

## **Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu – a diligent and wise preacher<sup>[1]</sup>**

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### **Abstract:**

*The fifth patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church is the author of an important and substantial corpus of writings, spanning a period of five decades. It is a telling fact that the teachings bequeathed by our Saviour Jesus Christ to the Holy Apostles – and through them to their successors – were not ignored, but through the efforts of the Father Patriarch, they became a beacon on the difficult path of moral perfection followed by all those he shepherded over an extended period of time, when his every step took him not to one place but to all horizons and provinces of the Romanian territory.*

***Keywords:** Patriarch Teoctist, homilies, Patriarchal Pastoral Letters, themes, parenesis.*

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### **1. Preliminaries**

From the beginning of his tenure, Patriarch Teoctist was aware that the duty of preaching was the first task that the Savior assigned to the Holy Apostles after choosing them (Luke 9, 1-2). And the Patriarch never sought to boast a personal contribution, but rather, he only aimed to preach the Gospel alone and all that derives from these holy teachings (Arăpașu 1992: 11-12).

Everything that followed was merely the fulfillment and illustration of this programmatic confession of the faith: an impressive number of studies, homilies and speeches supporting and asserting the Gospel's message. His words came naturally, like the flow of a river; he never sought elaborate or sophisticated expressions, but was rather interested in conveying the sweetness and plainness of the genuine Romanian language, employing the phraseology of the religious books, of the homilies, of the masterworks on Orthodox spirituality. In addition to the richness and variety of themes, the literary language used, portrays Patriarch Teoctist as one of the greatest and most talented stylists. His written creation constituted, undoubtedly, one of the reasons for which he

was awarded the title of honorary member of the Romanian Academy (Necula 2006: 29).

**Volumes of sermons.** From 1986 to 2006, he published 18 volumes that were part of a comprehensive body of works entitled *Pe treptele slujirii creștine* (*Steps in the service of Christianity*) and three volumes entitled *Slujind altarul străbun* (*Serving the ancestral altar*), *Umblați neîncetat în Adevăr* (*Never cease to walk in the light of Truth*) and *Conștiința vie a slujirii preoțești* (*The living consciousness of priesthood*), which, together, include over 1,500 titles and over 7,000 pages, rendering the situation of our Church in the 57 years spent by the Patriarch in his tenure (Necula 2006: 28). These volumes comprise the Patriarchal Pastoral Letters addressed to Christians on the occasion of the great holidays, Christmas and Easter, the homilies, catecheses and meditations delivered in cathedrals and other churches, in the diocese or throughout the country or in the Orthodox community living abroad, the speeches on the occasion of religious and national celebrations, international meetings, anniversary events in his own life, as well as the messages and interviews released on various occasions.

There are, of course, the simple parentheses delivered occasionally during some liturgies where the sermon of the day would be delivered by another priest. In his interventions he would always highlight certain significant matters, but he would also offer the necessary guidance, with the authority conferred by his patriarchal position. We can observe that the parenetic genre was used much more often by the Father Patriarch than the other sermon genres used in our homiletic tradition. This evident priority can be explained by the nature of the patriarchal dignity, since the occasions on which speeches are delivered are extremely frequent for the head of a Church (Gordon 2005: 399-400).

The volume entitled *Conștiința vie a slujirii preoțești* (*The living consciousness of priesthood*) comprises 55 sermons and speeches, and the number is not arbitrary, being, in fact, an anniversary collection honoring the 55 years of patriarchal tenure of the honorable patriarch, an event that was celebrated in 2005, the year when this volume was published. Placed in chronological order as they were delivered, the speeches collected in this book cover the period 1950-2005. Most of them were occasional thematic speeches, delivered particularly at certain events in the Church's

