

Book Reviews

Rev. Prof. Dr. Viorel SAVA, *Slujirea sacerdotală în context contemporan. Studii de teologie liturgică și pastorală (Priestly Service in a Contemporary Context. Studies of Liturgical and Pastoral Theology)*, Crimca Publishing House, Suceava, 2023, 384 pp.

In the latter part of 2023, at Crimca Publishing House of Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuți, appeared the exceptional work *Studies in Liturgical and Pastoral Theology*, by Father Professor Dr. Viorel Sava, who teaches Liturgical Theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Iași, being at the same time PhD coordinator and scientific supervisor of many students and master's students from the same faculty. The work, both liturgical and pastoral, brings together studies compiled by the father professor during the years of research in the two fields of Practical Theology, now being brought together in a single volume. This volume is offered to father Viorel Sava, on his beautiful 60th birthday, by his disciples. As the editors state, Father Viorel Sava returns this gift “to his spiritual and physical parents, to his family, to the teachers of the past (among whom Father Professor Nicolae D. Necula is in the place of honor), to the Romanian liturgy, to the Romanian Orthodox Church and to Christ the Lord, to whom he serves with exemplary selflessness” (p. 42).

At the beginning of this volume, in a medallion created as an offering of honor, suggestively titled “Fr. Prof. Dr. Viorel Sava at the «age of the perfect man» in Christ”, the editors: Fr. Associate Professor. Dr. Lucian Petroaia, Fr. Professor Dr. Marian Vâlcu and Fr. Professor Dr. Dumitru Vanca make a foray into the life and the priestly and theological development of the father professor, creating an overview of the theological work of His Holiness and some coordinates of his theological thinking, as well as the far-reaching academic projects, which are in full swing.

As I stated at the beginning of my review, the volume brings together very updated theological-liturgical and pastoral articles and studies, which can inspire the future and current ministers of the Holy Shrines in the sacramental and pastoral work that they have to fulfill. All the materials edited in this unitary volume are approached from two perspectives: on the one hand, in a theological approach and foundation, and on the other hand, from a practical perspective. Thus, all the themes deal with current pastoral problems and situations, which priests encounter in the parishes where they serve. From this perspective, as the editors of the volume also appreciate, “Reverend offers - through this volume - to the Romanian academic environment and the Romanian Orthodox priesthood a dense, interesting and valuable theological-liturgical-pastoral compendium” (p. 39). The materials presented in this volume offer important contributions both in the liturgical and pastoral areas, this fact being a notable one, especially taking into account the fact that in the Romanian theological environment, an updated Pastoral manual is missing. From this perspective, this volume brings a welcome contribution to the development of a liturgical-pastoral vision regarding the service of the Church in contemporary society. The topics treated are solidly argued theologically, through their subject matter and content, they are also of great relevance and share the practical experience acquired by Father Professor Viorel Sava both in the professorship and in the pastoral-missionary work carried out as a priest in the field of Christ’s service and of the faithful entrusted for shepherding.

The volume begins, like a successful Pastoral manual, by presenting priestly ministry as the embodiment of holiness and responsibility (pp. 43-47). Next, the author refers to the person of the priest as a co-servant with the angels in the chariot of the Divine Liturgy (pp. 48-51). Then, we are offered for reflection another study by the father professor regarding the liturgical consciousness of the priest of our days, the author motivating the topicality of this theme through the prism of the fact that

“in a world in spiritual decline, in which authentic spirituality is attacked frequently and violently by pseudo-spiritualities, where

magic and sorcery seem to have more credibility than the «word of truth», in a world where sects and sectarian organizations, often very little religious, assault the consciences and common sense of those insufficiently rooted in revealed truth, preaching «Christs» who have nothing in common with the Incarnate Son of God, in a society where alcohol, sexuality, drugs, uninspired music, and the like are offered as mediums and means of comfort for troubled souls and in search, the formation of the liturgical consciousness of the priest appears to us with an overwhelming actuality” (p. 54-55).

Referring to the service of a priest whose liturgical consciousness is alive and active, Father Sava emphasizes two major requirements that he must embody: “to internalize the act he is performing” and “to serve with fear, with love and responsibility” (pp. 64-65).

