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The Confessional Dimension of the Priestly and Didactic Ministry of Rev. Prof. Dr. Ilarion V. Felea Reflected in His “Ziuarul personal” (*Personal Diary*) (1927-1956)

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Abstract

As priest, professor and martyr, Ilarion V. Felea was one of the brightest personalities of the Diocese of Arad and the Romanian Orthodox Church as well. His theological thinking is not arid, superficial, but always profound, alive, apologetic, and confessing. Father Ilarion V. Felea had a wide and pertinent perception and vision of things, unwilling to imagine an abstract theology floating above the realities of life and the world. On the contrary, he wanted a theology ready to inspire and to animate both the preachers of the faith and the Orthodox faithful, who had to be thoroughly initiated into the mysteries of faith and the Church’s life. The confessional dimension of his person and theology must be regarded in this context, which brought a tremendous service to the work of the Orthodox Church in the western part of the country and beyond.

Keywords

Ilarion V. Felea, Romanian Orthodox Church, Theological Academy of Arad, confessing Theology

I. General Considerations

Rev. Prof. Ilarion V. Felea is one of the bright figures of theology and of the Romanian Orthodox Church from the first half of the past century, who left deep traces in the consciousness of his contemporaries as well as his posterity. This compelling theological personality was part of a Pleiad of Romanian Orthodox theologians who were animated by high ideals about the Church, and the Romanian people, as they felt great responsibility deep in their conscience for the Romanian society en masse. Therefore, their priestly, theological and social ministry was so complex, profound and with multiple implications not only in the life of the Church but also in society.

First of all, we should not forget that the generation of theologians Rev. Prof. Ilarion V. Felea was also a member of, was formed in the interwar period, with the euphoria generated by the act of the Great Union from December 1, 1918. This fact made the youth of that time particularly responsible, in order to become excited and to fight for the affirmation of the great values of the Romanian people, among which, of course, the Orthodox values were on the first position. Through their graces those values had to give birth to the soul of this people. The release from the straps of an overwhelming past under foreign rule, and the dynamics of assuming the ideals and the preoccupations for the affirmation of the Romanians perennial values included entire generations of young people, whom the above mentioned Rev. Felea was also part.

Secondly, that period was characterized by the attempts of various Christian religious groups to come up with a new religious offer addressed to the Romanians. In part they managed to convince some of them through their particular zeal. The first who were lured to adhere to these new forms of Christianity were the Romanians in Western Romania. It is not surprising that the Church's ministers and the Orthodox theologians and missionaries felt urged to respond to these new challenges with another type of mission they imagined, in response to these new strategies of dislocating parts of the Orthodox believers from the body of the Church. Thus, bishops, professors of theology and priests appeared and they were fully integrated in this new missionary impetus in order to respond to the contestations of the Church's teaching of faith. On the other hand, they came up with a

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new way of approaching the life of the Church, of confessing faith, and of understanding the role of the believers in the ecclesial life.

Thirdly, it must not be forgotten that especially in the fourth decade of the last century the black clouds of an atheistic and totalitarian ideology – i.e. Communism - were felt as a threaten and their vibrations from the East were already present in the Romanian space. Having a sensitivity to discern the spirits and anticipating what the implementation of this ideology will mean to the Romanians, these theological and ecclesial personalities have tried to prevent the adverse consequences of this ideology by their writing and their concrete attitudes from daily life. They acted this way because they wanted the Romanian people would arm with “all the weapons of the spirit” and to be able to resist spiritually in front of this threat, only potential then, but subsequently proved to be real.

In this context, a whole Pleiad of priests, professors of theology and hierarchs lived, manifested, and confessed the eternal values of the Gospel, some of them at the cost of their lives. Among these, there is also Dr. Ilarion V. Felea, the worthy priest and professor of theology from Arad.

Father Felea’s priestly, theological and missionary life and service took place on the highest coordinates of its manifestation, and conquered the people souls. He was animated by the highest demands that arose as a priest and theology professor, but also part of the city where he lived.

In the following, we will seek to capture some of the aspects of his confessional ministry, as reflected in his diary, namely “Ziuarul personal” (*Personal Diary*), which he started since his ordination as a priest by Dr. Nicolae Balan, Metropolitan of Transylvania and his installation as a priest in his native parish, Valea Bradului, until 1958, shortly before he was arrested in September 1958.