life (generally speeches delivered at the pastoral courses for the training of priests or at the opening and closing of the meetings of certain administrative deliberative bodies of the Church, usually at the meetings of the Diocese Assembly), these allocutions capture the atmosphere created during various Church activities. Seven speeches were delivered on the occasion of the pastoral-missionary courses of the clergy, two speeches on the occasion of the ordination of priests, nineteen are addressed to priests at the meetings held on Easter and New Year Eve or on other occasions, while eighteen of the speeches included in this volume are transcriptions of official Addresses at the opening and closing of the meetings of the Diocese Assembly. Three parentheses were delivered during meetings with military priests, other three were extracted from the reports presented at the opening of some priestly conferences, while two of the sermons had been published in Church Almanacs dating from 1996-1997. The volume also comprises the speech delivered on the occasion of the inauguration of the new building hosting the Seminary “Nifon Mitropolitul” of Bucharest, an event which occurred on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004.

**Themes.** In the speeches presented above, the Father Patriarch addressed a wide range of themes for reflection, both practical and spiritual in nature. Among the many subjects debated in the sermons of this volume, we mention *resurrection and the true life, peace, holiness* etc. Some speeches deal with certain coordinates of the *ecumenical and inter-Orthodox dialogue*, or speak about *the organization and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the relations between the Church and the Army, about priesthood, the nature and role of the Church, theological education, the role of religion as a subject of study in Romanian school, love and forgiveness*. Most parentheses approach pastoral themes on the role and mission that a priest has in this world, either directly or at times by digression.

**Sources employed.** Throughout the entire discourses found in the volume under discussion, the entire homiletic material contains referrals to the Holy Scripture, thus stressing the importance the Holy Scripture had in the Church’s life as well as the spiritual attachment of the fifth patriarch of Romania to the wisdom words of the Scripture, used abundantly. In addition to verses from the Bible used in these parentheses,

the author resorts to a series of arguments put forward by his predecessors as well as to the treasure of the patristic writings, in order to strengthen his assertions or support the ideas to be expressed. Thus, by speaking on the occasion of the opening of the pastoral course on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1953, he reiterates some of the thoughts expressed by the patriarch of those times (the worthy Justinian Marina):

we turn our thoughts back, four years ago, when, in circumstances of great enthusiasm... the first opening of the priest courses was taking place and the Blessed Patriarch, voicing the shared joy of the ancestral Church, stated: ...today God fulfills one of the old and ardent wishes of our Holy Church... giving back its right to prepare on its own the men who will serve its altars... (Arăpașu 2005: 30).

In the same address, speaking on the topic of the dignity of priesthood, a statement of Saint John Chrysostom is evoked: “What kind of man, wondered Saint John Chrysostom, is he who is the ambassador of God for the entire nation...?” (Arăpașu 2005: 32).

In another parenthesis, speaking on the subject of Resurrection, he resorts to certain explanations given by Patriarch Justinian, as well as other hierarchs:

the feast of God’s Resurrection is the celebration of life over death, as our Blessed Patriarch Justinian said: God’s Resurrection is the guarantee of our revival from the death, which we were condemned to because of our ancestral sin..., tells us the Holy Metropolitan Bishop Sebastian of Moldavia, ...Resurrection is one and the same with life and light, as the Blessed Firmilian of Oltenia explains (Arăpașu 2005: 35-42).

Elsewhere, when speaking about the Resurrection, he explains certain liturgical chants and gestures from the pascal period:

by uttering the calling *Veniți să luați lumină...* (Come and receive the light) the priest, as bearer of the torch, conveys to the Christians, the light of his own soul together with noble exhortations generated by the sacred words of the Resurrected Jesus (Arăpașu 2005: 54-58).

Here and there, in the homiletic discourse, he also uses arguments extracted from the Romanian poets and from the sources of Romanian history. For instance, in the opening address for the meeting of the Diocese Assembly held on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1983, he points out that:

the efforts made over centuries and the supreme price paid for the fulfillment of this dream, for which our fathers and forefathers died, the reunification of the Romanian people..., are the source of our strength... among the fighters for national unity there are also the sons of these lands, among whom we can also find the servants of the ancestral altar in Moldavia, a gateway for Christianity, as it was called from ancient times (Arăpașu 2005: 94).

