at the salvation of mankind, in all its aspects, shows that, without God's support, man cannot do anything to redeem himself, but, at the same time, he must not remain passive, but shine, through faith and good deed, respond to God's plentiful care and love and contribute to the restoration of its nature³⁵. Thus, the *Collection of Homilies*, that bear his name, reveals him to us as a great hierarch, always laboring toward the apprehension and experiencing of faith dogmas, which he sought to implement, with their entire life force, in the hearts of his faithful audience.

The St. Martyr Hierarch Antim Ivireanul

Before passing to the next preacher, we believe it would be proper to quote Ion Dianu, who said

“no other century brought together so many higher spirits like the seventeenth century. If we were to name only Ion Neculce, the metropolitan bishop Dosoftei, the sword bearer Milescu, followed by Dimitrie Cantemir in Moldavia, it would be enough to ensure the emblem of a whole century”³⁶.

³⁴ Pr. Mihail Bulacu, *Cartea românească de învățătură a marelui Varlaam mitropolitul Moldovei*, in “Glasul Bisericii”, year XVI (1957), nr. 12, p. 918.

³⁵ Protos. drd. Dometie Manolache, *Aspecte ale providenței și lucrării de mântuire în Cazania lui Varlaam*, in “Studii Teologice”, year XXVI (1974), nr. 5-6, p. 405.

³⁶ Ion Dianu, *Mitropolitul Varlaam ctitor de scriere și carte românească*, in “Glasul Bisericii”, year XL (1981), nr. 1-2, p. 88.

And we would also like to include here the logophete Udriște Năsturel, the High Stewart Constantin Cantacuzino, brothers Radu and Șerban Greceanu, chronicler Radu Popescu and the *Saint Martyr Hierarch Antim Ivireanul*, in Țara Românească.

Let us piously examine the complex activity of this metropolitan bishop,

“this prominent figure, member of the clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who identified himself entirely with the interests of the Church in Țara Românească, whose leader he became, and with the interests of the country that became his second homeland”³⁷,

attempting to stress the internal and external coordinates which made possible his appearance in the Romanian area. This is the Brancoveanu age, when reigns in Țara Românească seemed to have some sort of stability: the ten year reign of Șerban Cantacuzino (1679-1688), protector of culture, is followed by the reign of the former great logophete Ioan Constantin Brâncoveanu Voievod (1688-1714), from the Cantacuzini family, a nephew of the former REIGNING PRINCE on his sister’s side, who ruled for over a quarter of a century.

In an age and space of cultural effervescence, Constantin Brâncoveanu sensed the importance of developing the printing press, which had a tradition in these parts, and brought with him, from Constantinople, the one “who, from mere printing press worker and monk, came to hold in his hands the most important purposes in the clerical and cultural life of the Romanian Country”³⁸. The fact that the lives of the two, REIGNING PRINCE Constantin Brâncoveanu and the future metropolitan bishop, crossed paths, had an overwhelming influence on the cultural development in Muntenia.

When the metropolitan bishop Teodosie passed away in 1708, Antim is elected metropolitan bishop and invested on Sunday, February 22nd, 1709, in the presence of the country’s REIGNING PRINCE. In the speech he delivered on this occasion, which we shall mention again later on in this study, he undertook that, through his deeds and

³⁷ Prof. dr. Alexandru Elian, *Antim Ivireanul – apărător al prerogativelor scaunului mitropolitan al Ungrovlahiei*, in “Studii Teologice”, year XVIII (1966), nr. 9-10, p. 56.

³⁸ Mircea Păcurariu, *Importanța mitropolitului Antim Ivireanul pentru Biserica și cultura românească*, in “Mitropolia Banatului”, year XVI (1966), nr.7-9, p. 494.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

“together with you, I shall suffer whatever the day and the times bring, and for which I have the duty to guard tirelessly, day and night, and at all times, for the benefit and repentance of all, teaching you and showing you... the righteous path”³⁹.

And, as was his habit, the metropolitan bishop considered it timely to establish a printing press in Târgoviște, where the REIGNING PRINCE often used to retire. In all this time, from 1691 and up to the moment of his martyrdom in 1716, he printed 64 books, statistics that reveal his efforts and was evidence by many researchers. Thus, the printings of Ivireanul were 30 in the Greek language, 24 in the Romanian language and 10 in the Slavonic-Romanian, Greek-Arabic or Greek-Roman language.