II. Biographical Landmarks

Father Felea was born in Valea-Bradului village, former Brad district, Hunedoara region, according to his mother on Palm Friday 1903, when it is the feast of St. Hilarion the New. If this is true, then, both the Brad civil status register showing the date of his birth on April 13 (the new style) and the Baptist Registry of the Valea Bradului Parish, which shows the day of his baptism was March 31, 1903 (old style), without specifying

the date of his birth, are wrong. Rev. Felea's father, born in Ciuruleasa Abrudului was a priest (he died January 21, 1920, aged 62), and his mother Marta was born in Valea-Bradului and died in 1952, aged 86. They had 9 children (Gheorghe, the tenth and the oldest, died aged 6 at Ciuruleasa), 6 boys and 3 girls: 1. Ioan, Doctor in Theology, former priest in Pecica and spiritual father at the hostel of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest, dead in the bombing of English aviation on Bucharest on April 4, 1944 and buried in a mass grave, without the knowledge of his family, in Giulești Protestant cemetery; 2. Victor (born in 1892) was a Mathematics teacher in Oradea and Arad, with a degree in Mathematics and a PhD in Law; 3. Maria was the presbytera of the priest Miron Popovici from Mihăileni (Brad); 4. Aurelia married the craftsman Ilie Paicu from Brad; 5. Miron, PhD in Law, was lawyer in Pecica and Arad, where he lived; 6. Elisabeta was married to Cornel Grozescu, former police commissioner; 7. Ilarion-Virgil; 8. Gheorghe had a degree in Law and died at Odessa on October 21, 1941, as a major magistrate; 9. Traian, a Music teacher in Dumbrăveni, Arad and Cluj.

His first teacher in the first grade at the Primary Confessional School in Valea Bradului, was Valer Demian, the son of protopresbyter Vasile Demian from Brad. The following teacher was Petru Mateș from Valea-Bradului, the son of the church cantor Ioan Mateș. In autumn 1914, when the First World War began, the young man Ilarion V. Felea joined the Romanian Orthodox Gymnasium in Brad and attended it between 1914 and 1918. His teachers were: Dr. Ioan Radu, Vasile Boncu, Ioan Cheri, Vasile Stoia, Ștefan Albu and Dr. Pavel Oprișa, most loved and respected.

In autumn 1918 he joined the fifth grade at "Andrei Șaguna" High School in Brașov where he attended the classes until Christmas. Then Transylvania was united with Country-Mother (Old Kingdom), and he returned to Brad where the 5th grade was first opened at "Avram Iancu" High School. In Brad he graduated the sixth grade too, but he graduated the seventh and eighth, and the baccalaureate at "Moise Nicoară" High School in Arad (in Brad the seventh and eighth grade were opened only in the following years).

In autumn 1922 he joined the Academy of Theology "Andreiana" in Sibiu, which he graduated in June 1926. That was his parents wish, and young Felea's wish too: to study Theology and become a priest. This also explains the continuation of studies, for the enrichment of knowledge, first

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at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Cluj (1927-1929) which he graduated with the subject "Horace's Poetic Art", then at the Faculty of Theology in București (1930-1932) where he took his license with the subject "*Salvation from the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Point of View*", in autumn 1932, then between 1937-1939, he prepared for the PhD exam in Theology, where he received the qualification "Cum laude" (9), in autumn 1939, with the thesis: "*Repentance, a Study of Theological and Psychological Documentation*" (Editura Arhiedecezana, Sibiu 1939).

From January, 15 1927 - August, 31 1927 he worked as a substitute teacher at "Avram Iancu" High School in Brad. He was a substitute for Latin, Physics and Psychology classes. On July 23, 1927 at the church in Crișcior, he married Valeria, daughter of the confessional teacher and then communal notary from Crișcior, Ioan Faur and Elisabeta born Toda. On July 25 and 26, 1927, he was ordained deacon and then priest and spiritual father by Dr. Nicolae Bălan, Metropolitan of Ardeal, in the chapel of the Metropolitan Church of Sibiu.

On August 6, 1927, he was installed as priest in his native village, Valea-Bradului, where he served his fellow villagers until August 31, 1930, when he moved by choice as a priest in Arad, Șega I district. There he served until June 1, 1939, when he was transferred as a parish priest to the Arad-Centre parish, where he served as a parish priest until March 31, 1941, and, then as a priest until September 1958, when he was arrested and jailed.

