

The Involvement of Patriarch Miron Cristea in the Public Life of Romania

(1918-1939)

Abstract

The thesis entitled “The Involvement of Patriarch Miron Cristea in the Public Life of Romania (1918-1939)” aims to adopt as its main theme of research the answer to the following question: “To what extent did the involvement of the first Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Miron Cristea, in the social, cultural, as well as political life of interwar Romania, contribute to the consolidation of the Romanian society and to its continuity on the path established after the Great Unification?” What is not subjected to our research is the contribution of the Holy Synod to the development and structuring of the Romanian nation, due to the limited access to its archives. From a chronological viewpoint, as shown in the title, the thesis analyses the activity of the Metropolitan Bishop in the period comprised between 1918 and 1939, during which he becomes Prime Metropolitan Bishop, Patriarch, Regent and Prime-minister, in this order.

The current importance of this topic is upheld by the reintroduction in the public space of the debates pertaining to the role played by the Romanian Orthodox Church and its representatives in the process of national and European construction, amid which the identity of Romanians is sought and affirmed on the continent, in the interwar period.

The main objective of the thesis is to analyse the texts and political speeches of the Patriarch, along with the research of other themes germane to the ideological concepts and

chronology of events, as well as the political, economic and social context, where it becomes necessary to shed light on the manner in which the contribution of various public personalities plays a role in the chain of events. Another significant aspect within the thesis refers to the legal framework in the period subjected to our analysis, through which the principal aims are emphasised, along with the elements that led to the evolution and development of the Romanian interwar society. Part of the thesis is dedicated to describing the mechanisms that shaped social representations, but also to exhibiting the main stereotypes, which stem from the most prominent literary and historical references at the time.

By resorting to a brief description of the contents of the thesis, it becomes apparent that it relies on three parts, namely *The political and economic evolution of interwar Romania*, *Miron Cristea, Patriarch and politician* and *Miron Cristea - President of the Council of Ministers*; the first part is composed of five chapters, the second includes two, while the third contains three.

Part one deals with the political and economic context in interwar Romania, in chronological order, starting with a chapter dedicated to the period between 1920 and 1927, i.e. the time of Romania's unification, in which we have included aspects pertaining not only to the general context, but also to the Agricultural Reform of 1924 and the Constitution of 1923. Furthermore, within the second chapter, focusing on the period 1927-1930, the emphasis is placed on the political framework and the analysis deals with the governing programmes of the main political parties in the interwar period, namely the National Liberal Party and the Peasants' Party, as well as various aspects regarding the Concordat with the Vatican. The third chapter analyses the transition period from democracy to dictatorship, comprised between 1930 and 1938, containing the following three sub-chapters: *Restoration or Coup d'État?* *Political evolution* and *Economic evolution*. 1938 is the year of the beginning of dictatorship in Romania,

and this historical moment is studied in the following chapter, next to a series of aspects referring to the transformations occurring in the political and economic life of the country. The first part concludes with a presentation of the evolution of the Romanian society in the aforementioned period of time. Hence, starting from the *Theorization of the Romanian society in the interwar period*, we present various characteristics of nationalism, anti-Semitism and communism, followed by several *Concrete aspects of the interwar society*.

The second part is aimed at studying the personality of Miron Cristea, as Patriarch and politician, beginning with a chapter in which we present him as a Transylvanian personality of the beginning of the century, whilst assessing aspects such as the context shaped around nationalism and orthodoxy in Transylvania, the personality of Andrei Şaguna as a role model for the Patriarch and the contribution of the latter to the social-political life, chiefly amid the Great Unification of 1918. Moreover, the thesis includes a chapter dealing with the characterisation of Miron Cristea's personality as Patriarch as well as a politician, through an analysis of the link between state and religion at the time, and of his mandates as senator for life and position of regent. The second part also proposes a chapter focusing on presenting the social-political thinking of the Patriarch.

The last part of the thesis focuses on the presentation of Miron Cristea as President of the Council of Ministers. This section comprises three chapters and begins with a mention of the premises defining the Patriarch's appointment as President of this institution, only to continue with an ample chapter dedicated to Miron Cristea's government. Within this chapter, we have presented the three intervals in which the Patriarch was the head of Government, beginning with the King's Actions and continuing with the governmental reconfiguration and, eventually, the

period 1st February - 6th May 1939, namely the third mandate. Part three concludes with a general presentation of the economic policies designed by these governments.

Given the complexity and nature of the theme, the most appropriate research method is that of studying authentic documents, found in the Central Historical Archives, the Archives of Historical Studies and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, albeit other documents remain unavailable for the time being, due to their physical degradation, in the Archives of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. This method, aimed at researching original documents, is associated with the biographical one.

The content analysis enables us to approach a large variety of documents, such as the various public debates within Parliament and the press, legislative acts, several appearances in mass media, scientific and popularisation literature, all of which render possible both the qualitative and the quantitative analysis, as well as the emphasis on the use of specific concepts and ideas.

The analysis of documents is furthered by the case study method, aimed at the scrutiny of the Patriarch's personality, which naturally exploits the advantage of resorting to content analysis, with regard to each item pertaining to the documents and biographies consulted, whilst connecting them so as to better match specific situational variables than other, more general methods.

History placed Miron Cristea in the position of playing a prominent role in the political evolution of Romanians at the beginning of the 20th century, firstly as Bishop of Caransebeş, where he fought for maintaining the identity of Romanians, notably through the persistence of confessional schools, and then, from the same position, in Alba Iulia, where he courageously and

enthusiastically overcame the hesitations of Transylvanian politicians. In the same context, after reading the Unification Declaration, he was chosen by the political class of the Old Kingdom as the Prime Metropolitan Bishop of Greater Romania. This new status also made him a senator for life, which he will take advantage of in order to express before his fellow senators ideas of exceptional value for the entire Romanian society. He thus attempted to alter the situation not only indirectly, by means of the Church he led, which, through its priests, was engaged in a century-old struggle to renew man and society in the spirit of the Gospel, but also directly, beside the political class, by supporting Romania on the way to modernisation.

In this context, one may speak of the first Patriarch of Romania as a politician, a man of the *polis*, of the *earthly citadel*, which he desired to change according to the image of the *heavenly citadel*. If the apostles and their disciples, much like the first Christians, tried to recreate the Kingdom of God, through word and sacrifice, starting on the bottom, i.e. from simple people, along with Constantine the Great, the role of the Church and its representatives changed from fighting against the leaders to collaborating with them, as they shared the same goal - to pacify society. Therefore, a change occurred, from word to action, a worthy example being that of Saint Basil the Great, who created the first social institutions - the hospital and the school, before state-based ones.

Deciphering the language and ideas expressed by the first Patriarch of Romania is a necessity, meant to shed light on his valuable thinking and to rediscover a man who wrote part of the history of the Romanian people, both before the Great Unification, and afterwards, until his passing, on the 6th of March 1939.

By analysing such elements, pursued during a period of time lasting almost half a century, our conclusions emphasise the prominence of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its notable representative - Patriarch Miron Cristea - from the standpoint of the role he assumed in society, i.e. that of politician.