In the same discourse, speaking about peace, he brings as arguments the ideas of some Church Fathers:

Saint Ephraim the Syrian enumerates among the evils that cause wars, disturbing peace, the concern for worldly things – namely greed and thirst for power, while Saint Isaac the Syrian asserts that peace, like the life of Christ, is not a chimera but a living and lived reality... there is a holy and righteous war, says Isidore of Pelusium, and a peace worse than any grim fight... (Arăpașu 2005: 96).

At the end of the sermon, he concludes by evoking the words of the Metropolitan Bishop Pimen of Moldavia and Suceava, uttered in 1918: “it is very difficult to speak about peace when the soul is not at peace...” (Arăpașu 2005: 101).

**The structure of the sermons** varies according to the theme or diversity of themes developed. In terms of length, some addresses are brief. For example, the parentheses: *În prima zi de Paști (On the first day of Easter)*, *Răspunzând chemării lui Hristos (Answering the call of Christ)*, *Călăuziți de Hristos (Guided by Christ)*, *O pagină nouă – clerul militar (A new page – the military clergy)*, *Din vistieria sufletului (From the treasury of the soul)*, *Supuneți totul încercării, păstrați ce e bine (Subject all to trial, preserve the good)*, *Primește acest odor (Receive this gift)*, *Biserica Dumnezeului celui viu (The Church of our Living God)*. Others more elaborate. The Parentheses: *Unitate de gând și de faptă (Unity of thought and action)*, *Bucurie dăruită ucenicilor (Joy offered to the disciples)*, *Înnoire și sfințenie (Renewal and holiness)*, *Voi care de mult trebuia să fiți învățători (You who long should have become teachers)*, *Toți avem aceeași sfântă chemare (We all share the same calling)*, *Religia în Școală (Religion in school) (I)*, *Religia în Școală (Religion in school) (II)*. Some are introduced by a *motto* extracted from the Holy Scripture (in most of the pastoral letters), but there are still some that include quotes from other sources. For example, the speech *Împlinirea misiunii de propovăduitori ai Sfintei Evanghelii (Fulfilling the mission of preachers of the Gospel)* has as *motto* a fragment from *Epistola către*

*Diognet (Letter to Diognet)*, while the one entitled *Pe același drum cu credincioșii (Traveling side by side with the faithful)* includes the assertions of Patriarch Justinian with regard to the life of the priest. In the speech on the occasion of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Union of the Romanian Principalities, the *motto* is a phrase believed to have been uttered by Michael the Brave: “I have set to take this great burden from this country of ours so that I may create a shield for the entire Christian world” (Arăpașu 2005: 70).

The parentheses that form this volume do not include address phrases characteristic to the homiletic discourse. *The Beginning* is sometimes abrupt, other times more complex. For example, in the speech *Traveling side by side with the faithful* the introduction is elaborate:

Only little time has passed since the festivity of God’s Resurrection yet our souls still feel the sacred awe and the precious spiritual gifts that the celebration of our Savior’s victory over death brought to all those who believe, all those who seek to quench their thirst at this never ending and life-giving spring (Arăpașu 2005: 35).

Other times, the beginning is straightforward: “On the feast of the Resurrection, we relive, year after year, moments of great and sacred joy” (Arăpașu 2005: 54). In the paranesis that lends the title to the volume, the introduction is more extended:

This year too, as before, the message of the Savior’s Resurrection has gathered us once again so that we may share with each other the love and joy that rule our souls on these luminous days of Easter (Arăpașu 2005: 147).