Several other studies in this volume are dedicated to the parish. The parish is approached at the beginning as a factor and model of unity in a divided world. In this first study, trying to provide a diagnosis of the contemporary parish, the father professor presents three types of parishes: the active parish, which refers to “the manifestation, by liturgical excellence of the community”; the sociological parish, “consisting of «Christians with the name», who nominally belong to the Church” and the hidden parish “consisting of believers who, due to poverty, suffering, social degradation, cannot physically come to the Liturgy... (p. 72). Analyzing the causes that “distorted” the primary meaning of the notion of “parish”, the author of the study mentions the following: “permanent reorganization of communities (from villages and cities)” (p. 74); “diminishing or even losing the consciousness of belonging to a parish” (p. 75); “spiritual narcissism” (p. 75); “the incomplete integration of the priest into the community for which he was ordained” (p. 76); “the emergence of a new type of parish”, which the author calls “the home diaspora, by which we understand ... the communities of believers, who live and work in a foreign space, but which are under the canonical obedience of the mother Church” (p. 77) and

“excessive focus on social problems in the parish to the detriment of the service of the Liturgy” (p. 78). Offering some solutions and opportunities for the revitalization of the current parish, Father Professor outlines the following pastoral directions: “the priest should know his parishioners well” (p. 79); “to build among his parishioners the consciousness of their belonging to the parish community” (p. 81); the priest must be aware that “through the act of ordination ... he becomes the father of his parishioners, but also the son of the village or community he serves” (p. 81); “adaptation of pastoral methods and means to the concrete situation of the contemporary parish” (p. 82), “concentration of the priest on the liturgical service and, in particular, on the service of the Holy Liturgy” (p. 83).

In another study of this volume, the theological-spiritual meanings of the liturgical space are presented, the professor referring to it as a “house of the Holy Liturgy”, “synthesis of the seen world and anticipation of the Kingdom of God”; “space of ceaseless anamnesis” and “high mountain of deep prayer” (pp. 87-101).

Liturgical innovations are also addressed in another contribution, which the professor defines as “liturgical singularizations”. At the beginning of the study, the place and meanings of the divine cult in Orthodox spirituality are specified, and then the relationship between the divine cult and the teaching of faith is treated. Next, the problem of adapting the cult to the “requirements of the contemporary world” is addressed, the author specifying in this regard the fact that “one cannot enrich the spiritual life by impoverishing the food of this life”, which is actually the divine cult (p. 110). Liturgical innovations are defined by the author as “distorted forms of the adaptation of worship ordinances” (p. 110), and their consequences are also presented in theological-liturgical, spiritual, but also in pastoral-missionary terms. At the end of the study, the author presents some viable perspectives regarding the preservation of the Church’s cult in an authentic form, this problem having to be treated “with a sense of responsibility, being able to contribute to liturgical uniformity, to preserving Orthodox dogmatic and cultic integrity and to preserving the place on which Orthodoxy has always had in history” (p. 114).

The sharing of believers in the Orthodox tradition in older and newer challenges is the theme of another study from the volume presented in these lines, the study being presented in a liturgical-pastoral approach. In this research, the Father Sava refers to the specific characteristics of participation in the Holy Liturgy and receiving the Holy Communion within it, to the problem of the frequency of receiving the Holy Communion, as well as to the preparation of the believer for receiving it according to the teaching of the Church, the Holy Fathers, the theologians and the spiritual fathers of Orthodoxy. At the end of the study are presented, in this context, the challenges of the pandemic, with all the privations of this delicate period, which led to the “unnatural liturgy” (p. 164), in which the faithful were removed from the possibility of participating to the Divine Liturgies and even more much to communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord, “the whole liturgical and spiritual life, private and communal”, being “strongly shaken” (p. 175). The pastoral consequences of this pandemic period were: “the fragmentation of the liturgical community and the weakening of those who participate in the Holy Liturgy” and the alienation of people from each other and the distancing of relationships between them (p. 176). In this situation, “restoring the unity of the parish liturgical community and recovering its integrity... falls to the parish priest, the clergy from the monasteries, the church administrative structures, the theological schools, the hierarchs and, last but not least, the faithful” (p 176).