In the school year 1937-1938 he was a substitute professor of Dogmatics at the Academy of Theology in Cluj.

Between 1938 and 1948 he was professor of Dogmatics, Apologetics, Ascetic and Mystic (for a few years he also taught Morals and Practical Homiletics) at the Academy of Theology in Arad. *Between July, 1 1947 and December, 31 1948 he was the rector of the Academy of Theology in Arad, when the Academy was dissolved through the law of education and merged with the Academy from Cluj.*

Between March 7 and August 20, 1945, he was jailed to the camp of political prisoners from Caracal. From January 6, 1949 to January 6, 1950, he was detained and convicted "for non-denunciation" and imprisoned in Arad, Timișoara and Aiud. He was removed from theological and state education "for non-democratic attitude" (?!). He remained priest of the Cathedral and at the returned church from Arad, again recognized in the

budget on March 1, 1952, and editor of the eparchial calendar (Îndrumător) from 1951 to 1956 (inclusively). On September 3-4, 1952, he suffered a new arrest. In total - three home searches and three arrests.

He edited the publication "Calea Mântuirii" in 1935 (20 numbers) and between 1943 and 1947 and "Biserica și Școala" between 1939 (VI) – 1947, when these publications were banned. He contributed to the following publications: *Telegraful Român* (Sibiu), *Revista Teologică* (Sibiu), *Viața Ilustrată* (Sibiu-Cluj), *Duh și Adevăr* (Timișoara), *Lumina Satelor* (Sibiu) and to the newspapers from Arad.

III. Representative printed works

Brochures for popularization: *Beția Arad* 1931; *Icoane alese din viața Ortodoxiei Arad* 1933; *Drumul Crucii* in collaboration with Rev. F. Codreanu, 3 editions, *Culegeri de rugăciuni și cântări pentru creștinii care merg la mănăstire*, 2 editions; *Catehism creștin ortodox* – 1940, 4 editions (43.000 copies), *Sfintele Taine Sibiu* 1946; *Împărăția lui Dumnezeu*, Sibiu 1947 (printed but confiscated, with no censorship approval), *Calendarele cu tâlcuirea Sărbătorilor* 1951 – 1956. He also prepared for print: *Despre eretici și eresuri*; *Parabolele Mântuitorului*.

Homiletic studies and works:

Convertirea creștină Sibiu 1935; *Critica bisericii Baptiste Sibiu* 1937; *Dumnezeu și sufletul în poezia română contemporană*, Cluj 1937; *Teologie și preoție*, Arad 1939; *Pocăința* (PhD thesis in Theology) Sibiu 1939; *Paisie și Paisianismul Cluj* 1940; *Duhul adevărului*, work awarded by the Romanian Academy, *Două caiete Arad* 1943 and *Religia iubirii*, Arad 1946.

For divine worship:

Antologhion, Arad 1946 (10.000 copies); *Carte de rugăciuni Arad* 1945 – 50.000 copies (in collaboration with Rev F. Codreanu).

For catechism he initiated and wrote together with the priests: F. Codreanu, V.Mihuțiu, P. Bogdan, D. Tudor and C. Mureșan, *Programa analitică a religiei* in primary school and based on it, the textbooks of religion for primary school pupils were printed, first-seventh grade, Arad 1940 and approved by the Bishop Andrei Magieru.

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He also wrote the paper *Spre Tabor*, the collection of sermons in four volumes: *Pregătirea, Curățirea, Luminarea și Desăvârșirea; Religia și cultura, Calendarul Bisericii cu Viețile Sfinților*. He intended to review his two major works for a new edition: *Duhul Adevărului* and *Religia Iubirii*, project that could not be materialized.

Unfortunately, Father Felea was arrested in September 1958 and imprisoned in several places. The last part of his detention was at Aiud, where on September 18, 1961, after heavy suffering, he passed from this world to eternity as a martyr of faith in Jesus Christ.

Some works remaining from this theologian in manuscript were published after his martyrdom death. The work *Spre Tabor* was printed only in 2007, the volumes: *Pregătirea și Curățirea*; in 2008, volume III: *Luminarea* and in 2009 volume IV: *Desăvârșirea*, by the kindness of his son, Ioan Felea. Thus, the remarkable work *Spre Tabor* left from the author in manuscript was entirely published.