Returning to the valuable and original creation of Antim Ivireanul, this is represented by the *Didahii*, which, in spite of his printing worker passion, were never printed, but were passed down to us by means of three manuscripts which saw the light of day after his tragic death. As it happened later on, with the creation of other scholars such as Dimitrie Cantemir, this fact constituted a frustrating impediment in the dissemination and, particularly, in the overwhelming importance it would have had for our church literature and for the laic literature, in terms of the linguistic domain, the language expressivity, statistics. Edited by Professor Ion Bianu, after a manuscript discovered by bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu in 1871, by professor Constantin Erbiceanu, after a copy discovered in the previous year in the library of the Căldărușani Monastery, by the bishop of Roman, Melchisedec Ștefănescu, by I. Cornoil, Ph.D., Nicolae Iorga, Petre V. Haneș and Gabriel Ștrempel, their printing and successive re-printing demonstrates a preoccupation of the researchers for the hierarch’s work “which continues and even makes perfect the good tradition of old codes of laws and of its predecessors, to educate and guide the clergymen in all matters”⁴⁰.

Superior to the collections of homilies, read in the church by entire generations of known and unknown priests, but having a general character and not being anchored in the realities of the times, *Didahiile*, sermons written and uttered by Antim Ivireanul in the eight year period in which he industriously illustrated “the face of the true shepherd who commits him-

³⁹ Sf. Ier. Antim Ivireanul, *Predici*, Ediție critică, studiu introductiv și glosar de Gabriel Ștrempel, the Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1962, p. 75.

⁴⁰ Pr. Stelian Izvoranu, *Antim Ivireanul și locul lui în cultura poporului român*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, year LXXXIV, (1966), nr. 9-10, p. 981.

self to his sheep, with his entire soul”⁴¹, will bring forth a new perspective on the art of preaching, of teaching the word of God.

The printed volumes contain 28 sermons presented by Antim, ”for all Sundays, starting with the Sunday of the Pharisee and for all holidays over the year, great or minor”⁴², namely: *five on the Fig Sunday, three on the occasion of Transfiguration, two on the day celebrating Saints Constantin and Elena, two on the celebration of the Dormition of The Mother of God, two on the Birth of the Lord, two on St. Dumitru day, two on St. Nicholas day, two on the Sunday of Shrove Tuesday*, and on: *Circumcision, Epiphany, The Welcoming of the Lord, The Entry into the Church of the Mother of God, the Saint Archangels, the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul, the Sunday of the Pharisee and Custom Officer, and Word for repentance.*

Furthermore, other nine speeches for specific occasions were discovered in “the very original of the Didahiilor, exactly as they were written by the erudite metropolitan bishop Ivireanul”⁴³: the sermon on the occasion of his investiture as metropolitan bishop – *I have delivered this on the day I was made metropolitan bishop* – three funeral speeches, followed by a speech at the memorial service, and also two other speeches on the occasion of Confession, together with two replies in his defense sent in January and February 1712 to the Reigning Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, when, being envied by some of clergymen in his subordination and by some laics, he was charged with accusations so serious that he was specifically required to resign, because he had fallen in disgrace with the prince. When preparing his defense with eloquent proof, he knows how to insert in these, pleas to the conscience of his addressee, finally obtaining the end of his anguish:

“And Your Highness, I plead that you act as a Christian and merciful ruler and not allow me to go out in dejected and with tears on my cheek, because it will be a pity, and just like you do not take haste in the matters of politics to give rewards in the name of your honor, do not take haste in the church matters either, in the name of God’s glory, because evil is done easily, but repairing it is difficult”⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Mircea Păcurariu, *Importanța mitropolitului Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 514.

⁴² Title of the volume published by Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, Bucharest, 1889.

⁴³ Constantin Erbiceanu, *Prefață la Didahiile ținute în mitropolia din București de Antim Ivireanul, mitropolitul Ungro-Vlahiei, 1709-1716*, Bucharest, 1888, pp. III-IV.