Another theme treated in this volume is that of the Christian family. Thus, a first study refers to the Christian family and its problems in the light of the canons of Saint Basil the Great, in a pastoral approach. First of all, the father teacher refers to the family and the sins that endanger its unity and morality, treated through the lens of the canons of Saint Basil the Great. These dangers that affect the morality of the family are present to this day, among them the author mentions: “mixed marriages, divorce, trial marriages, concubinage, white marriages, domestic violence, clergy marriage” (pp. 183-184). Analyzing the canonical provisions of Saint Basil the Great regarding family life, the author concludes that “his pastoral and

parental attitude considers the one who needs to be recovered and healed, but also the one who helps him recover and heal” (p. 193).

In another study, dedicated to the same issue of the family, Father Professor Viorel Sava refers to the Christian family today: challenges, chances, perspectives, in the thinking of Saint John Chrysostom “in his time, for our time” (p. 194). This theme becomes an interesting and current one, especially in the more general framework of family pastoral care, which is currently in a “process of desacralization and decomposition”, especially in the context of contact with the “secularized family from the European space”, in which the dominant note it consists of “the trivialization of the moral values of the family and the encouragement of the idea of liberation from the canons imposed by the status of a family member” (p. 195). Father professor Viorel Sava finds in this regard “in the theology of Saint John Chrysostom ... aspects that confront the family today”, this fact highlighting “his ability to anticipate, centuries in advance, the crisis situations of the family ... and ... the fact that, in his time, the family was faced with the same problems to which the Church, through its ministers, had to respond pastorally, in the present” (p. 195). Thus, going through fragments of the vast work of St. John Golden Mouth, the father teacher highlights the love, attachment and respect for the family, the sanctity of the family, preparation for marriage, the wedding as a “feast of joy with the poor «brothers of Christ»” (p. 205). The family appears in the thinking of Saint John Chrysostom as an icon of Heaven, uniting the two spouses to each other and together, with Christ. In the conclusion of this study, father Viorel Sava makes the following assessments: “the restoration of the family today must begin with the restoration of our thinking and understanding about the family, with the rediscovery of God’s plan regarding the family and the vocation that the family has in God’s plan”. Thus, “The Church, through its ministers, must intensify its pastoral activities that have the family at the center of its concerns, create medium and long-term programs for protecting the family, promoting moral values in the family, protecting and helping families in economic, moral or spiritual crisis, to intensify catechesis among young people and to prepare them for family life” (p. 214).

Other studies presented in Father Professor Viorel Sava's volume refer to the Mystery of Confession and the role of the spiritual father. Thus, in a first study, the role of the priest in the life of the priestly son and the virtues that the priest must embody are presented. Among the qualities of the priest, the father teacher develops the following: "the priest should be a spiritual man" (p. 216); "to love with the love of Christ" (p. 216); "to be a man of prayer" (p. 216); "to have the gift and skill to penetrate the most hidden secrets of the hearts of his spiritual sons souls" (p. 217); and "to be the first friend of the spiritual son" (p. 217).

Another study is dedicated to the spiritual priest and the Sacrament of Confession, dealing with the place of the Sacrament of Confession among the other Holy Sacraments and its importance in the life of the Church. Next, the study refers to the preparation of the priest for the Sacrament of Confession, highlighting both the role of close and distant preparation. Father Professor also highlights the importance of sanctity of life, exemplary morality, science and culture that the spiritual priest must demonstrate through his personal example. It is also highlighted the need to know psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic tools and their effects in relation to the Holy Sacrament of Confession, because "knowledge in the field of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy can reveal to the spiritual priest their interference with Confession, but also the superiority of the latter" (p. 223). Another aspect of the priest's preparation for the Holy Sacrament of Confession is his own confession, the author showing that when "the priest is confessed and the believers who come to him know this, the word of instruction he conveys to the penitent during confession has for the latter the power of law" (p. 226). In the continuation of the study, the author refers to the priest, as the penitent's preparer for Confession, showing that, although "the preparation can be done to the believers in a group, so a collective preparation, but also to each individual, therefore, an individual preparation" (p. 227). Then, the study focuses on the person of the priest and the penitent in the confessional, the author showing that "the priest must penetrate into the soul of the penitent as much as sin has penetrated, to make light where darkness has penetrated" (p. 231). At the

