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RELIGION, POLITICS, AND LITERATURE IN BARTOLOMEU VALERIU ANANIA'S WORK

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Abstract. The personality of Metropolitan Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania has been extremely complex, first of all due to the various domains of his work – literature, essays, art history, theology and biblical theology –, and secondly due to his relation to politics, especially his connections with the Legionary Movement and with Communism. Despite having been incarcerated as a political prisoner in some of Bolshevik Romania's famous prisons (Jilava, Piteşti, Aiud), Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania is still accused of having collaborated with the political police of Ceauşescu's regime, *Securitatea*. The present text analyses the writer's work in order to explain the relationship between religion, literature, and politics, stressing both their connections, as well as his journey from being a writer to being the theologian commenting on and revising the translation of the Holy Scripture. The analysis is therefore oriented towards Valeriu Anania's literary works, namely his poetry, prose, and theatre, so as to underline its religious background, be it either theological or alluding to Romanian popular religiosity; furthermore, it focuses on his theology, from icon to biblical theology, stressing the associations with literature and the importance of literary workmanship. Finally, based on the cultural analyses which unveil his deep affection for the Romanian spirituality and considering several politically controversial episodes of his biography, the text will attempt to argue in favour of the lack of sufficient and reliable evidence that could prove his collaboration with the political police of Communist Romania.

Key Words: Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, religion, politics, literature, Communism, Legionary Movement, *Securitate*

Introduction. The *ars poetica* of a writer-monk

The biography and bibliography of Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania (1921-2011) – religious writer, monk, and bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church – are both extremely multifaceted.¹ A controversial *homo religiosus* during Romanian communism, he joins the “Brotherhood of the Cross” – a youth organization of the Legionary Movement – only to later recants his allegiance; however, he will never be able to escape the accusation of being a legionary as he will be arrested and incarcerated several times; he became a monk at 21, and Metropolitan of Cluj in his old age, and still confessed to not having any mystical calling²; he has been accused of collaborating with the political police; having written poetry, prose and theatre, Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania approached in a very original manner the icon theology and has annotated and revised the Romanian translation of the Bible, an undertaking praised by biblical scholars; a political prisoner condemned to 25 years of forced labour for “plotting against the social order” (he will serve six years and two months in the prisons of *Securitate*, Jilava, Pitești, and Aiud and will be released in 1964 following a decree of general amnesty) he will have various churchly functions in the Missionary Archbishopric of the Romanian Orthodox Church in America and Canada (1965-1976); all of this outline the complex portrait, not lacking in contradictions, of Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania³. Trying to decipher bits and parts of this universe our study will be dealing with the rapport between religion and literature as well as with the relation between religion and politics the way they are present in the life and work of this writer-monk. Whereas the religious sphere is a constant presence in his work, his connections to the *Securitate* are somewhat unclear – the question whether the former political prisoner was a collaborator of the Romanian communist political police or not can be satisfyingly answered only up to a certain point.

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Before actually analysing how literature and religious belief connect, we should first dwell upon Valeriu Anania’s *ars poetica*, a poet, prose – and playwright whose constant double was Bartolomeu, the scholar and theologian⁴. In order to do this we will first appeal to an episode taking place during the Russian bombardment when the young Anania, working as a waiter at the time, discovered that the purpose of writing was to oppose the absurdity forced upon daily life by the war: “This feeling [of the absurd] prompted me in my decision to keep writing and to give my life – as well as my death – a meaning I would not be ashamed of neither before my fellow men nor before God’s judgement”⁵. Later on this sense of writing will be overcome when it is transferred to a higher, ontological

level, because when asked why he wrote during an interview, Valeriu Anania said:

“When the reader is a mere abstraction and tomorrow an uncertainty, when the ‘manuscript’ is in danger of disappearing inevitably along with its author, can one really ask: why are you writing? I have reasons to believe that regardless of any cause, writing – whether better or poorer, more fragile, or perhaps more robust – is a part of my being and of my destiny.”⁶

This answer contains two main ideas: on the one hand it stresses the precariousness of a writer’s destiny, writing, and of how his work is received (which challenges the idea that writing can resist the absurdity of existence), and on the other hand, it emphasises the ontological status of writing, namely its supreme necessity. Contingency versus necessity, this antithesis is meant to underline yet again the ontological quality of writing, which in this way overcomes even the need for meaning. It is as if it were stated that *to be is to be a writer*, which is a lot more than taking it upon one’s self to fight the nonsense, a fight that might be won by future literary immortality.