⁴⁴ St. Antim Ivireanul, *Predici*, p. 300.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

We believe it is relevant to quote also from the speech delivered on the occasion of the ceremony of his investiture as metropolitan bishop of the Romanian Country, which reveals his beautiful morality imparted with modesty and humbleness, but „deeply infiltrated with the sanctity and sublime role of priesthood”⁴⁵:

“It is not a wonder, my dear listeners and honorable noblemen, that God ordained me and made me, a small and humble man, shepherd to a small herd, to you, whom I regard not like a small herd but like a high and tall one: great through its devoted worship and righteous faith, that you preserve pure and unspoiled; high, through the good church and for the prelate: since these two found and strengthen the church, and even though I was the smallest and unworthiest of all, but God sought my smallness and unworthiness, he did not see my poverty and that I was a stranger, but he searched into the richness and endless kindness; and people covered my sins and misdeeds and taught me, unworthy as I was, to master and to be worthy of this bishopry, and sent me to you to be your shepherd, spiritual father; for this I have the duty to tirelessly guard you, day and night, and at all times, for the benefit and repentance of all, teaching you and guiding you with fear of God on the path of righteousness”⁴⁶.

We can see that the metropolitan bishop Antim bequeath to posterity all kinds of sermons: exegetic and thematic or synthetic homilies, paraenesis, panegyrics. The sources used are often mentioned and show the extensive erudition of the prelate, being both clerical and laic in nature. Thus, he quotes not only from the Holy Scripture, but entire passages from the Holy Parents, whom he refers to as “heavenly teachers”, such as Saint John the Golden Mouth, the greatest church orator in the patristic age, whom he names “Saint Zlataust” or “the one with tongue and heart of gold”, or “the great Zlataust”, Saint Vasile the Great, Saint Gregory the Blessor, Efreim Sirul, also referred to as “the harp of the Holy Spirit”, Dionisie Areopagyte, Saint John of Damascus and, finally, Saint Teophylact of Bulgaria. To this list, we add the popular books: *The Physiologist*, *Alexandria* and of course, the books of service. But the great metropolitan bishop constantly resorts to the realities of life as well, to the morals of the pastorate, to the needs and aspirations of the nation.

⁴⁵ Pr. conf. dr. Alexandru Ciurea, *Antim Ivireanul predicator și orator*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, year LXXIV (1956), nr. 8-9, p. 805.

⁴⁶ Sf. Antim Ivireanul, *Predici*, pp. 74-75.

Referring to the close preparation of the sermon, professor Dan Horia Mazilu asserts that the erudite metropolitan bishop

“undoubtedly prepared and wrote the sermons beforehand, planning – for some of them or for all – even a possible printing. At least this is what I understand from that <<preface>> written to *Word of teaching and humbleness on Fig Sunday*. Antim never allowed himself to repeat his sermons. His rank and prestige as scholar required that each public appearance be a unique oratorical event”⁴⁷.

Remarkable is also the structure of his sermons, that can constitute models, observing the classical structure, as

“none of the sermons passed down to us, does not begin abruptly and does not end unannounced; instead, the beginning is always, one way or another, a plea to the listeners’ attention and a prelude to the topic that is to be discussed; the end is, generally, an application of the thematic teaching, a prayer of request or doxology”⁴⁸.

The starting point of his sermons was the religious texts, from which he knew how to select the most beautiful and appropriate for each circumstance⁴⁹. Our preacher assigns the text “not only one but various functions, namely to establish the objective of what is being uttered”⁵⁰. It is not always taken from the parable of the day, but instead, carefully selected according to the theme that forms the object of the sermon. Sixteen of the sermons begin with a text quoted from the New Testament, while two with texts from the Old Testament.

The greeting phrases illustrate his wise nature, his kindness, his respect toward the audience and his parental tone; all these features are still found in our priests’ speeches: *My dear ones!* or *My dear listeners!*, *My sons!* or *My dear sons!*, and also *Your Cleverness, my sons!* or *Blessed parents!*, depending on the who he was preaching to.

⁴⁷ Prof. Dan Horia Mazilu, *Introducere în opera lui Antim Ivireanul*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 89.

⁴⁸ Pr. dr. Gabriel Popescu, *Mitropolitul Ungrovlahiei Antim Ivireanul, cârmuitor bisericesc și propovăduitor al Evangheliei*, in “Studii Teologice”, year XX (1969), nr. 1-2, p. 61.