A similar procedure is followed in the speech on the occasion of the opening of the meeting of the Diocese Assembly of the Archbishopric of Bucharest on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1991:

It is with God’s great mercy that we find ourselves here, at the start of the year, when the rituals of our church have summoned us to reflect together on the good working of this God-protected diocese. Church life has its eternal coordinates, established by Our Savior Jesus Christ Himself and later by the Holy Apostles and by the Holy Fathers until this very day (Arăpașu 2005: 152).

When examining the purpose and role of the relations between the Church and the Army, at the beginning of the speech on this subject he briefly states the following:

We have before us, behold, the representatives of the two fundamental institutions of the Romanian nation: the Church and the Army. Without faith in

God and without this ancestral establishment of the army, the world's nations would not have been able to exist within their own borders (Arăpașu 2005: 179).

Going deeper into the actual *body* of the speeches, we can note the accuracy and coherence of the message being conveyed, the largest part of the parenetic corpus being richly depicted. For example, in the speech *Administrators of Grace*, delivered on the occasion of the ordination of a priest in the Arad Cathedral in the year 1972, the beginning is straightforward, anticipating the theme being discussed – the importance of the priest's grace: "The worthiness that the ordination confers to the one summoned and destined to receive the godly grace is a sign of being chosen by the celestial One" (Arăpașu 2005: 49). In the context of the fierce communist terror, the hierarch pointed out that the priest's dignity is conferred by the mystery of the ordination.

It does not assign to the priest other responsibilities and other competences than those referring to the redemption of the flock assigned to him at the time of the sacrament (Răducă 2006: 37). Speaking about ordination as *choice*, the worthy patriarch organizes his homiletic material by resorting to quotes from the Scripture on this kind of special sacramental choice. Abundantly illustrated with verses intended to strengthen the discourse (over 17 references to the Scripture, generally from pastoral letters), this speech also benefits from patristic arguments, harmoniously related to the theme being discussed. Thus, after the presentation of some verses meant to attest the sacramental role of the ordination, he goes on to list the characteristics that the sermons to be uttered by the newly ordained priest before the Christians will have, serving to show the future parishioners "facts and realities that have to do with the truths of faith" (Arăpașu 2005: 52-53). He highlights the role of sermon in the life of the Church by quoting the words of the greatest Christian preacher, Saint John Chrysostom: "The word is an instrument, the word is food, the word is the best means to moderate atmosphere, it is medicine, fire, sword..." (Arăpașu 2005: 52). In order to illustrate the force of the personal example of the priest's life, he highlights a fragment from the writings of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: "you must be light yourself in order to be able to illuminate others, you must be pure yourself in order to be able to purify others", ending this pastoral speech with the

exhortation: “This word I place in your soul, beloved brother newly anointed!” (Arăpașu 2005: 53).

In the course of discussing the themes, certain personal directions are formulated in connection with the discussed subjects. For example, in the speech entitled *Chemările Învierii (Callings of the Resurrection)*, when speaking about the gospel’s call to unity (John 17, 11), he asserts the following:

This message shall come through on the occasion of the Resurrection in the entire Christian world, when we, the servants and believers of different Churches and Religions, do hereby testify as one the truth of faith of the Resurrection, namely that Christ Has Risen from the dead, on the same Sunday (Arăpașu 2005: 55).

On another occasion he explains the importance of paschal chants as follows:

The beautiful chants, the words filled with spiritual inspiration used from old times by the Christians to greet each other when gathering around the sacred altars, on the occasion of these changes, are a testimony of the fact that Resurrection and Church are indeed a reality in our spiritual life (Arăpașu 2005: 62).

When participating in historical moments of great importance in the social life (anniversary of the Union of the Principalities in 1979), he asserts the following:

When we commemorate 120 years from the Union of the Romanian Principalities, before our soul’s eyes we see the figures of those who made this historical and sacred act possible: citizens, villagers and officials led by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the Metropolitan Bishop Calinic Miclescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, the archimandrite and theology professor from Huși, Melchisedec Ștefănescu, the Scriban brothers... (Arăpașu 2005: 71).