end of the study, the father teacher refers to the priest and the penitent after the Confession, showing from this perspective that “with the end of the confession and the saying of the release prayer, the connection between the priest and the penitent did not end either... From this moment on, the priest is the spiritual father of the disciple and he has the duty to raise him spiritually” (p. 234). On the other hand, “the penitent comes to confession to receive forgiveness, but also teaching” (p. 234). But, at the same time, “the priest does not preserve the image of the one who sinned, but of the one who confessed and repented” (p. 235).

The volume continues by addressing the issue of suffering. Thus, in a first study Father Professor Viorel Sava refers to caring for those in suffering as a philanthropic work and an exercise in humility. The study develops the following aspects: suffering and communion with Christ; “swimming” through suffering; suffering and purification; Christ - the “Debtor” of the suffering; and suffering - “the rule of humility”, the author’s final conclusion being that “caring for those in suffering is a philanthropic work and an exercise in humility, but also a way of exaltation or glorification” (p. 245).

On the same theme of suffering, in another study, the father professor refers to the healing of the human person, as a perpetual mission of the Church, in a liturgical approach. General aspects are presented at the beginning of the study, regarding the Holy Mysteries as mysteries of the Christian’s healing, and then there are extensive developments regarding Christ “Doctor of souls and bodies” in the Holy Mysteries, with special reference to the hands of Christ, who sit through through the sanctified servants within each Holy Sacrament of the Church over their recipients, giving them physical and spiritual healing. At the end of this study is presented “the only medicine that can heal”, the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Communion, which restore the human person, both physically and spiritually. In a final conclusion, the father professor appreciates that “looking at the Holy Mysteries... we first understand the fact that Christ, the Doctor of souls and bodies, entrusted as a gift to His Church the power to heal the infirmities of the people who, with steadfast

faith and strong hope, seek relief. This power works through ministering priests and is fulfilled through the Holy Mysteries. At the same time, we understand that the Holy Mysteries offer medicines or cures suitable for various ailments. Finally, we understand that, through the Holy Mysteries in their unity, we discover new and profound meanings and, above all, that, in their work and effects, they support and strengthen each other, for the spiritual benefit of the recipients” (p. 282).

From the presentations of Father Professor Viorel Sava made in the pages of this volume, there are also references to authentic pastoral models, embodied in hierarchs and worthy servants of the Holy Altar, of the Romanian nation and of the department of Liturgical and Pastoral Theology, such as: Saint Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna of Transylvania, Metropolitan Melchisedec Ștefănescu of Romania, or the teacher fathers Vasile Mitrofanovici from Cernăuți or Ene Braniște and Nicolae D. Necula from Bucharest.

In this sense, a first study is dedicated to the teaching ministry of the priest in the vision of two great Romanian hierarchs: Saint Andrei Șaguna, Metropolitan of Transylvania, and Melchisedec Ștefănescu, bishop of Romania. At the beginning of the study, the Pastoral Theology manuals compiled by the two hierarchs are presented, the author making the following assessments:

“In 1857, the first *Pastoral Theology* manual produced in the Romanian space appeared in Sibiu, bearing the imprint of the genius embodied in the personality of the Metropolitan of Transylvania, Andrei Șaguna, a published manual in Romanian with Cyrillic characters... Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna’s manual marked the beginning of the appearance of *Pastoral Theology works* «for clerical schools» in Romania, after, for a period of time, pastoral literature consisted of translations... Only five years after the appearance of the first manual of *Pastoral Theology* made on Romanian soil, in the other part of the country, in Moldova, Archimandrite Melchisedec Ștefănescu, the future

bishop of Roman, is also compiling a *Pastoral Theology* for Seminaries in Romania. This work can be considered a textbook of Pastoral Theology in the true sense of the word” (pp. 297-298).

