

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
95 (2), pp. 112-133, 2023

The Exigencies of Doctrinal Preaching in the Thinking of Father Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961). Notes to the Volume of Sermons *Duhul adevărului*

Filip ALBU

Filip ALBU

“Hilarion V. Felea” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Arad, Romania

Email: filipalbu@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

In this study, I highlighted the homiletic dimension of the theologian Ilarion V. Felea’s work. I also highlighted the steps taken by Ilarion Felea until he argued and expressed a dogmatic sermon of the Church in connection with Scripture and Church Liturgy. I have shown how Ilarion Felea delimited himself from the moralizing sermon and he used the book of sermons called *Cazania*. Father Felea’s concern for renewing the content of the sermon was also argued from the perspective of the challenging context for the faith and life of the Orthodox Church in the interwar period: the expansion of atheistic and secularizing concepts that led to ignorance and indifference to the essence of faith and the practice of Christian life and the virulent actions of neo-Protestant groups that sought to proselytize new followers from Orthodox communities. Undoubtedly the path of father Felea from *Cazania* to the book of sermons *Duhul Adevărului* represents an important page in the history of homiletics in Romania.

Keywords

doctrinal sermon, priest Ilarion V. Felea, “*Duhul Adevărului*”

I. Father Ilarion Felea's work - a homiletic constancy

A lot has been written about father Ilarion Felea lately. Many aspects of his confessional life and his work are known. The Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Arad bears his name and created a series of scientific and editorial events in which the personality and theological work of Father Felea were analyzed and placed in the meritorious place of honor¹. The

¹ Ioan TULCAN, *Contribuția lui Ilarion V. Felea la dezvoltarea Teologiei Dogmatice Ortodoxe*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2010; Cristinel IOJA, “Preotul Ilarion V. Felea. Pastorație și misiune în Parohia Arad Șega”, in: *Studia Theologica et Historica Aradensia*, III (2021) 3, pp. 104-139; Cristinel IOJA, “Ilarion V. Felea – preotul, teologul, mărturisitorul – după Jurnalul autobiografic”, in: *Teologia*, XII (2008) 1, pp. 15-61; Cristinel IOJA, “Ilarion V. Felea – preotul, teologul, martirul – după Opera vieții mele”, studiu introductiv la Pr. Prof. Dr. Ilarion V. Felea, *Opera vieții mele- ziar personal*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, pp. 5-42; Cristinel IOJA, “Religie și cultură în gândirea teologică a Părintelui Profesor Ilarion V. Felea. O remarcabilă contribuție a teologiei arădene la edificarea unei culturi teonome”, in: vol. *Istorie și spiritualitate ortodoxă în Episcopia Aradului 1706-2006*, Arad, 2006, pp. 207-235; Cristinel IOJA, “Preotul profesor Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961) - viziunea unitară asupra teologiei și metoda apologetică în exprimarea unei culturi teonome”, in: vol. *Catedrala Ortodoxă Veche a Aradului - Tradiție și actualitate 1865-2015, 150 de ani de istorie, spiritualitate și cultură ecleziastică*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, Arad, 2015, pp. 64-103; Cristinel IOJA, “Preotul Profesor Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961) – relevanța creștinismului în cultura modernă”, in: *Studia Theologica et Historica Aradensia*, II (2020) 2, pp. 147 -160; Cristinel IOJA, “Preotul Profesor Ilarion Felea în slujirea Bisericii și a ideilor naționale”, in: Pr. prof. Dr. Nicolae CHIFĂR, Pr. Prof. Dr. Aurel PAVEL (eds.), *Teologi ardeleni și Marea Unire*, Editura Andreiană, Sibiu, 2019, pp. 86-96; Filip ALBU, “A trăi, a propovădui și a mărturisi în Duhul Adevărului: preotul martir Ilarion V. Felea”, in: vol. *Predicatori și cateheți români, mărturisitori în timpul regimului comunist. Receptarea misiunii lor în actualitate*, Editura Universitaria Craiova and Editura Pro Universitaria București, 2017, pp. 184-190; Lucian FARCAȘIU, “Holy Sacrament of Penance in the Thought of Rev. Prof. Dr. Ilarion Felea. Theological and Liturgical Approach”, in: vol. *Teologie și educație la Dunărea de Jos, Fascicula XIII*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2014, pp. 304-317; Lucian FARCAȘIU, “Pastoral Missionary Directions Reflected in the Thinking of Father Professor Ilarion V. Felea”, in: vol. *Postmodernism – a Challenge to Contemporary Christianity*, Editura Felicitas Publishing House, Stockholm & Editura Devei și Hunedoarei, Deva, 2015, pp. 199-218; Lucian FARCAȘIU, “Părintele Ilarion V. Felea – chip al slujirii preoțești și viziunea sa asupra misiunii în parohie”, in: vol. *Misiune și propovăduire*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj & Editura

