

## Nicodim Munteanu: Monk, Translator, Patriarch

One of the outstanding personalities that, following the proposal of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, we commemorate this year is that of the scholar patriarch Nicodim Munteanu, whom the Most Blessed Patriarch Daniel describes as “a confessor of the Light in dark times”.

Born in the village of Pipirig, Neamț County, on the 6th of December 1864, the future Patriarch Nicodim graduated from the Veniamin Seminary in Iași in 1890, completing his theological studies at the Spiritual Academy in Kiev (1890-1895), by the good will of holy Metropolitan Iosif Naniescu (1875 - 1902, canonized on October 5, 2017), his benefactor. He became a monk at the Neamț Monastery, under the name Nicodim (1894). In 1909 he was elected and consecrated bishop-vicar of the Metropolitan of Moldova, and three years later, on February 18, 1912, was elected bishop of Huși, where he served until December 31, 1923, when he retired. He returned to the Neamț Monastery as abbot, ushering in a new age of welfare for this old monastic centre. In the cells of this monastery, abbot Nicodemus carried out with great eagerness the work of translator from the Russian theological literature and here he wrote inspired pages that imposed him as a great scholar. “By late at night the light from his working cell shone like a warm, guiding star in the dark. Monks, campers, hikers, all calmed down after the bells rang for vespers. The light from the cell of the scholar monk was watching until the second crow of the roosters”, notes the writer Cezar Petrescu.

Patriarch Nicodim’s activity as a translator from Russian is truly impressive. Here are the most important titles:

- Translations from Innocentius, Archbishop of Odessa: *Șase cuvântări despre natură (Six Sermons on Nature)* (1904), *51 de cuvântări la Postul Mare (51 Sermons for the Great Lent)* (1909), *Predici*

- la sărbătorile împărătești (Sermons on the Lord's Feasts) (1933), Cuvântări la sărbătorile Maicii Domnului și duminici (Sermons on the Feasts of the Virgin Mary and Sundays) (1933), Predici despre căderea lui Adam, păcat, moarte și înviere (Sermons on the Fall of Adam, Sin, Death and Resurrection) (1939);*
- From Sergius, Archbishop of Vladimir: *Cuvântări apologetice asupra adevărurilor fundamentale ale religiunii creștin-ortodoxe (Apologetic Speeches on the Fundamental Truths of the Christian-Orthodox Religion) (1905);*
  - From priest Constantin Stratulatov: *26 predici la credința creștină sau tâlcuirea Crezului (26 Sermons on the Christian faith or Explanations on the Creed) (1912), 23 predici la nădejdea creștină sau lămuriri asupra rugăciunii Tatăl Nostru și a celor 9 fericiri (23 Sermons on the Christian hope or Interpretations on the Lord's Prayer and the 9 Beatitudes) (1928), 75 predici catehetice pentru popor (75 Catechetical Sermons for the People) (1932);*
  - From priest Grigore Petrov: *Pe urmele lui Hristos (In the Footsteps of Christ) (1908), Viața de seminar (The Seminary Life) (1909), Un păstor model (A Model Pastor) (1918);*
  - From Leo Tolstoy: *Menirea științei și a artei sau: Religia este știința științelor (The Purpose of Science and Art or: Religion is the Science of Sciences) (1932) and a few brochures, all in several editions;*
  - From protopresbyter Sergius Cetfericov: *Paisie, starețul Mănăstirii Neamț. Viața, învățătura și influența lui asupra Bisericii Ortodoxe (Paisius, the Abbot of the Neamț Monastery. His Life, Teaching and Influence on the Orthodox Church) (1933);*
  - From F. V. Farrar: *Viața și operele Sfinților Părinți și Învățători ai Bisericii (The Life and Works of the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church) (1932), Predici pentru tineretul școlar (Sermons for School Youth) (1935), Primele zile ale creștinismului (The First Days of Christianity) (1938), Viața și operele Sf. Apostol Pavel (The Life and Works of St. Paul the Apostle) (1923), Viața lui Iisus Hristos (The Life of Jesus Christ) (1944);*
  - From A.P. Lopuhin, *(Istoria biblică) Biblical History (1947), six volumes of 700 pages each.*

Patriarch Nicodim translated from Greek into Romanian 51 books of the Holy Scriptures (24 from the Septuagint, and the whole New Testament).

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He also published the New Testament in five editions, as well as the Psalter (four editions), in his own translation. The biblical books translated by him, along with those translated by the priests Grigore Pișculescu (Gala Galaction) and Vasile Radu, formed the text of the synodal Bible published in 1936.

From among the original works, adapted translations and writings co-authored with other intellectuals, we mention: *Cuvântări liturgice* (*Liturgical Speeches*) (1906), *Călăuza creștinului în biserică* (*The Christian's guide in the Church*) (1907), *Ortodoxia și creștinismul apusean* (*Orthodoxy and the Western Christianity*) (1912), *Explicarea Sfintei Liturghii și despre pomenirea morților* (*Explanation on the Holy Liturgy and the Commemoration of the Dead*), *Cuvântări pastorale și îndemnuri* (*Pastoral Sermons and Exhortations*) (1940), *Mica Biblie* (*The Little Bible*) (1913) and *Biblia Ilustrată* (*The Illustrated Bible*) (1936).

In addition, many other books and brochures appeared, all aiming at enlightening the people and helping the priests in their missionary activity. In total, the number of works edited by Patriarch Nicodim in several volumes and editions and printed in several typographies amounts to 111 books. And if we were to add the articles, as well as the various written speeches we would reach 337 titles. "This combination between the text of the Holy Scripture and the social, pastoral context shows that Patriarch Nicodim was a realistic theologian, a shepherd who brought into his present-day situations the word of life, the saving word, the word that unites us to God - the Word and the whole Trinity", remarks Patriarch Daniel.

In January 1935, at the venerable age of 70, for his cultural merits, he was elected Metropolitan of Moldova, being enthroned on February 4, 1935. After four years, on June 30, 1939, he was elected Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (enthroned on July 5), leading the Romanian Church until his death on February 27, 1948. He was buried in the Patriarchal Cathedral on March 4, 1948.

His patriarchal activity coincided with an extremely troubled decade, in which no less than three dictatorial regimes - royalist, military and communist - followed one another, and Romania suffered the terrible experience of a new World War. He witnessed the tragedy of the war, the foregoing crimes and the horrors that accompanied it, the territorial losses of August 1940 and the sacrifices in human lives involved in the "Eastern

campaign” across the Nistru river. He then witnessed the occupation of the country by the Soviet armies and the establishment of the communist regime in Romania. These circumstances did not allow him to have other great achievements outside his truly monumental cultural work. His most important cultural feat as patriarch was a new synodal edition of the Holy Scripture, even in the year when the second world conflagration ended. The synodal Bible of 1944 is, for the most part, his work; 24 Old Testament books and the whole New Testament were translated by him.

The best characterization of Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu’s activity at the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church belongs for sure to his biographer, I.D. Ștefănescu: “The years spent by the Most Reverend Patriarch Nicodim at the head of the Romanian Church are the most difficult years of our burdened nation. Someone will tell once, and history will come to affirm with its authority, when the time will come, the self-control and tact with which the Most Reverend has faced great events and extremely difficult situations. Someone will speak then and contemplate in full light the good advice of peace and encouragement that came down the Hill of Patriarchate upon the whole Church and nation. Loyal to the Romanian King and Flag, full of the power that God alone gives, he intervened vigorously for everyone’s rights and humanity. When they will know the circumstances, many will value properly his courageous stand against passions and impulses sprung from the waves of times”.

**Rev. Adrian MURG**