With relation to the martyrs of Orthodoxy who were present in the life of the Church up to now, it is asserted that:

The Orthodox Church in general, like our ancestral Church, had a large number of martyrs during the communist period. Their names and numbers is known only by God. The succession of priests, theology professors, valuable scholars of our national culture who filled the communist prison is high... (Arăpașu 2005: 157).

*The ending* of the speeches has different connotations depending on the theme of the paranesis. Thus, on the occasion of summoning one of



the meetings of the Diocese Assembly, being aware of the responsibility the Church had towards the Society, the author shows:

today's secularized world calls for Christian moral value, which needs to be installed in the life of man, in the life of the society and for that we have the duty to meet these demands to a greater extent, especially when they come from the intellectuals that expect the Church to offer from its treasury its spiritual and traditional values, forever alive... (Arăpașu 2005: 185).

Other speeches conclude with a series of practical exhortations:

let us work the land of the Holy Church with courage and responsibility, with the kind work, with the living example, and with our deeds, for the sake of the spiritual growth of our flock and all our fellow people (Arăpașu 2005: 216).

Some parentheses end with the wishing:

I wish you all, my beloved brothers and sisters, strength and growth in the love that never falls, from which space and time were born and which wipes away any difference between us (Arăpașu 2005: 263).

At other times, feelings of joy and urges for prayer are expressed:

Your presence fills my heart with joy and I pray God to illuminate all our minds and help us in these moments that we spend together and in this Mass, in our participation in the life of these diocese... (Arăpașu 2005: 301).

**Originality.** Given that the 55 parentheses were collected in a volume dedicated to the 55 years of the Patriarch Teoctist's tenure in office, it can be strongly asserted that this is an original trait of the speeches. On the other hand, what surprises the reader from the very first reading is the accessibility of the messages conveyed on this occasion, the adjustment of the information without downplaying their importance. In short, both a reader with an extensive theological culture and the reader who lacks education in the field are able to comprehend the thoughts and concerns of the 90-year old patriarch, now having his eternal rest.

The phrases abundant in metaphors, the artistry of the combination of words in an authentic, pure Romanian language, strewn with the rich theological phrases, render the speeches of Patriarch Teoctist true and unequalled sources of theological culture. The style of these discourses is unique, bearing amazing beauty of language, where old terms, truly Romanian, appear at every step, like pearls, where the figures of speech – comparisons, epithets – and diminutives are present everywhere. It is a

successful expression in the Romanian literary language, having the archaic scent of the church language found in the Holy Liturgies, imbued with the language of the old homilies and chronicles, as clear as the waters of the mountain springs, from which neologisms are not missing but rather, they are used appropriately, moderately and with great subtlety (Necula 2006: 29).

#### **4. Conclusions**

Searching though the order of the Holy Sacraments is in fact a good opportunity to see once more the inseparable relation between the content of faith and the content of prayer, *lex credendi* and *lex orandi*. The Church Faith and its prayer are so deeply intertwined that each and every one of them could be without confusion identified and assimilated to the other. In none of the other Christian liturgical tradition one can find such a profound overlapping and intertwining of the content of faith with the content of prayers, not only in the cases of the main prayers but also for simplest and secondary prayers, not only in the in the Eucharistic Liturgy and the Holy Sacraments, but also in all the other occasional services, not only in the solemn rituals but also in the simplest and even personal liturgical gestures (ex. one crossing himself with the sign of the Cross in accordance to his/her own tradition, be it catholic or orthodox), not only in the Hymnography of the most important feast throughout the liturgical year dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, Virgin Mary or the Saints, but also in the other less important feasts and the simple Troparia as part of the Liturgy of the Hours for instance or any other liturgical orders.