most recent and complete monograph on the thought and work of Father Felea belongs to the priest Cristinel Ioja, in which we also encounter a series of aspects regarding the homiletic thought of the last Rector of the Theological Academy in Arad². However, there are not many in-depth studies on Father Felea's homiletic thinking, let alone his contribution to the development of preaching in Romanian Theology. Father Felea's name is very much associated with the status of a dogmatist and apologist. A fair association because he honored these directions in Romanian Theology through books and specialized studies. But let's not forget that we can just as strongly argue the integration of father Ilarion Felea among the homilists and catechists. He not only supports the Homiletics course for a while in the series of disciplines taught at the Theological Academy in Arad - Dogmatics, Mysticism, Apologetics - but also makes notable contributions in terms of the Church's sermon. Among these contributions, we mention: a) he makes the transition from the moralizing sermon to the dogmatic sermon in Romanian Theology through the work *Duhul Adevărului*; b) he provides significant elements of apologetic preaching in *Religia iubirii*; c) he offers a unique vision and contribution in Romanian Homiletics through the synthesis of Dogmatics, Moral, Liturgical, Philokalical, Hagiological, and religious psychology in the work *Spre Tabor*, which is nothing but a book of sermons/meditations in four volumes, sermons delivered from the pulpit of the historic Cathedral of Arad; d) he offers the image of the preacher engaged in the life and experience of the Church, by no means detached from them, by the fact that the sermons from *Spre Tabor* they were spoken in the church, in the liturgical synaxis. In a word, he gives a concrete picture of the preacher-ecclesial experience-sermon unity.

Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2015, pp. 124-130; Lucian FARCAȘIU, "Preotul Ilarion V. Felea - teologul liturghisitor și martir, după jurnalul său autobiografic", in: *Studia Theologica et Historica Aradensia*, II (2020) 2, pp. 128-146.

² Cristinel IOJA, *Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961). Preotul, Teologul, Mărturisitorul*, Editura Universității "Aurel Vlaicu", Arad, 2022. Of course, we can mention other studies about the father's Ilarion Felea biography: Adrian Nicolae PETCU, "Felea V. Ilarion", in: *Dicționarul clericilor și mirenilor ortodocși români mărturisitori în detenția comunistă*, Editura Basilica, București, 2017, pp. 115-117; Adrian Nicolae PETCU, "Felea V. Ilarion", in: vol. *Clerici și teologi din Eparhia Aradului în închisorile comuniste (1945-1964)*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, 2017, pp. 85-90.

II. A major contribution in the Romanian Homiletics: “doctrinal sermon”

In this study I will approach the first homiletic contribution of father Ilarion Felea: the transition from the moralizing sermon to the doctrinal one. This shift in emphasis represents a level break in the Romanian homiletics, which in many cases is tributary to either the reading of *Cazania* or to the moralistic current assumed in Romanian Theology through the Western way too. Of course, the reasons and influences in Father Felea’s thinking regarding this important “turn” in the history of preaching to the Romanians can be explored. Reflecting on this issue, I believe there were several reasons: 1) the challenges of modernity regarding the essence of Christianity, doctrine and spirituality, and the experience of the Church. These challenges represented concrete acts in the Romanian interwar period, with direct influences on urban and rural Orthodox Christian communities; b) the challenges of the neo-Protestant cults, which appeared in Romania in a growing diversity between the two world conflagrations. These cults acted with even more concrete pressure regarding the essence of the doctrine and life of the Orthodox Church. They targeted especially the Orthodox communities; c) the growing phenomenon of the world secularization, of the population’s ignorance regarding the knowledge of their own faith and Christian identity; d) the ignorance of some servants of the Church, therefore also of the pulpit, who limited themselves either to reading *Cazania* – an exceptional book, but in many aspects already outdated - either with the superficial delivery of some sermons without a doctrinal core, without the force of conviction and expression of the truth of the Church revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ.

I think these were the reasons why father Felea proposes a cycle of sermons in the volume *Duhul adevărului* intended to support the homiletic work of the Church and the preparation of the clergy to deliver sermons well documented and anchored in the data of Revelation. Of course, in contrast to the lack of enthusiasm and even training of some priests,

either from the villages or even from the urban environment, Father Felea places the enthusiasm of the Baptist, Pentecostal, and Adventist preachers, who, although they were twisting the Bible, expressed their twists with conviction.

But up to *Duhul Adevărului* (1942), we encounter several stages in the homiletic thought of the father Ilarion V. Felea.

III. Stages of homiletic thinking up to the doctrinal sermon

Of course, there were several stages in Father Hilarion Felea's homiletic thought before the dogmatic sermon, just as there will be other stages after the dogmatic sermon expressed in *Duhul Adevărului* (1942)³. It is important to state that all these homiletic stages are not primarily the fruit of any cabinet study, but are the living expression of the contact with the Church's Liturgy and Spirituality, with the spiritual and pastoral challenges and needs of the interwar period. Father Felea's sermon or the study of homiletics is not primarily in an artificial and external correspondence with some academic horizon, but with the pastoral and missionary pulse of the Church, with the experience of the pulpit and with the expectations of the liturgical synaxis with which he worked together for years in a row in the churches of Western Romania.