The study continues by presenting the vision of the two Romanian hierarchs on the theological and secular training of the priest, the content of his theological and intellectual training. The following aspects are presented further: the object of the teaching that the priest transmits to his pastors; the recipients of the teaching ministry of the priest and the characteristics of church teaching. In the final considerations, Father Professor Viorel Sava shows that

“in the view of the two hierarchs, a good teacher of the faithful, as the priest must be, must have a thorough training, a theological, specialized training... but also a lay training, to be able to dialogue with pastors whose relationship with the Church is more tenuous, but whose education is more elevated. The secular teaching, however, must be used by the priest in the service of the holy teaching. A particularly important aspect, emphasized by the two hierarchs in their pastoral work, concerns the priest’s ability to adapt to the context in which he fulfills his ministry... the most important aspect is that relating to the right faith and pure piety of the pastor in his activity as a teacher...” (p. 316-317).

The pastoral vision of the two hierarchs of the 19th century “fully suits the priest of our days and the faithful whom he is called to guide in his capacity as a teacher” (p. 317). In a final conclusion, the author considers that “The divine inspiration of their work and experience makes the two hierarchs of the 19th century, St. Andrei of Transylvania and Melchisedec of Roman, models of pastoral and teaching service for generations of priests and believers who lived from then until our time and, with certainty, for the generations of priests and believers who will follow us” (p. 317).

The study dedicated to Father Professor Dr. Vasile Mitrofanovici from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Chernivtsi, highlights the pastoral aspects reflected in his work. Thus, at the beginning, father Viorel Sava presents a bio-bibliographical sketch of the father professor evoked, then referring to the pastoral aspects of the work of the father professor, and concluding with the following appreciation: “we note the awareness of the importance of the priesthood and about its pastoral work in the Church that professor Vasile Mitrofanovici has” (p. 358), also highlighting the fact that he “sees and understands pastoral ministry as a practical, natural extension of academic theology, the parish being the finality of academic instruction” (p. 359).

Referring in another study to the personality of father professor Dr. Ene Braniște, from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest in the context of contemporary liturgical research, father professor Viorel Sava presents at the beginning a brief biographical portrait of father Braniște, then drawing the main research directions and themes reflected in his theological work. These are: “the translation of some basic liturgical works from patristic and post-patristic literature” (p. 331); “the development of manuals for Theological Seminaries and Faculties of Theology” (p. 332); his constant concern with the question of “liturgical unity and uniformity” (p. 334); “the problem of adapting worship to the requirements of the contemporary world” (p. 337); “the divine cult of other Christian confessions... introducing into Romanian theology elements of comparative liturgy at a scientific and academic level never seen before” (p. 341); as well as interdisciplinary approaches (p. 345). Referring to the theological-liturgical work of father professor Ene Braniște, father Viorel Sava appreciates that he “harmoniously combines the historical-liturgical elements with those of liturgical exegesis, the elements of liturgical theology with those of liturgical practice, so that each theme appears in a mature and accomplished form” (p. 347).

From the vast theological-liturgical work of Father Professor Ene Braniște, the author chooses to refer in a study to the problem of participation in the Holy Liturgy, as a personal necessity and ecclesial

manifestation, appreciating that this problem appears today “between the danger of secularization and the necessity of renewal” (p. 129). At the end of this study, father professor Viorel Sava shows that the state of crisis that the parish registered during the time of father professor Ene Braniște “and that the parish also registers today, can only be understood by referring to the way of life and manifestation of Christian communities from the first centuries, and the methods and means proposed today to improve the participation of the faithful in the Holy Liturgy can only be possible through the permanent appeal to the experience that the past offers us” (p. 134).

The portraits of Romanian liturgists continue with the presentation of the personality of father professor Dr. Nicolae D. Necula, in a tribute study composed by father professor Viorel Sava, the direct disciple of father professor Nicolae D. Necula, when he was 70 years old, the author concludes that “an overview of the work of Father Professor Nicolae D. Necula gives us the opportunity to observe ... that we are facing one of the most diligent and fruitful of the labourers in the field of Romanian theological research from the last decades, and in the field which he serves, especially that of Liturgical Theology, is by far the first” (p. 326).

