A PRACTICAL METHOD OF PASTORAL COMMUNICATION:
THE PARISH LIBRARY

Nicolae (Nifon) Jorza, PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca
and Silviu-Constantin Nedelcu, PhD Student, University of Bucharest

Abstract: The legal basis for the existence of a library in the parish is in the Statute for the
organization and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church. This leads to the following
aspects of the parish library, namely: the responsible of the library is the parish priest, and
members of the cultural service within the committee parish handles the purchase of books for
the library, as well as encouraging the community to read books and magazines the parish
library. There are no other references to the parish library, apart from these contained in the
statute mentioned. The parish library is one succesful practical method of pastoral
communication.

Keywords: Parish library, Pastoral method, Romanian Orthodox Church, Books, Journals

Introduction

Before taking into discussion our theme, we should mention that the present research
does not aim to be complete.

Thus, during my visits in different parishes in the country, I was sad to notice the
following: total lack of interest for books. Some of them, with an inestimable value were kept
in unworthy conditions, for the purpose they were made for: to be in a library, meaning the
parish library. There is unnecessary to bring examples, as the purpose of the present paper is
not to blame someone. I have a story in my mind, in connection with this aspect, I have in my
mind a story, which I have read in a book written by the Priest Gr. G. Petrov; the book’s name
is Not from that side or bishop task. The books tells the life history of a young monk who
became bishop, somewhere in Russia, in 1900, and in order to enforce respect, in front of the
priests, he used to send all kinds of circular letters to them¹, where he indicated how to
improve their mission, in their parishes. One of these circular letters mentioned they were
compelled to build parish schools, however this paper was treated coldly, as the other before
it. Many priests hurried to answer to that request. His Holiness received many of these

¹ Pastoral letters
documents, which announced the opening of parish schools, „as if everybody in the Diocese was full of thirst for culture”\textsuperscript{2}. One of the archpriests, close to the bishop said he did not believe in those miracles produced by the circular letters. During his frequent visits in the diocese, the bishop understood that the schools in question „were better in the reports, than in reality”\textsuperscript{3}. In a parish, a priest presented an application for opening a library and donation of books. All these were achieved and that priest received a church rank, from the bishop. Meanwhile, that priest died and his follower was a young priest, recently ordained, who received from the bishop a serious task, to continue that library activity, as diligently as possible, or more zealous, if possible. „That second priest was as full of nice thoughts for the people well being, as the priest before him. When he arrived in the village, he did not find any library or school. Nobody in the village heard about them. Hardly, he could find in the parish house attic, beside the chimney, the box with the books sent to the library”\textsuperscript{4}.

The moral: the purpose of opening a parish library is not that to gain church decorations or positions, but in order to achieve the \textit{good thought, for people well being}. Instead of that, I learned about some exceptions in some parishes, where the libraries were organized, each of them in a proper manner, but not in an unitary pattern.

This pastoral method, represented by the parish library was not enough or less exploited in books. We mention, among the authors, in our country, who wrote on this subject, the following names: 1) Priest Prof. Ioan Mihoc\textsuperscript{5}; 2) Priest Prof. Dr. Vasile Gordon\textsuperscript{6}; 3) Răzvan Topală George\textsuperscript{7}.


\textsuperscript{3} Ibidem, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibidem, p. 19.


Therefore, our research includes three sections: 1) Short history of parish libraries; 2) Legal framework for parish libraries; 3) Parish libraries: a practical method for pastoral communication. Case study: Priest Ioan Sabău (1914-2009) and parish libraries.

In the end, we added an annex with photos representing Priest Ioan Sabău and the churches where he officiated and founded parish libraries.

1. Parish churches short history

The first author who wrote about the need for opening parish libraries, in our country, was protosinghel, and future bishop, Silvestru Bălănescu, in the journal *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, in 1875\(^8\). He was born in 1838, in a village in Neamț county and he graduated from the Seminary *Socola* in Iași (1855-1862). For a while, he followed university lectures at the Faculty of Theology in Iași, then at the Theological Academy in Kiev (1868-1873). He used to be a teacher at the Seminary in Iași (1867/1868), at the Seminary in Roman (1874), as well as at the „Central” Seminary, in Bucharest (1874-1886). In 1879, he was ordained vicar bishop, with the name Piteșteanul, then in 1886, he was elected bishop of Huși, where he officiated, until his death (†1900)\(^9\). In addition to the fact that he was the first theologian who wrote about the parish libraries, there must be mentioned that, when he was student at the Seminary *Socola* in Iași, he used to be librarian\(^10\). An article like that, could be written only by someone who knew about libraries and used to work as an librarian. His short article with the title *Formarea de bibliotecă pe la toate bisericiile*, speaks about the fact that in the Cheson diocese in Russia, the bishop proposed to open parish libraries in all churches and they should have religious books, „apart from the books necessary for the church service”\(^11\). The author continued in the footnote 1, saying „this good and useful thing should be also introduced in


our country, as well”\textsuperscript{12}. In the same time, he proposed these libraries should be financed by the commune mayoralty, however, this was not achieved.

