Sfântul Preot Mucenic Ilarion Felea, *POCĂINŢA. Studiu de documentare teologică şi psihologică*, Colecţia *Ilarion V. Felea – OPERE COMPLETE* 1 (*REPENTANCE. Theological and Psychological Documentation Study*, coll. *Ilarion V. Felea – OPERE COMPLETE* 1), Editura Universităţii „Aurel Vlaicu" din Arad, Arad, 2025, 350 pp.

The year 2025, the year of the canonization of the Holy Priest Martyr Ilarion Felea by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, meant for the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Ilarion V. Felea" in Arad the year of extensive theological and spiritual events dedicated to the patron saint of this Faculty. Within these events, an extensive editorial project was carried out, initiated and coordinated by Father Prof. Dr. Cristinel Ioja, Dean of this Faculty, a project through which the complete work of the Holy Priest Martyr Ilarion Felea was published. This editorial project was conceived in 20 volumes, of which 10 have been published so far, with the remaining 10 volumes to be published in 2026.

The first of the republished works of Father Professor Ilarion Felea was the work *POCĂINŢA. Studiu de documentare teologică şi psihologică* (*REPENTANCE. A Theological and Psychological Documentation Study*), representing the father professor's doctoral thesis in theology, compiled under the coordination of Professor Ioan Mihălcescu, and defended at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest, on October 23-25, 1939. The theme of this doctoral thesis, although developed at the Department of Systematics of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest, has a very close connection with the pastoral care and life of the Church. This can also be understood from the author's words, from the preface of the work, first published at the Archdiocesan Printing House, Sibiu, in 1939:

> "I have had the idea of a work on Repentance for a long time. I have been in the service of the clergy for 12 years, during which time I have realized not only the saving significance of the Sacrament, but also the shortcomings and difficulties that the confessor encounters in performing it. In Romanian we have enough books of instruction on Repentance, but too few and only partially satisfy the needs of faith and Christian life in our century" (Pr. Ilarion Felea, *Repentance. Study of theological and psychological documentation*, Theological Series, no. 16, Archdiocesan Printing House, Sibiu, 1939, p. III).

This confession of Saint Hilarion leads Father Professor Cristinel Ioja to make the observation in the preface to the new edition of Saint Hilarion's doctoral thesis that: "doctoral studies had first a pastoral and then an academic motivation for Saint Hilarion Felea" (Rev. Prof. Dr. Cristinel Ioja, "Introduction. Repentance - an inedited study on Orthodox soteriology. A dogmatic theme with pastoral-liturgical motivations and implications", p. 7).

The work *Repentance* is a complex one, in its content encountering recourse to biblical and patristic sources, offering a historical, theological and liturgical-practical perspective on the theme of repentance, as a personal, communal, sacramental and healing, saving reality in the history of Christianity and in the history of several religions.

In the preface to the first edition of the work, the author, referring to the Sacrament of Repentance, makes the following observations in the practical realm:

> "A good part of the faithful do not have clear convictions about it, which is why some no longer practice it properly, and others have completely alienated themselves from the confessional chair. Instead, sects, in their own way, stir it up with frenzy, as if it were a novelty, and thus give rise to doubts and confusions that open the door to proselytism" (Pr. Ilarion Felea, *Repentance. A Study of Theological and Psychological Documentation*, ed. 1939, p. III).

Evaluating this Holy Sacrament from the perspective of Holy Scripture, the dogmatic, liturgical and spiritual Tradition of the Church, Saint Hilarion also emphasizes the moral and social benefits of Penance, calling it a *school*: "... penance is a religious necessity and a moral benefit for man and for society. The best reformation of morals is done in the school of repentance, in the chair of confession... Penance is the best school of moral and national rebirth" (p. IV, ed. 1939). Regarding the practical, liturgical and pastoral dimension of Penance as a Sacrament of the Church, Saint Hilarion Felea discovers both the priest's responsibility in relation to it, and the lack of concern of some priests and even teachers regarding spirituality. Starting from the height, purpose and place of spirituality in The Church, in connection with the Sacrament of Penance and its neglect in theological schools, expresses once again the motivation for the doctoral study: "That is why when I contemplated the present work, my first thought was to address the clergy, to collect from them pastoral experiences and then processed and published, to make them available to the clergy" (p. 274, ed. 2025). In this regard, he elaborates a *questionnaire* that he sends to over a hundred priests from the Romanian Patriarchate. The answers to the questions of the questionnaire are presented and analyzed in the doctoral thesis.

The study of the Mystery of Repentance begins in the first part of the work with an incursion into the history of religions, the author being influenced by Professor Ioan Mihălcescu, in order to demonstrate the universality of man's tendency towards repentance in relation to the Creator. The importance of the theme emerges from the extensive analysis that Saint Hilarion carries out, starting with the texts of the Old and New Testaments, up to the patristic texts and those of the Ecumenical Councils. He recognizes the importance of repentance in the Old Testament, especially in the psalms and in the prophetic writings, and emphasizes with arguments the unity and organic continuity between the teaching of the New Testament and the writings of the first Christian centuries (p. 140, ed. 2025).

Also, at the end of a demonstration regarding the Sacrament of Repentance in Scripture and Tradition, Saint Hilarion writes: "both in the

writings of the Holy Fathers and in the canons of the Ecumenical Councils we have encountered clear texts that fully convince us that repentance in the Church has always been believed, preached and applied both as a Holy Sacrament and a dogma" (pp. 190-191, ed. 2025).