3.1. Homily and Scripture

From the beginning, Father Felea placed the Scriptures and the data of Revelation at the foundation of the sermon. From the beginning, the texts reveal a priest fully engaged in the reading, reflection, and assumption of Scripture in church and daily life.

“For any priest, the sermon is a difficult and easy thing. Difficult when we want to be somewhat original and easy when we follow the Bible. For it more easily refreshes and enriches our

³ See about these stages Cristinel IOJA, *Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961). Preotul, Teologul, Mărturisitorul*, pp. 214-219.

endowment of knowledge necessary for preaching. A priest who reads the Bible daily will never be tormented by the thought that he will have nothing to preach to his listeners. Open the Bible and find out. Take a pericope of a few verses or even a chapter, meditate on it and the essence of the sermon is ready. In this way, the priest gets rid of the burden of learning the topics of the sermon and the decrease of repeating. From here come other gains: the sermon will have a documented character, the text read in front of the listeners impresses more deeply and awakens in believers the desire to be tempted and read the Scriptures”⁴.

For this reason, he reacts to some preachers’ lack of interest in the text of Scripture, in fact, a phenomenon of secularization the content of the sermons directly proportional to their lack of force to move souls. Ignoring the texts of Scripture in the expression of the sermon by the preacher is described thus:

“From a superficial knowledge of the Bible, our preachers greatly neglected the use of holy texts, in favor of rhetorical phrases. The *Cazania* spirit in the sermons was abandoned and replaced by human craft in speech. That is why we listen to speeches and church sermons, in which from beginning to end not a single verse from the field of revelation is used, but everything goes only on the routine of personal inspiration. Man speaks, with his authority and personality, but little, if any, from Scripture (...) For this reason, so many of our sermons are tasteless, lacking the salt and seed of God’s word”⁵.

This fundamental principle that Father Felea assumes from the beginning of his homiletic vision, namely, the preacher’s commitment to

⁴ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, “Sfânta Scriptură în mâna preotului”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XXVII (1937) 3, pp. 148-149.

⁵ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, “Recenzie” to Al. LASCAROV-MOLDOVANU, *Concordanță a Noului Testament. Îndreptar alfabetic pentru o grabnică cercetare în Noul Testament*, București. Tipografia Cărților Bisericești. 1932, 138 pp., in: *Revista Teologică*, XXII (1932) 10-11, pp. 391-392.

the biblical text, will remain in the same central position in the elaboration of the work *Duhul Adevărului*. The dogmatic sermon in the meaning of the work *Duhul Adevărului* is the sermon based on the text of Scripture, not on the personal impressions of the preacher or those from sources foreign to Christianity and the life of the Church in general.

3.2. Homily and Liturgy

If Ilarion Felea bases the sermon on the Scriptures, this exercise does not remain singular but is permanently doubled by a unitary perception of Liturgy-homily. We also encounter this method in the life and thinking of the Church Fathers. They comment on Scripture in their homilies and express it most of the time in the liturgical community, linking it to the liturgical experience. We meet this perspective very early on in Father Felea's writing, which links the sermon to the Liturgy.

“Between the Liturgy and the sermon, there must be a close and uninterrupted relationship, which coordinates the mystical part of the divine worship with the didactic one. One condition, calls and complements the other. We have the most obvious proof in the fact that, after the war and in recent times, those churches begin to be more research in which the word of Christian truth is interpreted, therefore in which it is preached. The shout of the time is: to preach, to interpret the contents and mysteries of the Holy Gospel and of the Holy Liturgy!”⁶.

He believes in the “power of preaching”, and its therapeutic role in healing people⁷. The sermon is seen in a sequence of sacramental acts.

“The fact from which we start and to which we must arrive is original sin, the atoning sacrifice or the sacrifice of the Savior on the Cross and the liturgical mystery. To bring souls to Christ

⁶ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA “Sf. Liturghie și predica”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XIX (1929) 11, p. 324.

⁷ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA “Sf. Liturghie și predica”, p. 325.

means to bring them before the altar of the church, and to make people partakers of salvation means to prepare them through repentance and to serve them with the sanctifying Body and Blood of the Lord. Any sermon and any work of a movement of religious and moral revival, which does not build on this biblical and historical foundation, is apart from Orthodoxy”⁸.

IV. The renewal of homiletics – the doctrinal sermon

We believe that the reason that leads Father Felea to publish a volume of sermons also refers to the fact that in the Diocese of Arad, Bishop Andrei Magieru took measures to intensify the preaching on Sundays and holidays, also initiating a column *About what to preach?*, an outline of the Sunday sermon, in the diocesan publication “Biserica și Școala”. Of course, these measures come in the context and for the reasons already mentioned, related to the challenges of secularizing and atheist conceptions and those of neo-Protestant groups.