“Educated in the spirit of classicism” and always faithful to it, Valeriu Anania admits he never intended to write a challenging or original literature at all costs, but rather he practiced “the art of being offensive without offending.”⁷ In addition to the classical limit, if we may call it that, there is also the limit of being a clergyman, which, for instance, does not allow him to write a play with the most genuine argot, nor to translate Villon “as such”, employing the slang used by the pickpockets and swindlers in prisons⁸. This reverence to the classical paradigm is governed by the fundamental belief that a great writer is not only a language innovator “but also – but essentially I believe – one who restores it, rebalancing it with the means and measures of his time”.⁹ On this note, which places value on originality, we enter the broad field of the relations between religion and literature.

A literature marked by the primordial: from theophany to theology *The meaningful beginning*

The origins are central to Valeriu Anania’s work, and they explain and shed light both on his theology and his patriotism and on his obsession with mythology and folklore in a somewhat interdisciplinary manner. Anania writes literature when he deals with art. For example in the prose *Amintirile peregrinului apter* [The Memoires of the Wingless Pilgrim], he plunges into history when he unfolds his literary plot and then spans a bridge between historical events and sacred history, and then

crosses over to a plane where the myths and the word of God are intertwined in the ultimate adventure of the origins. Hence, the originality proves to be constantly marked by the obsession with the beginnings, in a fabric of words in which the primordial dominates the original and the poetic word symbolically refers to the Word of the Gospel according to John.

However, this abolishes neither the originality, nor the importance of the poetic word. Quite to the contrary, the latter gains more power in a sort of isomorphism we can identify in a poem of the *Anamneze* [Anamnese]: “I know the powers of the word/ yet not of late and neither by the guess/ but since it moved above the waters”. The biblical reference to the time of creation, when the Spirit of God *moved upon the face of the waters*, supports the author’s belief in “the sanctity of the artistic act” and the idea that the poet “doesn’t craft verses, in the manner of Arghezi, but (...) he professes a *creation* akin to the primordial one.”¹⁰ This theologically courageous theory reveals that what connects literature and faith is more than an exterior nexus, because by the divine Logos the poetic logos appropriates the same function of rising to ever truer meanings: “By this means the poetic reason rises to the knowledge of truth and allows people to experience aesthetic and metaphysical revelations.”¹¹ At this point, aesthetics necessarily become theological and the relationship between religion and literature loses its contingency.

Just to give an example, the importance of the origins lets itself be deciphered in the Hawaiian distinction between the imaginary story (*kaao*) and the true story – as historical fact (*moolelo*) – the latter encompassing the legends about the gods, who in their turn are considered to be real beings, not just fantasies.¹² Even the narrator-character of the novel *Străinii din Kipukua* [The Strangers of Kipukua] is a sort of fallen god among men: “Of course I was a degenerate, I, who once used to live in the kingdom of the waters and roamed freely among the sharks of Kamoho. What a fall, God, what a fall!”¹³ The narrator of *Amintirile peregrinului apter* [The Memoires of the Wingless Pilgrim] is yet another angel lost among men; this means that the primordial is present in every-day life, blended in common situations which it provides with meanings transcending their horizontal parameters even when those meanings are not easily decrypted. A significant instance of how difficult deciphering them may be is found in an episode where the apterous pilgrim returns to the essence when he is asked: “Do you really think you rose from afar and went to find Nicodemus just like that? Do you think you’re obsessed with the beginnings for nothing?”¹⁴ This “mystery of the origins”¹⁵, an “obsessive metaphor” in Valeriu Anania’s work, appears in various contexts. For example, here is what a character of *Străinii din Kipukua* [The Strangers of Kipukua], Mr. Martin, says when someone shows him an Omega watch: “What an ideal said he, slightly phlegmatic. Omega? There is no Omega time. There is only alpha time. Omega is just the ashes of time.”¹⁶

Moreover, the sexual intimacy of two lovers is described in primordial terms, on grounds of the equivalence between making love and “letting themselves be swallowed by the ancestors”.¹⁷ Regarding salvation, it is synonymous in this case with being reintegrated in the soil of the motherland because “There is only one reintegration, in the earth of the land which bore you to the world.”¹⁸