⁴⁹ Vasile V. Haneș, Teșu Solomonovici, *Istoria oratoriei la români*, vol. 1: *De la Antim Ivireanul la Ion Antonescu*, Teșu Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Pr. conf. dr. Alexandru Ciurea, *Antim Ivireanul predicator și orator*, p. 807.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

The introductions are brief, sometimes limited to a few sentences. Love and duty toward preaching, the basic idea of the celebration, the listing of the parts, a situation of life are all examples of starting points in the elaboration of the introductions.

Once the theme is enounced, it is supported with arguments, by resorting to the biblical texts or to great theologians:

“Says he, the one with the Mouth of Gold, John, when explaining Psalm 48, that many emperors have built citadels and erected wonderful buildings and put their names on them, and even so, they vanished, and no use got out of them, but ceased to be and with them so were their names forgotten”⁵¹.

In expanding the theme he does not use very long presentations. In general, the author limits his interpretation, directing his effort toward deepening the teaching that he intended to share to the listeners. The briefness of the preacher’s sermons is compensated by the richness of their contents. Thus, the first sermon on the occasion of the Birth of the Lord comprises six pages, but the interpretation given is one of the most profound. The question: Why did the Lord take on human nature and not angelic nature?, Antim answers as follows: the Lord took on human nature first because men had all fallen while the angels were not all fallen. Secondly, because man erred because of his weakness, his ignorance, but angels fell because of their evil character, thus committing a sin against the Holy Spirit, and this cannot be easily forgiven. Thirdly, men erred being urged by the devil, while angels by their own initiative. Finally, men are less guilty for their fall than angels, who being more honorable, had the duty to protect themselves against sins⁵².

A fervent believer, as can be seen from his life and sermons, with a thorough knowledge of the biblical texts, the metropolitan bishop Antim criticized the vices of the society of his time, being aware of his duty toward his fellow men, considering them, whatever their social status, equal before God. From his sermons we see that would teach the Christians that, before the Righteous Judge, they shall come only with their deeds, while their ranks will stay behind in the material world and that such ranks are, sometimes, a burden for the souls that come to the fair judgment, if their lives has not been honest and lived for the benefit of the society⁵³.

⁵¹ St. Antim Ivireanul, *Predici*, p. 128.

⁵² St. Antim Ivireanul, *Predici*, pp. 190-191.

⁵³ Ioan D. Lăudat, *Antim Ivireanul: activitatea culturală, oratorul, patriotul*, in “Mitropolia Moldovei și a Sucevei”, year LII (1976), nr. 5-6, p. 372.

Though he is fervent in debating the theme, he always shows himself indulgent and gentle: “All this that I have said, out of duty I have said, and God makes the blind wise and the broken straight, and so may he make you wise and may he make you direct you to what is useful.”⁵⁴ The endings of the *Didache* are short. They include applications in the listeners’ lives, recapitulations followed by the correspondent applications or warm, useful prayers. All of these illustrate the care of the spiritual father, who does not forget to encourage, spirit up and inspire in his listeners confidence in the victory of good over sin. The contemporaneity of the *Didache* is obvious. Advice given them is still valid today, the moral betterment of people is still a problem for the Romanian society⁵⁵.

Insofar as the language of the sermons is concerned, mainly the syntax,

“the phrase conceived by Antim Ivireanul is sometimes short and paratactical, with a staccato rhythm, sometimes periodical, with a smooth and wavy rhythm, sometimes simple, calm, reserved, sometimes complex, ample, full of warmth”⁵⁶.

The style of his speeches is oral, natural, varied, nuanced, straightforward. The author avoids exaggerations and bombastic expressions, he unfolds his presentation without deviations, useless paraphrases, proving a higher intuition of language and a remarkable literary talent. We must also observe the popular, concrete, colored nature of the style in the sermons of the Saint Hierarch Antim Ivireanul. The church orator realized, from the beginning, that he is standing before an audience prepared for the subtle text interpretations. He addressed very modest people who, more than anything else, were in need of practical guidance. This explains his orientation toward the spoken language and the need to express himself as clearly as possible⁵⁷. The comparison, interrogation, metaphor, dialogue, antithesis, description, irony and repetition are used skillfully to evidence the style, to give it nuances and make it more interesting and more pleasant to the

⁵⁴ St. Antim Ivireanul, *Predici*, p. 174.