As I have shown, to reach what we call doctrinal preaching, expressed in *Duhul Adevărului*, Father Felea methodologically assumed from a pastoral, liturgical, and missionary perspective at least two basic principles of preaching in the Orthodox Church: homily and Scripture, homily and Liturgy. These two principles are not alien to the Eastern Tradition, but characterize it in terms of the Church’s sermon. So, we could say without error that, following the Holy Fathers, father Felea offers us a patristic method to understand the meaning, importance, and power of the sermon and implicitly to preach in modernity. The assumption of the two mentioned principles generated changes in Father Felea’s reporting to the Church’s sermon, namely: a) from *Cazania* to sermon; b) from the moralizing sermon to the doctrinal one⁹.

⁸ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, “Dragostea altarului”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XXV (1935) 9-10 p. 362.

⁹ Cristinel IOJA, *Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961). Preotul, Teologul, Mărturisitorul*, pp. 214-218.

Although he proposes the doctrinal sermon as a method of expressing faith teachings from the Church pulpit in the context of a changing world, Father Felea is not against *Cazania*. He believes that reading it is a good practice, but it must always be accompanied by reflections and interpretations appropriate to the era, according to the meaning and within the horizon of expectations of modern man. He writes:

“Our Christian peasants from the villages have long been looking for old sermons, which can be read in the church not only by the old singers who know the Cyrillic script but also by the younger generation, who are a bit confused in deciphering the old letters. And this is a rather gratifying sign, about the thirst for the spiritual and divine word, to be adapted to the power of understanding and feeling of our peasants, as in the past. But as much as they benefit the peasants, the old sermons make the priest’s work easier”¹⁰.

About the practice of reading *Cazania*, he gives us a testimony.

“I alternated *Cazania* with the sermon for several years and convinced myself of the usefulness of this. More than that. The action and preaching activity of the priest must start from *Cazania*, to connect the sermon with its thread and continue on the same path if possible or not, in the spirit of *Cazania*. In many parts where the thread of *Cazania* was interrupted, either it was no longer preached, or the sermon no longer had the desired effect (...) To come to reality, we must pick up where we left off and continue in the spirit of our preaching tradition, without which we risk encountering delusions and unsuspected defeats (...) So, at least for the time being, we must also return to the

¹⁰ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, “Prezentare” la *Cazanii ce cuprind Evangheliile tâlcuite ale Duminicilor de peste an și cu cazaniile sinaxarului praznicelor împărătești și ale sfinților celor mari de peste an*. Ediția a III-a, București, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești 1929, 670 pp., in: *Revista Teologică*, XXI (1931) 4, p. 154.

old sermons, which, compared to ours, look better and more conscientiously crafted and, on top of that, they also present a particularly important characteristic: in them the Scripture and its spirit speak more than man, being above all religious sermons”¹¹.

This testimony reveals Father Felea’s method, which does not consist in an act of delimitation from the older forms of preaching in the Church, but responsibly interweaves the old with the new, always updating the preaching message of the Church.

Without strictly delimiting himself from *Cazania*, he amends the moralizing-barren style and content of the sermon of his time. The lack of content and spiritual strength of the moralizing sermon, centered on the rebuke and criticism of the faithful, decisively leads Father Felea to propose the transition from this form of preaching - unproductive for the Church, in the context of modernity - to the doctrinal sermon, having the confessed consciousness that from dogma springs the power of preaching in the Church. Here we can implicitly discover Father Felea’s conception of dogmas, understood not as abstract propositions, but as life and experience.

“The need for doctrinal preaching is imposed on our time for other reasons as well. Sectarian, atheistic, and materialistic ideologies shake the balance of the soul life of believers. Struggles and clashes between ideas breed doubt and disturb faith. To support the strength and purity of faith we need the support of holy and

¹¹ Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, “Prezentare” la *Cazanii ce cuprind Evangheliile tâlcuite ale Duminicilor de peste an și cu cazaniile sinaxarului praznicelor împărătești și ale sfinților celor mari de peste an*, pp. 154-155. In 1927, when he was a priest at Valea Brad, he mentions that “in our church, the sermon is listened to with pleasure and attention only on the second or third Sunday, because the faithful are especially used to the «cazania» which they consider an integral part of the worship” (Archive of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology Arad, *Raport anual asupra parohiei Valea Brad 1927*, f. 8; See also Cristinel IOJA, *Ilarion V. Felea (1903-1961). Preotul, Teologul, Mărturisitorul*, p. 215).

eternal dogmas. Therefore, the lights that dogmatic, apologetic, and biblical studies give us are of invaluable use”¹².

But, as I pointed out, the *doctrinal sermon* does not represent the end of the road for the theologian from Arad, but a stage that later will pass through the apologetic sermon and will be crowned with a true unification of Theology in the homily.