IV. Fundaments of the confessional dimension of his person and theology

To look at the complex, living and dynamic personality of Father Felea is not a simple thing, because this theological personality manifested on several levels. First of all, it is about Ilarion V. Felea's double quality as theologian and priest which merged admirably into his being. Secondly, we surprise the teacher, who manifested in a direct and demanding way, close and distant at the same time, in front of his students from Cluj and Arad. Thirdly, we see his image as teacher of the pupils from Arad, Șega I, Bujac, Calea 6 Vânători, Grădiște etc., whom he proposed the everlasting values of Jesus Christ's Gospel and the treasure of light of His teachings. Fourthly, it is a pleasant surprise for us to discover the image of the courageous church journalist who edited the church publications from Arad: "Biserica și Școala", "Calea Mântuirii", as well as by collaborating to some church and secular publications in Arad and in the country. In this regard, we mention the publications: "Telegraful Român", "Revista Teologică", "Lumina Satelor" from Sibiu, "Duh și Adevăr" from Timișoara, and the local newspapers: "Românul" and "Tribuna" from Arad.

Last but not least, we are unmistakably surprised by his quality as missionary: by vocation, well-prepared, visionary, intelligent and brave,

who roamed the parishes of the Diocese of Arad at least once, or even several times in some of them, according to the local pastoral-missionary needs, which were neither few nor easy.

A first foundation of the confessional dimension of his theology could be seen in the unity he constantly felt and cultivated between reason, feeling and will, respectively, between intellectual knowledge, good theological information and convincing ardour of his heart. This encouraged him to concrete attitudes, consistent with what he knew and loved from the depths of his soul: the beauty of God's love manifested in Jesus Christ, which he described as following: "the name of Jesus Christ is the holiest, the best and the most beautiful name".

Through this unity of his theological being, he resembled the former Fathers of the Church, who were models and encouragements in his priestly ministry. According to the model of the Holy Fathers, Father Felea knew that the existence of God is not an abstract reality that does not touch the existence and concrete life of man, but on the contrary, He is a living, personal and loving reality, Who surrounds man who opens to Him through faith and love, with His protective attention. Through this, man is interrogated by God to respond in a concrete way to the love and dialogue He initiates with man. From this living theological consciousness, Father Felea knew how to develop a direct, living, actual, visionary and confessional theology. In other words, the Church Fathers' model of theology was a permanent guide, inspiration and impetus for the theologian Felea.

This patristic consciousness resulted in a luminous and sublime vision on priesthood, which he endeavoured to embody in his person and life. Therefore, by its very reason to be priesthood was a confessional work for him. First, it is about confessing God before men, as well as living a new life that constantly springs from Jesus Christ.

"As theology is a science, so the priesthood is a holy ministry - choice, calling, vocation, mission, apostolate, work in the service of God and the Church for the salvation, service, and happiness of men"¹.

Therefore, in its essence priesthood is a call from above, from God, and it has such a high purpose that it passes through the heavens and bear fruits for eternity. From priesthood there springs the "faithful service of

¹ Pr. Ilarion v. Felea, *Teologie și Preoție*, Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezana, Arad, 1939, p. 11

Christ the Lord and the performance of the Mysteries of the Almighty God”². In selected and penetrating words, Father Felea portrays the image of the priest-confessor in general, as well as that of the spiritual father who confesses the believers, saying: “Confession is the best place and means of religious education. The spiritual father should be a superior personality. In particular, he should be a chosen soul (endowed with superior and rich intellectual and moral attributes) and a clean one (righteous, innocent “whom there is no deceit in”); fine psychologist (to know all the mysteries of the human soul) and good pedagogue (to know how to apply the most effective methods of learning and influencing the soul). Such a priest has all the means and possibilities of safe guidance of the human soul on the ways of faith and salvation; such a priest goes and guides on the eternal ways of the spirit and truth”³.

If we were to briefly define the life and activity of Father Felea, we will not be wrong to say that it was a work of confessing par excellence. He was first guided to this ethos of his own life and activity by the very priestly ministry which he was called to, on the one hand, and by the context he was formed, lived and activated in, on the other. He noticed that certain methods of thought and theological work of his time became detrimental to the life of the Church and believers. That is why he tried to bring a new vision, breath and approach to the presence, ministry and manifestation of the theologian and priest in the life of the Church and society. He did not invent them himself, but rediscovered them by scrutinizing the depths of life, faith, and presence of the Church in the world.