⁵⁵ Prof. dr. Lucreția Vasilescu, *Sfântul Ierarh Martir Antim Ivireanul – modelul cărturarului ortodox*, in “Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă”, Bucharest University Publishing House, year VIII (2008), p. 643.

⁵⁶ Alexandru Rosetti și Boris Cazacu, *Istoria limbii române literare*, vol. I, București, 1961, p. 168.

⁵⁷ Gavril Istrate, *Locul didahiilor lui Antim Ivireanul în istoria limbii române literare*, in “Mitropolia Moldovei și a Sucevei”, year LII (1976), nr. 5-6, p. 377.

The Role of the Clergy in the Development of the Romanian Literary Language...

audience. As illustrative material, the Ivirean preacher used both biblical and profane stories.

Professor Eugen Negrici dedicated a compact volume to the rhetoric of Antim, where the aspects of the eloquence of the metropolitan bishop from Muntenia and the beginning of the oratorical genre in Romanian literature are studied with great fervor and competence. He shows that the Ivirean hierarchy

“places his creation on the entire network of homiletic rules, excluding improvisation. In terms of composition, the sermon is meditative, thought about lucidly and, in spite of its spontaneity and vigor, it reveals a documented nature. It constitutes a revolution in the belletristic sense as well, because it advances the idea of public. The style of the homily thus leaves the limitation of stereotypes and subordinates itself to the preacher-author relationship. Examined closely, the work of the metropolitan bishop is a truncated dialogue in which one of the partners anticipates the objections and takes the answers upon himself”⁵⁸.

Conclusions

In the culture of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as in Romanian literature from its beginning up to the present day, sermon represented and continues to represent a genre and, respectively, an important mode of manifestation of the Word of God, as foundation and support for the faith “that works through love”. The sermon or the homily is not only a noble duty of the priest whereby he plants the word of God, through urges and teachings transmitted to the Christians, but also a mission of grace, aimed to enhance, through the sacred word, the richness of ideas and feelings of the religious literature, an integral and extremely precious part of Romanian culture of all times.

Even though the beginnings of the preaching literature occurred in a “late Middle Age period” of the Romanian culture, the contribution of this kind of writing to the formation and perfection of the Romanian literary language, as an artistic literature, is undeniable, because the hard-working toilers of the Church of those times - metropolitan bishops, priests, deacons, monks, are acknowledged as our first scholars.

⁵⁸ Eugen Negrici, *Antim. Logos și personalitate*, București, 1971, p. 84.

In the absence of any other institutions of culture, the Church was the small and blessed settlement where the basis was laid for what was to become Romanian language and literature. Moreover, of all the Romanian provinces, Muntenia, situated at the center of the territory for the formation of the Romanian language, imposed the "canonical, official tongue"⁵⁹, the language which, by suppressing the sap of all dialects and subdialects, gradually became a „means of current expression"⁶⁰. Thus, we have another argument in favor of the fact that the preaching activity must be regarded not only as a valuable cultural phenomenon in itself, but also as a work of erudition and foundation on the part of our scholar priests. This is how we explain the fact that a groundbreaker of this type in literature is appreciated not only as a gifted and notable preacher for his time, but also as a genuine creator of moral portraits, that can be so convincing to the "listener in the Church"⁶¹.

A common trait shared by all scholar preachers in the three Romanian provinces is the preoccupation for the same goals their ancestors had, namely: protection and promotion of the ancestral faith, development of the Romanian language and culture in the Romanian language, preservation of the awareness of the national unity of all Romanians. With its richness and diversity of forms of presentation, as well as with the imprint of the personality of each preacher, the preaching activity of the three representatives examined in our present paper is comprised in our cultural heritage as an expression of the spiritual edification and fulfillment of the Romanian people.

⁵⁹ E. Negrici, *Antim. Logos și personalitate*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ E. Negrici, *Antim. Logos și personalitate*, p. 14.

⁶¹ E. Negrici, *Antim. Logos și personalitate*, p. 17.