

Book Reviews

Sfântul Preot Mucenic Ilarion FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, coll. *Ilarion V. Felea – Opere complete 2*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu” din Arad, 2025, 460 pp.

For the Romanian Orthodox Church, and especially for the Orthodox Church of Arad and its Theology, this year – 2025 – represents a great joy, an enrichment, and the fulfillment of a long-awaited hope: the inclusion among the ranks of the holy martyrs of one of its most worthy servants – the priest and professor of Theology Ilarion Felea (1903–1961). In this context, the Faculty of Theology in Arad, which gratefully and joyfully bears his name, considered it fitting to highlight throughout this year, through a multitude of theological, cultural, and ecclesial events, the exceptional personality of the theologian from Arad. Among the activities and works carried out this year is the republication, in 20 volumes, of the *Complete Works* of the confessing priest Ilarion Felea. This collection of works is initiated and coordinated by the industrious dean of the Faculty of Theology in Arad, Fr. Prof. Dr. Cristinel Ioja. Among these works conceived, elaborated, and printed by Fr. Felea, in a place of honor stands his work *The Spirit of Truth*, a book awarded by the Romanian Academy. *The Spirit of Truth* is the second volume of this collection. The entire series will appear in excellent graphic conditions, inviting and captivating the reader to delve into the rich content of Fr. Felea’s writings.

In order to help the reader enter more easily into the universe of Fr. Felea’s thought, the coordinator of this ample undertaking notes, with reference to the theologian’s works, that they “represent a testament of witness-value to the faith and life of the one who served with exemplary devotion and self-sacrifice the Altar and Theology of the Orthodox Church. This work is written with Christian conviction and in existential, experiential, and confessing unity with the prayerful life of the Church” (p. 2).

This new edition includes an ample Introduction, a Chronology, and a Note on the Edition. In the Introduction (pp. 5–24), Assistant Professor Dr. Filip Albu outlines the demands of Gospel preaching in the thought of Fr. Ilarion Felea. The theologian from Arad sees his entire involvement in the service of Theology as one grounded in homiletic–pastoral motivation. Fr. Felea has a major contribution to Romanian Homiletics, namely that of courageously and competently promoting **the doctrinal sermon**. Moreover, this Introduction presents several stages of homiletic thinking. The doctrinal sermon truly represents a renewal of preaching in the Romanian Orthodox Church. For the theologian from Arad, preaching is solidly founded on Holy Scripture and closely linked to the Holy Liturgy — this in order to be as effective as possible from a pastoral–missionary perspective.

The Chronology presents the life and activity of Father Felea from his birth until his passing from this earthly life as a martyr in the Aiud prison in 1961. Also included here, in chronological order, are the appearances of several works by Fr. Felea after 1989, up until the moment of the canonization of the Holy Priest and Martyr Ilarion Felea on February 4, 2025.

The Note on the Edition explains the working method of the team that participated in the republication of this work, namely the use and valorization of the author’s manuscripts, their comparison with the liturgical books and editions of Holy Scripture printed in recent years, etc.

The republication of *The Spirit of Truth* is an exceptional editorial event — not only because this work had a significant impact on the preaching of the Word of God from the moment of its first appearance in 1942, but also because it has preserved its vigor and relevance even in our own times.

The context of the initial appearance of *The Spirit of Truth* and the author’s intention regarding the elaboration of this work are explained by the holy author himself in the “Prologue” to his book. He began from the observation that the sermons then delivered by the ministers of the holy altars did not rise to the height of the demands of this ecclesial act, suffering from superficiality, paraphrasing, inefficient moralizing, etc. The consequences of such a manner of preaching saddened the theologian

Felea, but at the same time motivated him to undertake a rethinking of the way preaching should be done in the Church. Rightly he affirmed: “Most of today’s sermons suffer from the abuse of paraphrasing, improvisation, and the repetition of the same ideas. They are lamentations amid ruins, plaintive appeals, and sentimental exhortations, with a very relative and fleeting effect, often even boring. We build almost nothing” (p. 40). From this observation he began to imagine a new vision or preaching strategy, for the greatest benefit of the faithful and their salvation. He proposed a step forward on this path, namely that “the Church must preach its truths, its fundamental principles, its dogmatic, moral, apologetic, liturgical, and mystical doctrine. It must make from the pulpit its apology and the dissemination of its dogmas, with system and with fervor” (p. 41). Thus, Fr. Felea himself indicated the manner of preaching: **with system and with fervor**. I believe that, among other things, this way of preaching brought him his fame and undeniable success.

In this manner and with this purpose, the priest-martyr Ilarion Felea elaborated his collection of doctrinal sermons, in order to transmit to the faithful the treasure of Christian faith, spirituality, and life. The volume contains 88 sermons for Sundays throughout the year, as well as for the feasts of the Mother of God and of the Saints.

Although the work was printed for the first time in 1942, reprinted in 1943, and now republished once again this year in exceptional graphic conditions as a tribute to its author, this volume of sermons represents not only an act of homage and gratitude for this confessing priest, but it retains relevance and significance even today. On this occasion, several of these may be highlighted:

1. *The Spirit of Truth* represents a work of theological, dogmatic, apologetic, and missionary value which does not lose its importance with the passing of time; on the contrary, it appears ever more significant in the context of today’s world, offering a guiding thread for the confession of the Orthodox Christian ethos.
2. This work brings clarity to any person who asks profound existential questions about life and his or her purpose in this world. It illuminates the path at existential crossroads, showing the direction one should take.

3. This work has exceptional significance for the activity of the Church's ministers, who may find in it an indispensable tool for work, meditation, and inspiration. It enables them to correct certain deficiencies in the preparation and delivery of sermons, giving these a content, a spiritual vibration, and a revelatory coherence.
4. The connection the author establishes between the Church's doctrine and its life of prayer and Christian spirituality, in the context of the ideologies of the time, represents a response that the faithful expect from the Church's ministers.
5. The linguistic garb in which the sentences and phrases of the work are clothed is luminous; it is like a garment of perpetual feast. Indeed, the sermons elaborated by the author are clear, coherent, and solidly argued biblically, patristically, and liturgically.
6. The conclusion of each sermon with a biblical text or with a prayer from the Church's services, or even formulated by the author himself, gives his sermons distinction, conviction, and an impulse in thought, delivery, and in the following of the exhortations by the listeners or readers.
7. *The Spirit of Truth* represents a pinnacle of homiletic thought of a servant of the Church, a work that calls for the deepening of the faith and the knowledge of Christian identity by the members of the Church, transforming those who are merely formal and external members of the ecclesial Body into living, conscious, and responsible members; and it offers the ministers of the Church the opportunity to be enlighteners of the faithful they shepherd — "with system and with fervor".

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