We do not wish to make an overall evaluation of his work through these lines, which would not be even possible given the intentionality of this study, but we wish to refer only to the reflection of this confessional dimension in his work left in manuscript - “Ziuarul personal” (*The Personal Diary*) and printed later⁴.

Starting from here, we will try to capture the ways and means that Rev. Prof. Ilarion V. Felea used to highlight the confessional dimension of

² Pr. Ilarion v. Felea, *Teologie și Preoție*, p. 11.

³ Pr. Ilarion V. Felea, *Opera vieții mele. Ziuar personal*, Ediție îngrijită, note și studii de: Cristinel Ioja, Pr. Ioan Tulcan, Pr. Pavel Vesa, Pr. Nicolae Marcu, Pr. Filip Albu, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu” Arad, 2012, p. 80

⁴ The manuscript was printed in Arad under the title: *Opera vieții mele. Ziuar personal*, Ediție îngrijită, note și studii de: Cristinel Ioja, Pr. Ioan Tulcan, Pr. Pavel Vesa, Pr. Nicolae Marcu, Pr. Filip Albu, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu” Arad, 2012

his person and his priestly, didactic, pastoral, missionary and educational activity. In the above mentioned, we already identify the directions and coordinates which his entire activity was carried out on, and which constituted an important moment in the life of the Romanian theological education, but not less, as regards the activity and the missionary service of the Church.

V. Means and directions of manifestation of Ilarion V. Felea's priestly activity

a. Serving the holy service with godliness and sacred dignity.

Father Felea's dedication, consistency and firmness in performing the holy services in all the parishes he has passed through are impressive: Valea Bradului, Arad-Şega I and the Old Cathedral of Arad (Arad-Centre parish) where he served in the last part of his too short life. Not only the preached word, but also the liturgical services are confessing acts or deeds for Father Felea. "Ziuarul personal" (*The Personal Diary*) is a faithful radiograph of the liturgical ministry of father Felea. He respected the whole liturgical cycle of divine worship with priestly conscientiousness: Vespers, Matins, the Divine Liturgy, Great Compline, Small Compline, The Saviour Akathist Hymn, Paraklesis to the Most Holy Theotokos, etc. He performed certain holy services at the request of the faithful: prayers for the sick at the church and at home, Theophany house blessing, sanctification of the home, funeral services, memorial services, etc⁵.

b. Saying sermons on Sundays and feast days and other various occasions. This is a fruitful and constant work of the theologian from Arad. A result of these sermons uttered by Father Felea is the publication of the volume of dogmatic sermons: "Duhul Adevărului"⁶ and apologetic sermons "Religia iubirii"⁷.

The homiletic success of Father Felea can be explained in many ways. First of all, Father Felea had a solid theological and cultural-philosophical

⁵ See: *Opera vieţii mele...*, fully reports of this daily liturgical service of father Felea.

⁶ Work published during the life of the author in two editions: 1942 and 1943, at Editura Diecezana a Episcopiei Aradului, awarded by the Romanian Academy and re-edited in 1993 by the Diocese of Alba Iulia with the blessing of Bishop Andrei Andreicuţ.

⁷ Arad 1946, at Editura Diecezana of the Diocese of Arad.

education, which allowed him to portray the Church truths of faith in a clear, coherent, and reasoned way, having a clear vision of his responsibilities as preacher of the Word of God.

Secondly, Father Felea had the flair to see what was necessary to be transmitted to the people through the way of the preached word, and which came in response to the believers' questions and difficulties. That is why he attracted the crowd of believers to the holy services and, last but not least, the intelligentsia from Arad, who found itself in his word from the cathedral's pulpit.