In the almanac \textit{Casa Bisericii 1902-1919}, in the chapter about the priests pastoral and social activity, there are also presented the parish libraries\textsuperscript{13}.

In 1888 Bishop Ghenadie Enăceanu (1835-1898) made the following proposal: a part of the money coming from candles selling should to be used for opening parish libraries\textsuperscript{14}.

In 1893, through the article 30 of the regulation for the lay clergy, there was settled that „each parish should have a parish library”\textsuperscript{15}. Ten years after issuing this law, there were not many parish libraries.

In 1909, \textit{Casa Bisericii} decided to research the problem of the parish libraries in the dioceses, and the general conclusion was the following: „the rural parish libraries were very poor, so they were not useful either to priests and peasants”\textsuperscript{16}.

On September 1st, 1919, the journal \textit{Casa Bisericii} published a detailed research about parish libraries and produced the following statistics: „there were inspected only the parish libraries from 3,056 parishes, of 3,546 rural parishes. There are no parish libraries in 990 parishes, as most of them were destroyed, during the war […] only the libraries in 318 urban parishes of the total 398, were inspected. 70 of these parishes do not have parish libraries”\textsuperscript{17}. This report ends with the idea this mission should be continued, so that „popular parish libraries to exist in the whole country, libraries which, through their mission, to settle our Church (Romanian Orthodox Church, A/N.) on the first place, in the movement for spreading culture to people”\textsuperscript{18}.

This reality changed, in time, and parish libraries have become more endowed, mainly with „prayer books, orthodox knowledge, saints lives, religious journals, religious guides,
books for spiritual elevation”\(^{19}\). Excepting few libraries, there were parish libraries where there were books from different fields of activity, different from theology. An example could be seen, during the communist age, at the parish library from church Sapientei in Bucharest, where the Priest Constantin Sârbu „who organized the so-called «People Library», and lent books for some years, until the Political Police forbade him to do that”\(^{20}\). Certainly, there were more vicars in the country, who, during the communist age, did the same as Priest Constantin Sârbu, and they founded parish libraries, which were useful to the orthodox believers. Such an example was offered by Priest Ioan Sabău (1914-2009), who established parish libraries in the churches where he officiated.

This pastoral method proved to be a very good one, as young people can be brought closer to the Church and they could „establish and organize parish churches”\(^{21}\).

2. The legal framework for the parish libraries

Since 1990, after the communist regime fall, there were settled both the Statutes of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Libraries Law.

The Statutes of the Romanian Orthodox Church include only three articles referring to the parish libraries: art. 50 (letter k), art. 67 (point 2) and art. 71 (letter b).

Article 50\(^{22}\) refers to the tasks of the parish priest. One of the tasks is mentioned under letter k, as following: „he drafts and keeps the daily records of the inventory of the parish, of any kind, as well as the parish library and archive”\(^{23}\). Thus, parish priest have also the task to draft and keep the record of the parish library.


\(^{23}\) Ibidem, p. 40.
The article 66, point 2, says about the Parochial Committee, as „it includes people of age of the parish community as volunteers”24. The article 67, point 2, presents the five departments of the Parochial Committee, as follows: social department, missionary department, cultural department and administrative department25. The cultural department „initiates and support the acquisition and distribution of the rite books, icons, small crosses and books of spiritual elevation for believers and parish libraries”26. We highlight the idea that the cultural department, within the parochial committee, initiates and supports the acquisition and distribution for the parish library of the rite books and the books for spiritual elevation. The cultural department also „encourages the members of the community to read books and journals from the parish library”27. This department has the task to encourage reading of the books and journals in the library.

The last article which mentions something about the parish library is art. 71, which describes the archpriest tasks. There is mentioned under letter b that the archpriest „inspects, at least once a year, parishes, branches and the social settlements in the deanery, taking note about the quality of the religious, moral and social life of the parish members; he verifies the bookkeeping registers, the archive and the library...”28. There results the idea that, during the inspection, the archpriest verifies, beside the bookkeeping registers, the archive and the library, as well.

