

**Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Printing in the Romanian Orthodox Church*,**

**Andreiana Publishing House, Sibiu, 2016, 336 pp.**

**+ XXXIX drawings with illustrations**

At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, only six decades after the appearance of printing in the Western world (a relatively short time, compared to the overall scale of history), only two decades after the publication of the first books in Slavonic and only eight years after the end of the “incunabulum era”, at south of the Carpathians, near the old seat of Wallachia, namely at the Dealu monastery above Târgoviște, three books of inestimable cultural value saw the light of day: *The Missal* (1508), *The Hymn Book* (1510) and *The Four Gospels* (1512). And these prints, together with those that followed them, fulfilled not only a cultural and ecclesiastical role, but, by the fact that they circulated in all three Romanian countries, they were also a significant factor in the process of awareness of unity of the language, of the nation and of the minds of Romanians everywhere; also, by spreading them in the Slavic countries south of the Danube and in the ecclesiastical space of the old Eastern Patriarchates (first in Slavonic, then in Greek, and later even in their national languages, as was the case of the Greek-Arabic *The Missal* and *The Book of Hours* of the hieromonk Antim Ivireanul from Snagov and Bucharest from 1701-1702, destined for the Christian-Orthodox believers from the Patriarchate of Antioch, or that of the Bulgarian *The Four Gospels* from 1828, translated by the scholar Peter Sapunov, a cornerstone of the modern Bulgarian language), all under Ottoman (non-Christian) occupation, they represented a real support for the respective peoples in preserving their language, culture and – in fact – their identity.

These beginnings, together with the entire “epic” of the later Romanian church typographic act, constitute the object of a volume, entitled *Printing in the Romanian Orthodox Church*, having as author the tireless priest, professor and researcher of our church past, Mircea Păcurariu, member of the Romanian Academy; the book, printed with the blessing of His Eminence, Laurențiu Streza, Archbishop of Sibiu and Metropolitan of Transylvania (who signed the preface), was published in 2016 – a

year declared by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church as “commemorative year of Saint Hierarch Martyr Antim and of the church printers” – in the prestigious “Andreiana” Publishing House and Printing House from Sibiu, one of the multiple legacies left to the Romanian people by the great Șaguna, the patron saint of Transylvania.

Based on an extensive specialized bibliography, the volume is a successful attempt to synthesize all the aspects that – taken together – define the phrase “church printing”; in fact, until 2016, there was no profile work, depicting the entire editorial work of the Church in the Romanian space of the last half of the millennium.

The volume, of a high graphic and scientific nature, is structured in six chapters (with several subchapters), following in detail, for each century, the activity of all printing centers in the three Romanian countries, since the appearance and establishment of printing in the south of the Carpathian Mountains at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, through the toil of the Montenegrin hieromonk Macarie, and until the dawn of present-day Romania; are presented, as such, the printing centers from Dealu, “Assumption” in Câmpulung-Muscel, Govora, Snagov and Antim monasteries in Wallachia, respectively Neamț, “Holy Three Hierarchs” and the Citadel of Iași in Moldova, the from the former cities and fairs of Târgoviște, Sibiu, Brașov (the Romanian district of Șchei), Orăștie, Bucharest, Iași, Bălgrad (Alba Iulia), Râmnic, Buzău, Blaj, Rădăuți, Cernăuți, Chișinău, Arad and Caransebeș and those in the remote European capitals Buda and Vienna. From the middle of the twentieth century, on the same line, the activity of the Romanian metropolitan, archdiocesan and diocesan publishing houses is outlined, presenting both the main titles of cult books, school textbooks, collections of official documents, respectively the series of theological magazines and of the national-political, church and didactic newspapers that came out from under the presses of the printing presses or from the modern printing workshops, as well as the typographic directions specific to each historical period crossed. The 100 illustrations in the photographic appendix are meant to help the reader fully understand the importance of the typographic act in the development of our national and church culture. Also very helpful are the three-person index of people, titles and places, respectively the bilingual summary (in Romanian and English) at the end.

Beyond this periodization and presentation – broken down by cultural-ecclesiastical centers – of the Romanian press, the work in question brings to the attention of contemporaries the figures of great scholarly hierarchs, with detailed presentation of their activity in the service of the Church and the people they came from (to mention only the metropolitans Teofil, Ștefan, Teodosie, Grigorie IV of Wallachia, Varlaam, Dosoftei and Veniamin Costachi of Moldova, Simion Ștefan and Andrei Șaguna of Transylvania) or in which they integrated (the emblematic case of the holy metropolitan-typographer Antim), as well as the role of supporters of our national culture, as a whole, of the former rulers of Wallachia and Moldova (Transylvania following in the past, due to the vicissitudes of the times, a special trajectory). Also remembered are the diligent master printers, most of whom were lost under the unjust dust of history, who worked – some decades in a row – with devotion, conscientiousness and full responsibility for the mission to which they were called, in the direction of enlightenment through the culture of contemporaries, leaving to posterity an invaluable book treasure: beautifully printed books, adorned with engravings, frontispieces and multicolored flowered initials, meticulously executed.

Therefore, paraphrasing a thought of the preface, this volume, as well as the one entitled *Living Letters. The pattern in the Romanian Orthodox Church – between mission and necessity* (Andreiana Publishing House, Sibiu, 2016), which followed, is “a well-deserved tribute to all those who served the Romanian pattern for over five centuries”.

At the end of these brief considerations, we can only recommend this book for reading to all those who – as he wrote, in the preface of another major work of the renowned historian and theologian Mircea Păcurariu, namely the *Romanian Theological Culture. Brief historical presentation* (Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011), His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel – want to “deepen the knowledge of the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church from the perspective of its contribution to Romanian spirituality and culture”, at a time when “Romanian society needs affirmation its own national and universal identity”.

**Florin DOBREI**