Eucharistic Liturgy and Holy Sacraments orders lay out that thought their agency the Church preached and preserved intact the mystery of faith. The Eucharistic Liturgy forms and the canon laws issued throughout the Church history meant to preserve intact the church faith and prayer order, were not simply forms of ritualistic conservative attitude specific to a certain period in the Church history, but especially thoughtful and careful preservation of the Right Faith expressed fully though the very agency of these orders. During the catechumens institution period, the Baptism candidates were revealed the mysteries of the faith teaching before they would be ministered the Holy Sacraments; but once they have received the Sacraments, were given the opportunity to enter deeper

though their own experience into the same mysteries of the Faith the Sacraments themselves contain and reveal. We understand therefore, that the Holy Sacraments are veritable Church Faith thesaurus that we are to approach in faith and reverence, and meant to strengthen our personal faith.

We conclude also, based on what has been presented here so far, that due to the inseparable relation between the doctrine and its teaching and the prayer of the Church, the Holy Sacraments are presented as Confessions of Faith themselves, open to those participating in and receiving them, where to the same being granted both the sanctifying grace and the holy teaching of faith.

**Notes:**

[1] Born on February 7th, 1915 at Tocileni, Botoșani country. A novice in the Vorona (1928) and Neamț Monasteries (1931), a student at the Monastic Seminary of Cernica Monastery (1932-1940), tonsured in Bistrița (Neamț county), under the name Teoctist (1935) and ordained hiero-deacon (January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937). In 1940 he became a student of the Faculty of Theology of Bucharest, obtaining his bachelor's degree in 1945. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 he was transferred to the Diocese Center of Iasi and ordained a hieromonk (March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945) and ordained archimandrite in 1946. He studied at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy of Iasi (1945-1947), served as a priest (1945), and later as high ecclesiarch at the metropolitan cathedral of Iasi and exarch of the monasteries in the Iasi Archbishopric (1946-1948), then became vicar of the same Archbishopric (1948-1950). In March 1950 he was elected and ordained Patriarchal Bishop-vicar, given the title "Botoșăneanul". In this capacity, he acted as secretary to the Holy Synod, president of the Academic Theological Institution of Bucharest (1950-1954) and leader of various sectors within the Patriarchal Administration. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1962 he was elected and on September 16<sup>th</sup>, appointed Bishop in Arad, shepherding there for 10 years. On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1973 he was elected Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan Bishop of Oltenia. On September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1977 he was appointed Archbishop of Iași and Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia and Suceava (as of July 1980 until January 1982 being substitute for the metropolitan bishop of Ardeal). On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1986 he was elected Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan Bishop of Ungrovlachia and Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which he shepherded until his death (on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007). In addition to the volumes that comprise his pastoral letters and sermons, we mention the following works: *The Metropolitan Bishop Jacob Putneanul, a torch-carrier of Romanian Orthodoxy, of the aspirations towards national unity and assertion of Romanian culture*, Monastery of Neamț, 1978, 45 p. (and an extended issue under

the title *Metropolitan Bishop Jacob Putneanul, 1719-1778. In the service of Romanian Orthodoxy, of the aspirations for national unity and assertion of Romanian culture*, Neamț, 1978, 128 p.); *Metropolitan Bishop Dosoftei, founder of the Romanian language*, a study that was included in the work entitled *Dumnezeiasca Liturghie (The Divine Liturgy)*, Iași, 1980, p. V-XLIV (a work edited at his initiative), *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare în evlavia credincioșilor ortodocși români (Saint Basil the Great, venerated by Romanian Orthodox Christians)*, in *Romanian Orthodoxy*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1992, pp. 7-19. He published the anniversary issue in 1988 of the *Biblia de la București (Bucharest Bible)* (1688) and supervised the publishing of the *Bible*, an anniversary issue of the Holy Synod (2002), compiled and annotated by the Metropolitan Bishop Bartolomeu Anania. He wrote the preface of several books and monographs of certain monasteries and churches in the Romanian Patriarchy.

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