A special and unique chapter for that time refers to the Mystery of Repentance as a presence in the liturgical books of the Orthodox Church. Saint Hilarion analyzes the presence of Repentance in the Octoechos, Triodion, Prayer Book, in the teaching on Confession, in the service of confession, in the canon of repentance, as well as in the *Very Useful Book for the Soul* and the canons of Saint John the Faster. In this analysis we observe a unified method regarding the understanding of the connection between dogma-spirituality and the worship of the Church. He is aware that in the prayers and hymns of worship, in the texts of hymnography, through their mystical and dogmatic content, the comments of the Christian doctrine on repentance and other dogmatic themes are reproduced. At the end of this chapter, Saint Hilarion writes: "From the contents of all the ritual books used in the Orthodox Church, as well as from the appendix *of the Prayer Book* to the teaching on the canons (*The Very Useful Book for the Soul*), we derive the same doctrine about repentance that we encountered in the study of biblical and patristic documents. All of them show us that repentance is a divine, saving work, therefore a Holy Sacrament..." (p. 210, ed. 2025).

The second part of the work aims to evaluate the Catholic and Protestant conception of *Repentance*. It does not follow the same logical presentation of the teaching with biblical, patristic and liturgical-canonical foundations, arguing that such an approach is both cumbersome and of little use. Saint Ilarion evaluates the Catholic conception of *Repentance* from the perspective of two landmarks in Roman Catholic theology, namely: the decisions of the Lateran synods and the decisions of the Council of Trent (pp. 213, 214, ed. 2025). Saint Ilarion highlights the difference between the Catholic and Orthodox conceptions regarding soteriology and *Repentance*. He analyzes in this regard: 1) auricular confession; 2) the elements of repentance; 3) the treasury of superfluous merits; 4) indulgences; 5) purgatory. He directs his arguments against the theory of satisfaction, superfluous merits and purgatory. In practice, he does not

evade the dogmatic themes in the debate, but neither does he remain at a strictly symbolic, comparative approach, but opens the topic to a practical, liturgical and pastoral applicability.

Regarding the theory of satisfaction and superfluous merits related to indulgences, he writes:

> "Since repentance has existed, within it, as an essential element, there has been and is applied the punishment for the atonement of sin, called in Orthodoxy rebuke or the canon of repentance. All the Holy Fathers, all the ecumenical penitential canons and all the Orthodox dogmatics unanimously confess that punishment, rebuke or the canon of repentance have a pedagogical, correctional, medicinal, expiatory role. But this atonement is the medicine or the bitter herb that kills the root of evil in the sick man. It is expiation, not satisfaction, personal canonization, not satisfactory merit before God. Much more condemnable than the idea of satisfaction in the Catholic conception of repentance is the theory of the treasury of superfluous merits with all its consequences. Its origin lies in the Catholic conception of the consequences of ancestral sin" (pp. 226-227, ed. 2025).

By comparing the two soteriological conceptions, Saint Ilarion comes to the conclusion that "Catholicism supports a theory that alters the entire biblical soteriology" and this has major consequences for the economy of salvation (p. 227, ed. 2025). Catholic innovations lead by reaction to Protestant innovations (pp. 236, 249, ed. 2025).

The last part of the work, the third, entitled Psychology and the Penitential Experience, deals with the following issues: Psychology of repentance; Psychological penitential documentation; The psychological necessity of repentance according to Origen, Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Gregory the Great; Conversion and its relationship with repentance; The groundlessness of the Protestant conception of repentance; Religious emotion in conversion and repentance; The investigation of conscience; Guidance and correction of the conscience

of penitents; The fruits of repentance. The third part of the work concludes with some considerations regarding: Repentance in the liturgical and pastoral experience of spiritual priests; Liturgical and pastoral experiences and orientations as well as the experience of Father John of Kronstadt.

In conclusion, the spiritual work represents an important work in the Church, the spiritual father being a man of the Spirit, and the spiritual father, living in the atmosphere of the Spirit and the Saints. Saint Hilarion speaks of a *spiritual therapeutic* . In this perspective, he writes:

> "When applying the canons, the spiritual father cannot forget that he is not only a judge and a doctor, but above all a loving and disinterested father. The faithful should see in him the man of God, the celebrant of the liturgy of salvation and the greatest benefactor of their happiness. Then and only under these conditions do the faithful approach him with all trust, reveal to him the secrets of their conscience with all sincerity, and he will be able to penetrate and serve in their hearts as in an altar" (p. 328, ed. 2025).

The bibliography of the work *Repentance* elaborated by Saint Hilarion Felea represents the stage of theological research in the interwar period. However, the work remains important for current theological-pastoral thinking and practice.

As Father Professor Cristinel Ioja appreciates in the Introduction to this new edition of the work *Repentance* of Saint Ilarion Felea, its author

> "opens in this work theological reflection towards the analysis and understanding of the liturgical text of the Church, of a theology of ecclesial experience and of a practice that is called to remain within the normative-liturgical frameworks of the Prayer Book and of the Orthodox Church ... A dogmatic theme that harmoniously intertwines with the spiritual, pastoral and liturgical realities of the Orthodox Church" (p. 14, ed. 2025).

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