The legal basis for opening libraries is to be found in the Statutes for organizing and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church. There are mentioned in this document the following legal aspects concerning parish libraries: the parish priest is in charge with parish libraries and the members of the cultural department within the parochial committee are in charge with the acquisition of books for libraries, as well, they have to encourage the members of the community to read the books and journals in the parish library. There are no other mentions about parish library in the Statutes of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

24 Ibidem, p. 47.
26 Ibidem, p. 49.
27 Ibidem, p. 49.
28 Ibidem, p. 52.
The Law nr. 334 from May 31st, 2002 regarding libraries, known in the library science as *Law of Library* settles the legal framework for opening, organising and functioning of libraries. Therefore, according to the article 10 in *Law of Library*, parish libraries are included in the category of *special libraries*. This type of library is included into this category, as it „it is destined mainly to different groups of users or collectors, mainly to special types of documents, or, in order to answer the needs of the higher body” (cf. art. 1, point d of the *Law of Library*). For the present situation, parishes are the higher bodies, for this type of libraries and their users are the orthodox believers within these parishes. Thus, „the academic and research institutions, the central and local public administration authorities, public institutions, military units, economic units and the other legal bodies of public or private right can organize special libraries. Special libraries are libraries of public or private right are they are financed by the authorities, institutions or other higher bodies” (art. 20-21 from *Law of Library*). This way, parish libraries are included in the category of special libraries of private right, however, not legal bodies, which function under the care of parishes.

In the 4th chapter of *Law of Library* no. 334 from May 31st, 2002, there is settled the status of the library staff. Thus, the library staff includes: a) special staff; b) administrative staff; c) maintenance staff, cf. art. 44, point 1. Special staff include: librarians, bibliographers, editors, researchers, documentarists, conservators, restorers, etc. (art. 44, point 2). Thus, regarding the employment of „the special staff in the libraries financed by public funds, not legal bodies, there is organized a contest by the higher body” (art. 45, point 2). As regarding special libraries, including parish libraries „the list of positions and the criteria of rate setting are included in the annex no. 2, observing the maximum number of positions and the accepted budget (art. 44, point 4).

There is mentioned in the 5th chapter of *Law of Library* no. 334 of May 31st, 2002, at art. 52, point b, the management, in the situation of libraries which are not legal bodies, as parish libraries, is coordinated by a „director or librarian in charge”. Thus, in the annex no. 2c of the *Law of Library* no. 334 from May 31st, 2002, there is mentioned the fact that „special staff is employed, according to the unique profile of the library, the annual number of acquisitions, storage, as well as the library financial means”. Thus, the employment of the librarian/librarians followed the library profile, working volume, storage and financial means, if they exist.
This is the legal framework for parish libraries, however, we are aware that, in our country, practically, few parish libraries afford to pay one or more librarians.

2. Parish libraries: a practical method for pastoral communications. Case study: Priest Ioan Sabău (1914-2009) and the parish libraries

The priest Ioan Sabău was born on October 20th 1914, in a family of peasants, in Folt village, Rapoltu Mare commune, Hunedoara county. He graduated from the primary school in his native village (1920-1924), then he followed the Theoretical High School „Aurel Vlaicu“ in Orăștie (1924-1931). Further on, „following his own enthusiasm and his family wishes, in the autumn of the same year, he went to the Faculty of Theology at the University in Chernivtsi”\textsuperscript{30}. He married Alexandra Traciuc, on November 7th, 1935, when he was 21 years old and he was ordained on Christmas, the same year.

Between 1935 and 1937, Priest Ioan used to be priest in the village Ceru-Băcăinți, parish where there was no priest, in the last 50 years. In 1937 he was sent to accomplish a difficult mission in the parish Renghet, where people used to live in concubinage. He managed to wed 40 families, and in 1940 he was sent to Vinerea (two thousand people lived there), until 1958. Priest Ioan Sabău gained many and fruitful accomplishments for the parishers’ souls, during these years, when he officiated in Vinerea. In 1936, the priest Nicolae Cerbiceanu founded a church, but he passed away in 1940, and the construction was continued and finished by the Priest Ioan Sabău\textsuperscript{31}. The church Saint Nicholas, was dedicated on October 20th, 1957 and there took part more than ten thousand people and one hundred and twenty priests. Father Sabău was also involved in Vinerea in the development of the religious life, which was supported by regular religious service, the church choir, religious festivals and participation of the parishers in pastoral activities, through which he attracted many people, to the Church, mostly youngsters.