V. The homiletic features of the work *Duhul Adevărului*

*Duhul Adevărului*¹³ represents an important work for Orthodox Homiletics as the author offers us new content of the sermons, based on the text of the Scriptures. Precisely for its homiletic theological importance, with implications in the life of the Church, the work *Duhul Adevărului* is awarded by the Romanian Academy. This work has some homiletic characteristics that we want to specify, being important for our study.

In the retrospective-descriptive analysis of the sermon in the Romanian Orthodox Church, undertaken by the authors of the work *Omiletica*¹⁴, we also find some general references to the preaching work of father Ilarion V. Felea. We make it clear that Father Felea’s name is already mentioned in the preamble of this chapter, in the sub-section: *Reprezentanți de seamă (Prominent representatives)* (for the period 1900-1947), along with 13 other homiletic personalities.

In the presentation dedicated to the author from Arad, after mentioning some biographical data and his work, we also find a paragraph that makes a direct reference to the volume of sermons of the father:

“The volume of sermons *Duhul Adevărului. Predici* (Arad, 1942; Alba Iulia, 2000), deserves a special mention. It was awarded by the Romanian Academy for its exceptional qualities in terms of

¹² Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, “Ortodoxia în predică”, in: *Biserica și Școala*, LXII (1938) 36, p. 303

¹³ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, Diecezana, Arad, 1942, 529 pp.

¹⁴ Pr. Vasile GORDON (coord.), *Omiletica*, Basilica, București, 2015.

content, the elevated way of expression, as well as for the firm attitude against Bolshevism that was threatening its installation on our lands. Sermons generally have doctrinal content, but there are also moral and liturgical themes. Through these speeches, the author opened a new path in the homiletic practice, because the sermon for Romanians, in general, until then had a moralizing character that led to routine and was without effect. The sermons are distinguished by a comprehensive systematic exposition of the proposed theme, which is supported by an extremely rich biblical argumentation. As a whole, the work has a pronounced apologetic and missionary character”¹⁵.

The original edition, from 1942, is presented in B5 format, having 527 pages. The 88 sermons inserted in the volume are preceded by a *Prologue* (p. V-XIII) and *Content* (p. XIV-XVI).

The second edition, printed in Alba-Iulia in 1995, with the blessing of His Holiness Archbishop Andrei, is presented in the form of a volume of 412 pages, format: 15 x 22 cm.

5.1. Homiletic-pastoral premises

From the very first pages of this volume, subsumed under the title of *Prologue*, we find described, in some interesting details, the homiletic and pastoral premises that led to the appearance of this collection of sermons.

The motivations proposed by the author are punctuated in a logical order, discovering a well-structured system, which constitutes a true homiletic paradigm¹⁶. On the one hand, they belong to some inner springs, to which are added professional ones.

Thus, first of all, Father Felea places a personal desire, a “torturous” thought, that of offering priests and believers **a collection of sermons**¹⁷.

¹⁵ Pr. Vasile GORDON (coord.), *Omiletica*, p. 238.

¹⁶ We believe that this unitary conception is also due to the fact that, for a while, his Holiness had Homiletics classes in the didactic norm.

¹⁷ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. V.

This implies the absence of any temptation for personal affirmation. The expression “has tormented me for a long time” allows us to see a meditative process of long reflection that has fermented his mind and heart. It is determined by the neo-Protestant trend that propagated in the era, received by father Felea as a wave that “envelops the ship of the Church”. These powerful metaphors betray a priestly conscience faithful to the correct teaching of the Church, marked by the responsibility of guarding the faithful against sectarian upheavals. From these few lines, we can easily and directly identify the recipients of this book: the priests and believers of the Orthodox Church. For each one, the author explains the justification of his editorial approach with concrete arguments.

For priests, it brings to the fore the interesting idea: of **popularizing the subjects of theological studies**¹⁸, thus campaigning for the exit from the “ivory tower” of a hermetic theology, *only for professionals*. The argument used here recovers the baggage of information from the student years, showing their practical value. It relies on what homiletic scholarship defines as *distant sermon preparation*. Thus, any future priest is invited to take on the subjects studied in the Faculty in the highest way, being aware of the importance of every detail, but also of the overall structure, for solid preaching. At the same time, Father Felea also has in mind here a nuance that aims at a certain standard of style, of preaching language, at the accuracy of dogmatic expression, an aspect that shows the superiority of the right teaching about the sectarian heresies that promoted a sentimentalist preaching style, with an approximate theological language. This approach ultimately appeals to the legacy of the Fathers, who did deep theology by preaching.