Thirdly, Father Felea spoke convincingly, because he deeply believed in what he transmitted through word. He identified himself with the preached word and gave life to it. The thoughts transmitted through sermons flowed from the depths of his heart, lighted by the fire of love for Jesus Christ and His Church, and sustained by the joy of responsibility for those who listened to him and whom he wanted to draw near God and His Church. Reading his diary brings us to mind the multitude and variety of themes he approached in preparing his sermons. For example: "The Holy Apostles, the Saints and the Holiness of Life"⁸, "Divine Justice and Providence that Govern the World"⁹, "Confessing God to Inherit Eternal Life"¹⁰, "The Holy Scripture"¹¹, "The Grace of God"¹², etc. All the sermons of Father Felea have a pronounced and convincing character that engaged the believers to assume and live it in their personal life. On the other hand, they contain the whole treasure of faith, moral Christianity and liturgical cult, which preacher Felea sought to integrate his hearers in. The sermons of Father Felea said at the funeral services are a rich homiletic thesaurus that he always transmitted a rich word of teachings through. Their content was taken from the Holy Scripture, the lives of saints, Christian dogma, etc. In his sermons from funerals he spoke about the meaning, the richness and holiness of Christian life, the reality of death, the rest of the soul in the Kingdom of God, about Jesus Christ the Saviour, Happiness and the Joy of Salvation etc. At funerals, Father Felea managed to present the beautiful "image" of the Church and its teachings "extra muros ecclesiae",

⁸ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 208

⁹ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 209

¹⁰ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 211

¹¹ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 213

¹² *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 21

to listeners who often were not too familiar with the new life of the Church and to whom Father Felea stretched a bridge of spiritual salvation, communication and communion.

c. Religious missions in parishes. This is an extremely lively and dynamic chapter of father Felea's life of confession and activity. Since the years of his priestly activity in Valea Bradului, and the years when he served in the parishes Arad-Şega I and Arad-Centre (the Old Cathedral), Father Felea carried out a rich missionary activity in various parishes, especially where there was a need for the revival of the church life, marked by indifference, religious proselytism and insufficient pastoral-missionary work. With the encouragement of the Diocesan Centre of Arad and at the request of the various priests, Father Felea visited numerous parishes, where he served the Divine Liturgy, preached, held various conferences on burning topics of the day, confessed and partook believers of the Eucharist. His personal diary is a brightly coloured missionary fresco of the confessing work he has done. In this chapter of his work one can see the intensity he lived with and testified the saving truth revealed by Jesus Christ and how much he wanted to share the joy of salvation in Jesus Christ with the faithful who were listening to him. With his arrival in Arad, one can observe especially an intensification of the religious missions that Father Felea has carried out since 1930, when he moved to Arad-Şega I parish. His first mission was in the Macea Parish on December 21, 1930, where he served the Divine Liturgy and preached about the "Holy Communion"¹³. The series of Father Felea's missions continued in Andrei Saguna village on March 16, 1931, where he also served and preached about: "Holy Cross and Holy Communion"¹⁴. Another mission was in the Macea parish, on July 26, 1931, where he also attended a funeral service with priest Remus Oancea and preached. On December 20, 1931, he performed a religious mission in the Curtici parish¹⁵. On August 21 and September 1-8, 1932, he carried out an intense missionary activity in the Andrei Saguna parish, established not long ago, where he served and preached several times, in order to succeed an ecclesiastical configuration of that parish¹⁶. The religious missions attended by Father Felea at the Hodos-Bodrog Monastery represented a

¹³ *Opera vieţii mele...*, p. 107.

¹⁴ *Opera vieţii mele...*, p. 109.

¹⁵ *Opera vieţii mele...*, p. 113.

¹⁶ See *Opera vieţii mele...*, p. 116.

special chapter. He managed to transform them into a true local church tradition. The most suitable days for such missions at the Arad monastic settlement were those related to the feast of the Lord's Transfiguration, August 5-6 of each year, and the day of the patronage of the monastery, August 14-15. Father Felea attended this venerable monastic settlement almost every year with hundreds of believers, between 100-300 people, walking down to the monastery in procession, with crosses and church banners at the forefront, and performing songs related to the Theotokos, as well as other different religious songs. At the Hodos-Bodrog Monastery, Father Felea participated at the holy services with other priests: the Holy Unction, the Vigil and the Divine Liturgy, being often invited to preach within these holy services¹⁷. Through the missionary project of the Eparchial Centre of Arad, shown by circular no. 6541/1935 father Felea made a new missionary tour in the parishes: Bocsig, on October 29, 1935, where he preached: *What People Should Do on Sundays?*, on October 30, 1935 at Bonțești parish, on October 31, at Almaș parish, where he spoke to people about the purpose of culture and of culture houses. Then he continued the mission in the Măderat parish, on November 5, 1935, in the Mâsca parish, on November 7, 1935, in the Nădab parish, on November 12, 1935 and on November 19, 1935 in the Socodor parish. He continued his work of confession with the same missionary impetus, on December the same year, in the parishes: Șiclău, Păuliș, Fibiș, Giroc, Jimbolia, Beregsău, Cenad, Comlăuș, Seceani, Cernetez¹⁸.