One of the pastoral methods used by Priest Ioan used to be the organisation of a parish library, as a core of theological and world culture. Priest Ioan’s follower, Mr. professor,

\textsuperscript{29} See Fig. 1 in the Annex.


\textsuperscript{31} See Fig. 2 in the Annex.
Mihai Cimbru, who, many times used to go to the parish library, mentioned in a book this evidence about the pastoral activity to education and enlightenmment of the parishers, through culture: „Through his sermons, having a great inspiration in his belief which he served with entire his soul, Father achieved a fundamental work of education, guidance of the people in the village Vinerea, and not only in the spiritual field“32.

There were preserved from Priest Ioan more than one hundred notebooks, which include mainly sketches for sermons. One can read in these notebooks extracts and citations from holly books, as well as from Holly Fathers, and also from the works of famous representatives of the world and Romanian culture: Horace, Socrates, Plato, Ovid, Dante, Montesquieu, Nietzsche, Eminescu, Mircea Eliade, Soljeniţin, Tolstoi, Gogol, Coşbuc, Goga and many others, who inspired enriched his thoughts and improved his expression. The same professor, who knew Priest Ioan, for 60 years and listened to his sermons, many times, mentioned the following: „His urges were full of the wisdom generated by a vaste culture, deep belief and rich life experience“33.

After harsh years of prison, which followed in various periods (of which, the longest, was that between 1959 and 1964), Father was appointed vicar in Bobâlna. Here, Priest Ioan also took care of the library he had found there, he developed the collection, as he used to have a subscription to all the theological publications of that time. After retirement, Priest Ioan went to his native village, Folt, and lived in Bobâlna a perfectly organised library, including a series of collections of journals from Sibiu, published under the care of the Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, a lot of books, published in the teaching collection, literature from the interwar period, theological books, as well as history, philosophy books, or in other fields. On the occasion of researching the parish archive in Bobâlna, Priest PhD Florin Dobrei had also access to the parish library, therefore, he noted the following: „Beside rite books and theological volumes, there must be mentioned here also the valuable collections of theological and lay journals from the parish library inventory“34. The library organised by

32 Ibidem, p. 18.
33 Ibidem, p. 6.
Priest Ioan, includes also very old church patrimony books, which Priest Ioan preserved carefully and transmitted to future readers.35

Closing the present research, as a conclusion, I cite one of the Priest Ioan Sabău’s followers, who confessed that: „Gifted with many qualities by almighty God, the priest Ioan Sabău could officiate in any church in town, in any cathedral in the diocese, as if he might have been a brilliant professor of Theology. His training, through permanent reading, serious education, his struggle to achieve the new books in all fields: theology, science and culture, etc.; his close relationships with the intellectuals and youth, his articles, conferences, his enthusiastic and convincing sermons, many times emphasized by special stories from the Romanian tumultuous history, would have entitled him to be promoted and appreciated, likewise. The hard times and the people of that period prevented him from communicating his knowledge, skill and grace received from God, upon other believers who wanted to listen God’s word and to be saved”36.

Conclusions

The idea of organizing parish libraries came from a Russian bishop and it was taken over in the Romanian Orthodox Church parishes. Our short historical presentation regarding the emergence of the parish libraries in our country has brought the following conclusion: some of the parish priests who were in charge directly with the libraries, either were not interested in them or they took care of them, only to mention this in the parishes documents. There are few situations when there were more than 300 books and/or journals, in the libraries. During the communist age, things „balanced”, as the parish libraries’ collections developed, first with Orthodox religious journals, as these parishes were the main subscribers. After 1990, after the communist regime fall, there was settled the legal framework for functioning parish libraries, foreseen both in the Statutes of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Law of Library.

35 Information from Priest Daniel Baraboiu, now, vicar at Bobâlna parish.
In spite of all these, we reached the conclusion that parish libraries might be a practical method of pastoral communication with believers, together with other means used by priests in their mission. In order to bring arguments for our opinion, we have presented as case study the orthodox priest Ioan Sabău (1914-2009) and his care for the parish libraries, in the parishes where he used to officiate. Certainly, there were a lot of priests, along time, who endowed and organized the parish libraries, where they officiated. Some times, the results of their pastoral work can be noticed after many years, sometimes dozens of years.

Parish libraries represent an endless resource through which priests can draw believers, mainly youth, but not necessary, to volunteer activities. This way, Priest Ioan Sabău was an example.
Annex

Fig. 1. Priest Ioan Sabău (1914-2009)
Fig. 2. The church in Vinerea commune, Alba county (Arhid. Jorza Nifon’s personal archive)