¹⁸ “It was very wrong to think that Dogmatics, Morals, Exegesis, Apologetics, Liturgy, Mysticism, Canon Law, Church History, and other Christian studies are only taught for exams and diplomas. With such opinions the churches were emptied of believers. A sermon in which the content of these theological disciplines is not systematically reflected is a sermon of empty words, a sermon delivered in the wind and without the desired effect. A good sermon is one that answers the needs, questions, torments and soul pains of believers on the one hand, and on the other hand, that propagates the principles of the Christian religion, from which souls leave themselves enveloped, deceived and lost, only when they waver their foundations”, at Ilarion V. Felea, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. V.

On the other hand, it starts from the bitter realization that:

“Most of today’s sermons suffer from the abuse of paraphrasing, improvisation, and repetition of the same ideas. There are complaints about ruins, laments, and sentimental appeals, with a very relative, fleeting, very often boring effect. We don’t build anything (!)... improvisations. paraphrasing and moralizing don’t convince anyone anymore”¹⁹.

These justify the need for a **systematic collection of sermons on doctrine**²⁰. So, the author is concerned with providing a predicate landmark and not just any other. He realizes the value of an editorial approach that respects some demanding criteria imposed by the superiority of the Christian faith doctrine. To achieve his goal, he uses an integrative, coherent perspective, in which the main themes of the faith teaching are presented in a clearly defined logic of systematization. He offers a scheme of connection of these themes, structuring them according to the great chapters of theology: Dogmatics, Christian Morals, Orthodox Liturgics, Apologetics, and spiritual life²¹. Here, the previous idea of recovering the knowledge received during the student years is put into practice.

The author explains the work process, showing the historical and ecclesiastical context of obedience to the order of his hierarch:

“The occasion that led me to go from contemplation to execution was the entrustment given to me by HE Father Bishop Andrei Magieru of Arad, a year before, to edit, in the course of 1942, the column in the magazine «Biserica și Școala», initiated by His Holiness: *What to preach about*. I immediately got to work. I first made my analytical program of sermons, the plan of subjects for the whole year, sometimes according to the Apostle

¹⁹ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. VI. Although so many decades have passed since these critical assessments, they can still be reiterated today.

²⁰ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. V-VI.

²¹ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, pp. IX-X.

and sometimes according to the Gospel, for all Sundays and religious holidays, as can be read on the table of contents”²².

From these references, we deduce a weekly work schedule, which imposed a constant rhythm, with a specific pressure load, especially if we think about how a newspaper text was collected and printed, in such a way that the publication was shipped promptly. It can also be seen from here that any sermon is closely related to a socio-cultural context specific to a time. This testifies to the principle of adaptability. Thus, each priest is called to dress the Church’s preaching response in the clothing of the cultural context of his era, bringing the perennial message of the Gospel of Christ the Lord into reality.

To these descriptions, Father Felea adds other details detailing the work of coagulation of the materials already published in the diocesan publication, in a unitary, systematic form: “Then I collected my finished sermons and sketches and systematized them according to the plan. But here I came across a surprise: for each subject, I had 4-5-6 sermons or sketches, and for some subjects I had nothing”²³. The idea that emerges from what is reported here leads us to think of the existence of a repertoire of sermons and drafts of sermons collected throughout the priest’s career. This tool demonstrates what was preached at the different services, being a good tool for observing the themes covered to avoid some unproductive repetition.

After the process described above, Father Felea draws some conclusions with value as a preaching paradigm, subsumed to the principle of observing an **annual preaching planning** (synonymous with didactic calendar planning) and to the principle of **preaching according to the plan**: “From this balance, I immediately realized: how flawed is the system of preaching without orienting ourselves according to a pre-established annual plan. Of course, it is not an easy thing: neither to make your annual plan of sermons nor to give sermons a doctrinal content”²⁴. These findings are testified here as a result of a preaching experience, fulfilled for several decades

²² Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, pp. VI-VII.

²³ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. VII.

²⁴ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. VII.

already, and following the clarifications mentioned above (some topics were covered in sermons or outlines, others not). Without planning and a plan, any preaching endeavor risks missing the mark, both for the preacher and the listeners²⁵. Annual planning is similar to the architectural design of a building: just as the beauty and longevity of the building depend on how the architectural plan was designed and executed, the same happens with the didactic ministry of the priest in the parish. He should not limit himself only to the construction or beautification of the place of worship, but also to pursue the spiritual edification of his believers. The weight of such a projective approach is testified here, even by an experienced preacher like Father Felea. Although difficult, it can and must be done by every priest.

Another difficulty identified concerns a very important aspect, that of the **doctrinal content of the sermons**. First, the author defines the terms, according to his conception: “The sermon can only have a doctrinal content, i.e. a content in which the dogmatic, moral, liturgical, apologetic, historical and canonical principles of Christianity can be shown and debated from a biblical, patristic and rational point of view”²⁶. Then, he emphasizes:

“It is not an easy thing ... to give sermons a doctrinal content. The most difficult sermons are those with doctrinal content. Here you can no longer count on the *copia verborum*, nor on the *gift of oratory* (which some boast about). Here the precision of the knowledge and the effort to teach it in an easy and pleasant form of exposition play an essential role. No doctrinal sermon, dogmatic, moral, apologetic, etc. can be uttered usefully and successfully, without first mastering the subject and - well understood - without giving it life through one’s own experience and conviction”²⁷.