Father Felea visited again the Curtici parish, where he preached to the youth about "Guarding the Christian Law", but, and he also confessed 41 people¹⁹. Also, on March 7 and 8, 1942, the religious missions at Macea were resumed, and he spoke to the young people "On the Observance of the Divine Law" and "On the Gifts of the Church"²⁰ to the faithful at the Divine Liturgy. Of course, the series of missionary events that Father Felea created and developed does not end with what has been presented here. There are many more, but the emphasis of those already mentioned manages to reveal to our conscience the exceptional missionary and confessing personality of Rev. Prof. Dr. Ilarion V. Felea.

¹⁷ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 122; p. 133 etc.

¹⁸ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 145-146.

¹⁹ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 229.

²⁰ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 229.

d. Religious conferences on topical issues at that time. A special chapter of the missionary work of Priest Felea is the multitude, the diversity and the actuality of the conferences he held in different places and on various occasions. His favourite places of conferencing were: the Auditorium of the Theological Academy, the Diocesan Hostel, the Cultural Palace, all in Arad, the Culture House from Şega I and from many other parishes, the Theological Academy in Cluj etc. At the Culture House in Arad-Pârneava Father Felea began the series of conferences that he had presented to an increasingly diverse audience. The first conference held here was entitled: “Pages Chosen from the Orthodox Life”²¹. At “St. George” Youth Association he held the conference: “The Sadness and Joy of the Resurrection” and at the priestly meetings he presented the conference: “How Can the Priest Win the Collaboration of the Laity?”²² Within the Clergy Association “Andrei Saguna” at Lipova he held the conference: “Icons Chosen from the Life of Orthodoxy”, and at the Culture House of Segă he presented the conference on “Peace Day”²³. In the meeting room of the Arad-Centre parish, he presented a very interesting conference entitled: “Christianity in front of Modern Science and Life”²⁴. Father Felea transmitted the important message of the Church in the space of educational institutions. Thus, for several times “Moise Nicoară” High School was the host of Ilarion V. Felea’s lectures. There he held the conference with the theme: “The Person of the Saviour According to the Historical Documents of His Age”²⁵.

It should also be mentioned that in the missions he carried out, priest Ilarion V. Felea also included a conference almost every time, which usually wanted to be an answer to the challenges the respective parish faced. It can also be observed that the theologian from Arad had a sharp sense of knowing the pastoral realities on the spot, which he often found the right antidote to. The impact of his conferences turned into a true church, pastoral, missionary and cultural event in the parish. If in the past decades there was not a greater dislocation of believers from the Body of the Church, it was due, not least, to the missionary efforts of Father Felea.

²¹ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 109.

²² *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 110.

²³ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 112-113.

²⁴ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 114.

²⁵ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 119.

e. Fostering and accompanying the activities of “Oastea Domnului” (The Army of the Lord). At the beginning of the 20th century, at Sibiu, a Christian religious movement for the revival of the life of the Church was born, supported by the Metropolitan of Transylvania, Dr. Nicolae Balan. Its name was Oastea Domnului (The Army of the Lord). And its activity, program and priorities were long under the care and clear vision of the Metropolitan of Sibiu. He took care that such a movement of spiritual revival was created in each parish, which he drew a unified action program for. This also explains the fact that in the parishes where Father Felea was a priest, such spiritual movements arose, or, finding them already established, he constantly supported them. The highlight of father Felea’s activities on the movement “Oastea Domnului” was his missionary activity in Arad. But he began the guiding of “Oastea Domnului” in the Brad area, where he started his priestly activity. On July 6, 1930 he “patronized the meeting of Oastea Domnului from Crișan, Ribița, Uibărești, Ribicioara de sus, Rîșculița, Brad and Potingani, where he spoke about the meaning of “Oastea Domnului”. All in Potingani”²⁶. On August 10, 1930, he attended the meeting of “Oastea Domnului” again in Potingani village. In Arad, the permanent meeting place of “Oastea Domnului” was the Culture House of Șega, the Culture House of Pârneava (Arad), and the meeting room of the Old Cathedral (Arad-Centre parish). The meeting of “Oastea Domnului” from the entire city of Arad took place on March 1, 1931, at the Culture House of Pârneava where father Felea held the conference: “Pages chosen from the life of Orthodoxy”.²⁷ On August 16, 1931 he held another conference at the same association, at the Culture House of Arad-Pârneava. On August 19, 1933 he participated at the meeting of “Oastea Domnului” at the Culture House of Șega I, when this movement of spiritual awakening was established in the Arad-Șega I parish too. A new gathering took place on March 26, 1933 at the parish Șega I, and he had a speech²⁸. It should also be noted that these meetings of “Oastea Domnului” were held every Sunday after lunch at the Culture House of this parish, where Father Felea served from 1930 until June 1, 1939. So priest Felea had also a constant activity of confession and missionary in terms of supporting and coordinating the activities of “Oastea Domnului” from the Arad-Șega