From the rich theological work of father professor Nicolae D. Necula, father Viorel Sava stops in a study from the contents of the volume, to highlight the care for those who passed away in Orthodoxy, reflected in the theological thinking and in the liturgical-pastoral practice of the father professor evoked. At the beginning of the study, the author presents a synthetic look at the theological work of Father Professor Nicolae D. Necula in the context of Romanian theological-liturgical research, in order to then briefly present the work of Father Professor concerning the care of those who passed away in Orthodoxy. Regarding the theological approach to the commemoration of the fallen, the professor reveals himself to be a “guardian of the liturgical rites and of the right faith” (p. 286), and by the way he explains these funeral rites, His Holiness he reveals himself to be an interpreter of divine worship and a teacher of the faithful” (p. 292), protecting them from some harmful practices and the inappropriate

meanings of the ordinances of commemorating the dead. In the conclusion of his study, father professor Viorel Sava appreciates that

“the theology of father professor Nicolae D. Necula regarding the commemoration of the ones that passed away is deeply rooted in the faith and in the liturgical tradition of the Church. Father Necula is a complete theologian, mastering the deep meanings of Dogmatic Theology, which he expresses in a form accessible to all categories of believers, being equally a refined connoisseur of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, Church History, Canon Law, and of the other theological disciplines, on top of which he adds a vast secular culture, mastering the art of the word, which he masterfully interweaves with a lively, dynamic and constructive pastoral practice...; he wrote for his time, responding to real and concrete challenges in parishes and monasteries, giving answers deeply penetrated by his theological science, academic authority and personal liturgical-pastoral experience. This type of approach makes him unique and with an unmistakable identity among the liturgists of the time” (p. 295-296).

Father Professor Viorel Sava's work ends happily with a study dedicated to Father Trandafir (Popa Tanda) from Ioan Slavici's short story, which the author considers “a perpetual pastoral model” (p. 360). At the beginning of the study is presented our ongoing need (or dependence) for authentic pastoral models. Next, the author briefly presents Slavici's short story, *Popa Tanda*, in order to then capture the pastoral aspects derived from it: father Trandafir - portrait of a shepherd; Sărăceni - the village and its inhabitants in an economic-social and pastoral diagnosis; the steps of change, initiated by Father Trandafir's pastoral work in this community, and at the end, some useful lessons for the contemporary pastor. The string of these teachings presented by the author of the study are the following: the importance of the efforts “that the priest must make to fully integrate

into the concrete pastoral reality of the parish he is called to serve; realistic and complete diagnosis of spiritual, socio-economic, ethnic, confessional life, etc. of the parish, in order to realize a pastoral project in the medium and long term; also ... in carrying out any pastoral project”, the priest having to “rely with faith on God’s help” (p. 373). Another conclusion of this study is that the priest, in his pastoral work, must use “appropriate and timely implemented methods” (p. 373). The last conclusion of the author of the study is that “the outside world really changes only when our inner renewal has occurred, which means that the inner life of the priest plays an essential role in the work of spiritual renewal, spiritual and material building of the parish which he shepherds” (p. 374).

At the end of the volume, the editors have placed an abstract in English, which summarizes the subject matter of the materials in its contents.

We are facing a very successful liturgical-pastoral treatise, which addresses current and impactful themes for contemporary pastoral care. A work written in an attractive language, which conquers from the beginning of the reading, to the end of it, with a rigorous bibliographic documentation, written in an academic manner, but also with the skill and dedication of an experienced pastor in the liturgical-pastoral realm. The content of the volume itself outlines the fully mature profile of Father Professor Viorel Sava, its author, the competent professor at the department, but also the experienced minister and clergyman at the Holy Altar. A work, which, of course, imposes itself in the theological consciousness of the current generation of servants and believers of the Church, but also of the future ones, as a liturgical-pastoral guide, which has the gift of guiding the steps of those who want to deepen and to be perfected along the paths of experience of the Orthodox faith.

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