²⁵ In another place, Father Felea asks that the church sermon must be done “with system and momentum”.

²⁶ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. VII.

²⁷ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. VIII. The thought of approaching the preaching action from the perspective of doctrinal preaching came to him, as he himself confesses, after teaching the disciplines of Dogmatic Theology and Apologetics at the Academy in Arad (p. VII).

Concerning the current homiletic science, the definition proposed above has the gift of offering a simpler perspective on the genres of preaching, focusing attention on the genre of thematic preaching²⁸. Even so, the offered synthesis points out the main elements of the predicate action through the two verbs chosen: to *show* and to *debate*. The first action aims at the presentation, and the second brings with it the argumentation (from the perspective of Revelation, of the Holy Tradition but also of rational logic), all supporting the applicative approach of the transmitted content. In addition, the author returns here to the idea that emphasizes the effort required for any undertaking of this kind, the composition of the sermon having to respond to the imperative of correctness or precision of terms. The warning is valid in any historical context, which is why the nuances referred to here by Father Felea retain their relevance. Of course, the author points out as relevant the coverage between what is preached and the priest's life, precisely so that the word spoken from the pulpit has the power to convince the people.

It is not only a call for this kind of preaching that is expressed here, but more, an unquestionable belief and confession that: “even today a *systematic, unitary, documented, sincere and enthusiastic preaching* of Christian doctrine, from the mouths of *all* priests, would have the gift of *enlivening the religious life* and *strengthening the convictions* that every Christian should have about his religion”²⁹. The criteria marked here with the special font capture the most important milestones of successful preaching.

Being thematic sermons on Sundays and feasts of the church year, according to the author's indication, they can also be used as paraenesis for various other services and events in the life of the parish³⁰. The additional details provided by the author also show from this point of view the importance of the doctrinal sermon, emphasizing the overcoming of a pietistic discourse, which has no value for the spiritual life of faith: “to preserve and propagate authentic Christianity, a return to doctrine

²⁸ Pr. Vasile GORDON (coord.), *Omiletica*, p. 381 and following.

²⁹ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. XIII.

³⁰ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, pp. X-XI.

is required. Otherwise, in the absence of the Christian faith, all the congratulations, condolences, and forgiveness eventually become words without any echo in people's souls"³¹.

The prologue also refers to the fact that these sermons were passed not only through the filter of "office" stylizations but also through that of the pulpit, which validates them for their use by priests. Even so, we are warned by Father Ilarion that some sermons "are a bit difficult", or that some have many brackets with biblical references³². His explanation of these objections suggests a different kind of attitude: "The seriousness of the subjects requires more seriousness and attention from the listeners"³³. We see here the intention to **improve the quality** of both the sermons and the listeners. The sermon does not only provide religious education but also imposes a certain effort of understanding, in which the listeners are involved; it refers to a certain cultivation not only of the heart but also of reason. As for the multitude of brackets with biblical references, they have the gift of showing the fact that all the teaching of the Orthodox Church has its source in divine revelation and the writings of the Holy Fathers, as those who interpret the biblical text in the *spirit of truth*.

Another homiletic landmark discussed by father Felea concerns the "**ambition of originality**" of the sermon, understood by us as the temptation of the preacher's desire for personal affirmation. The author rejects it, showing us the motivation: "In Christian doctrine, originality, for the most part, equates to heresy"³⁴. That's why he shows us the concept he had in mind when preparing the sermons: "I tried to summarize the classic content of Christian teachings, from the conviction that everything that is classic remains, and everything that people and time add, goes"³⁵.

With such preliminary clarifications, we can take the text of the volume to another level.

³¹ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. XI.

³² Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. XII.

³³ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. XII.

³⁴ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. XI.

³⁵ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. XI.

5.2. Some homiletic landmarks

As the “table of contents” shows, the author chose to order the sermons according to the civil calendar, opening the series with a sermon on the new year, for the first day of January. This is titled “The New Man”. The last sermon text is dedicated to the last Sunday of the year, identified by the church calendar as “Sunday after the Nativity”. It bears the title “Holy Tradition”. In the area of homiletics, such a classification is not unique. We believe that the author’s choice is justified by the prevalence of the civil calendar, by which the Romanian society was already guided then and now, which offers a facility for anyone looking to identify a certain sermon text. Of course, the sequence of Sundays and feasts is given by their name in the church calendar.

As mentioned above, each sermon text is placed under a suggestive title, thus indicating the topic covered. As can be seen from the titles chosen, the theological areas touched by father Felea are those related to the teaching of faith, morals, and Christian spirituality, biblical and liturgical ones.