²⁶ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 104.

²⁷ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 109.

²⁸ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 119.

parish. Then, after 1939, when he was appointed to the Old Cathedral, he continued this activity in the central parish of Arad, in the meeting room of the Arad-Centre parish (the Old Cathedral), but also at the Culture House of Arad-Pârneava²⁹. Among the themes that Father Felea approached at the meetings of “Oastea Domnului” on Sunday afternoons we mention: “The Light of Christ that Illuminates the Eyes of our Soul and Body”³⁰, “About Faith and Prayer”³¹, “The Steps to Perfection”³², “On the Worship to Theotokos”³³, “The Nine Commandments of the Church”³⁴, “Psalter and Psalms”³⁵, “On the Renewal of the Soul”³⁶, “He who belongs to Christ is a new being”³⁷, “Jesus Christ the Saviour and Judge”³⁸. All the themes of the conferences held at the assemblies of “Oastea Domnului” bears the mark of the theologian-confessor, who brings out the wisdom richness of the saving Christian truth from the depths of his soul. Thus, the good deeds of love for God and men become fruitful in the faithful life.

VI. Conclusions

The theological work of Father Felea carries on the unmistakable seal of confession. The theologian from Arad wrote articles, studies, books, conferences, or he spoke not from the desire to say anything ordinary, trivial and superficial, but always trying to testify about what he knew, and, above all, about what he personally lived with apostolic conviction. Therefore, his theological thinking is not arid, superficial, but always profound, alive, apologetic, and confessing.

Secondly, Father Felea’s personality was shaped in a form of confession from the roots of his own existence that is from his family and especially

²⁹ See more details about this tireless activity of Father Felea at the meetings of “Oastea Domnului” (*The Army of the Lord*): *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 119-129.

³⁰ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 130.

³¹ *Opera vieții mele...*, p.132.

³² *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 132.

³³ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 133.

³⁴ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 133.

³⁵ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 133.

³⁶ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 134.

³⁷ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 135.

³⁸ *Opera vieții mele...*, p. 138.

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from his father, who was priest too, and a diligent and dutiful one, from whom he learned the cult of working, prayer and Christian confession. Besides his family, Father Felea was part of a wider family, the theological and church family, which he always inspired from. The theological and orthodox Sibiu, headed by Metropolitan Dr. Nicolae Balan, was for him the spiritual matrix, which set up his theological and spiritual profile. He looked at the Metropolitan of Transylvania with great admiration, who, in turn, encouraged and appreciated the worthy work of the young theologian Ilarion V. Felea, encouraging him and partly printing his theological work.

Thirdly, Father Ilarion V. Felea had a wide and pertinent perception and vision of things, unwilling to imagine an abstract, cabinet theology floating above the realities of life and the world. On the contrary, he wanted a theology ready to inspire and to animate both the preachers of the faith and the Orthodox faithful, who had to be thoroughly initiated into the mysteries of faith and the Church's life. The confessional dimension of his person and theology must be regarded in this context, which brought a tremendous service to the work of the Orthodox Church in the western part of the country, and, not only.

The careful and admiring examination of his theological and ecclesiastical thinking and activity is an act of knowledge of the theological and ecclesial past, on the one hand. But, at the same time, it helps those who have this theological and church mission in the present to be inspired by the luminous, competent and courageous ethos of the theologian from Arad. Thus, the work of Theology and Romanian Orthodoxy in the contemporary world will also be a living, current, bright and confessing one, as it was in the time of the Rev. Professor Ilarion V. Felea.