The homiletic pattern of each sermon respects the form imposed for this preaching genre, the text being marked by an introduction (as an apperceptive preparation, from catechesis), followed by an extended treatment and an applicative, exhorting, persuasive conclusion.

No sermon text mentions the opening invocation (*In the name of the Father ...*) nor the final doxology (in the form: *Glory to the Father ...*), these being implied.

The presence of address formulas is sporadic, sometimes the appellative *brother* is used. By using it, the close relationship between the priest who speaks and the believer who listens is preserved, according to the biblical model.

In most cases, the introductions used by the author are short in length and direct, managing to immediately arouse the interest of the listeners in what is to be presented. So, for example, in the New Year’s sermon, after indicating the three events celebrated that day, the author directly announces the theme, in the form: “This celebration is connected not only to the renewal of the year but also to the renewal of man”³⁶. Or, a

³⁶ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. 1.

more extended introduction, such as we find in the sermon on “The Holy Trinity”. Here, after presenting the various liturgical contexts in which the Church and the faithful remember the three Trinitarian Persons, the author provokes the listeners’ interest by using the question: “What do all these simple sayings, bows, and Christian prayers mean? ... A great mystery; the first and deepest teaching of the Christian Church, namely the teaching about God”³⁷.

The expository part of the sermon spans several pages. In the course of the sermon, the author observes a clear and logical systematic approach, this homiletic model being conducive to thematic sermons. The presentation of ideas follows two types of approach: concentric and ascending, thus managing to capture several aspects of the theme, from several angles of view. As an example, here is the text from the sermon “Gifts of the Church” where the ten gifts given to us by the Holy Church are listed and explained: *1. the Christian name, 2. saving faith; 3. the holy life; 4. freedom and happiness; 5. the communion of saints and especially the cult of the dead; 6. holidays; 7. the priest; 8. Holy Scripture; 9. Religion; 10. Peace with God*³⁸.

In support of his ideas, father Ilarion makes full use of biblical argumentation, doubled by the patristic one. This fact highlights the permanent connection of the author with the biblical text, which he read, researched, and meditated on so that he could gather from it all the sap that brings spiritual meanings useful to himself and the faithful. For example, in the sermon entitled “Happiness”, he exposes and explains the words spoken by the Savior Jesus Christ, with this introduction: “*The Sermon on the Mount* begins with the gospel of the nine beatitudes (Matt 5, 3-12) which are linked together like steps; one conditions the other and the last all”³⁹. In the sermon “Holy Scripture”, he recalls the Chrysostomian reference about the ignorance of the Holy Scripture leading to thousands of evils⁴⁰.

³⁷ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. 11.

³⁸ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, pp. 205-209.

³⁹ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. 141.

⁴⁰ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. 407.

The end of the sermons proposes an applied approach, in the form of clear and direct exhortations, which takes the message addressed in the expository part from theory to practice. Most of the texts end with a prayer text taken from the liturgical thesaurus. As a testimony, we evoke here the end of the sermon *Jesus Christ the Redeemer*:

“As in the time when He walked the earth, let us call on the Savior for help today, and throughout all time, so that He may forgive us of the great evils and heal us of the many physical and spiritual diseases from which we suffer, we and the whole of humanity. All you who suffer in secret and have hidden and unhealed wounds in your heart, come to the Savior. Call upon Him with all faith, with all hope, with all love, and with prayer: Doctor and Helper of those who are in pain, Savior of the helpless, Master of all and Lord, grant healing to Your helpless servants; have mercy on those who have sinned a lot and save us from our sins, oh Christ, so that we may glorify Your divine power”⁴¹.

VI. Conclusions

In the lines above I have captured some of the main coordinates that can be observed in the work of father Ilarion V. Felea, from the perspective of its homiletic dimension, especially exploring the book of sermons *Duhul adevărului*. Although rightly claimed by the branch of dogmatists and apologists, in all his writings a permanent concern for the reception of the teaching of faith by believers is evident. The themes addressed, as well as their presentation, highlight a priest and a theologian aware of his role in the teaching work and mission of Christ's Church. That is why most of his texts take on the sermon form. This can be seen from the fact that the phrasing is as flexible as possible, and the explanations are logical and systematic.

⁴¹ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, p. 69.

Among his many contributions, the work *Duhul adevărului* stands out, a special volume of sermons for Sundays and feasts over the year. Received as such in the era and other analyses, it brings an interesting perspective not only through the way the author's favorite themes are approached but also contributes to the homiletic theory, through the extensive prologue, a real excursion into systematic preaching.

The texts of the sermons in this volume express the Church's teaching of faith in a concise and clear form, imbued with a relevant biblical argumentation, any priest, from any place and time being able to be inspired towards a fruitful preaching. His constant appeal was in the direction of a sermon out of the moralizing-pietistic pattern, towards a sermon connected both to the doctrinal values of the Church and to the contextual cultural currents. Both in form and content, the sermons in Father Felea's volume remain today as a model for church preaching.