Literary epiphanies

There is an implicit religiosity in the work of any great poet, and Valeriu Anania knew it: through the close contact the creator has with life's mysteries and with the sacred he is “touched, one way or the other, by the religious feeling”¹⁹. Religious poetry does not need explicit topics, themes or motives in order to reach the depths. In Anania's case, both a writer and a monk, the religiosity of creating is never confined to the level of implicit elements: it always aims for more. There is an easily noticeable ascension from literary creation to the Bible's translation, from the implicit to the appropriated sacred. At first, this undisputable connection between religion and culture is merely external: “The purpose of culture is to give religion a taste of the human soul's thirst for universality; religion, in its turn, is called to grant the culture the inner dimension of its absolute sense, devoid of which the culture would be a vast, yet simple laboratory.”²⁰ Just one step further the two are found interwoven in one single spirit. For example, when one reads the poems in the book entitled *Geneze* [Geneses], one finds invocations that are far from rhetorical, resounding with prayers, invocations spoken in a world imbued with mystery where God is always somewhere close; the consciousness of self sacrifice, which as it mirrors and replies the Crucifixion, traverses all poems without a trace of melodrama; when voiced, the existential anguish never turns to repudiation (the way it does in the work of Arghezi), it takes the form of an elegy: it is as if transcendence inevitably reclined over all things and destinies. Needless to say that the actual form of religious poetry is not absent from the work of Valeriu Anania: the volume *File de acatist* [Akathistos Pages] encompasses the lyrical forms of the akathistos, the hymn, the litany, and the poems' structure resembles that of liturgical poetry. For now suffice it to point out that the religious-quotidian intertwining is made possible by the belief that the sacred and the profane are embraced, and this attests to Mircea Eliade's strong influence.

An exegete observed that “The whole of the author's literary – or scientific – discourse seems to be contained by his interest for cultural anthropology, also specific to Mircea Eliade”²¹. Anania was a perpetual admirer of Eliade and he also proves he possesses a thorough knowledge of his work. He admires the idea of a *Deus otiosus*, which he believes is “the most daring” and “most fertile” idea for myth hermeneutics²². Moreover, he is well acquainted with the way Eliade thinks and he systematises his

system in five points centred on the idea of the sacred and rejoining it – understood as “a reintegration in authenticity, a transfiguration of the spirit within the mythical time recuperated through rituals”²³. His encounter with Eliade goes beyond the mere influence of the latter, it is a sort of confirmation of Anania’s inner structure: “The impact of Mircea Eliade’s scientific work (...) did nothing but theoretically confirm (partially, however) that which was structurally mine”²⁴. His reservations are due to the fact that for Eliade the sacred and the profane are opposed, whereas for Anania the profane settles on the fringes of the sacred, but never completely outside of it, as they share a continuous and fertile interference²⁵. In order to grasp this phenomenon the writer makes use of a wide range of means:

“The backdrop of a literary work is always mythical, set where the fantastic, fabulous, oneirical, magical reality, legends and history meet. Christianity is projected onto an ancestral screen, the archetype also bearing within the seed of heresy. (...) The nostalgia of the origins determines an eternally reiterated odyssey of retrieving the significant beginnings. The end itself is understood as a return to the archetype. (...) Living in the profane is the intermediary and transient stage of reintegrating the absolute.”²⁶

The cases where the sacred and the profane communicate are especially profuse in Valeriu Anania’s prose that can be characterised by the insistence on establishing the primacy of artistic truth over the historical one.²⁷ In *Amintirile pelerinului apter* [The Memoirs of the Wingless Pilgrim] for example, the story entitled “Pasărea măiastră” [The Magic bird]²⁸, where the events take place within a monastery (Polovragi), combines life with the description of old frescoes, and is thus transferred to the sphere of accounts whose meanings go beyond mere art history. There is an existential dynamics, an exchange between the sacred life of the iconographical images and the daily life of the characters – monks and close friends of the monastery – without automatically leading to miraculous events. This calm interlacing, this type of sacredness, so gentle and completely lacking the violence of cratophany, naturally coexisting with the human life, is one of Valeriu Anania’s trademarks which advocates the idea of the continuity between the sacred and the profane. The ontological register of this world does not perceive heavenly presences as something absolutely estranged; even if the reality of everyday life needs to become accomplished, the heavenly perfection does not stand in contradiction, instead it improves the possibilities the world already possesses.

The novel *Străinii din Kipukua* [The Strangers of Kipukua] brings before the reader the same communion between the ancestral powers, still active for the people of Kipukua in complete accord with local mythology, and daily reality. This game in which the profane doesn't obscure the sacred but allows it to manifest itself does not set clear boundaries, neither of the former, nor of the latter. The feeling of mutually belonging to the same ontological framework is given by the fact that the fantastic traits of the novel generate neither the perplexity of terror, nor the feeling of inadequacy between the two worlds. If the existential adventure of the narrator-character may be placed in the category of an identity crises, the constant bond with the ancestral world provides a startling answer: what we are is not as much reflected in our name – which can be doubled at any time by the name (and the powers!) of old gods – as it is a question of participating in the primordial, in that sacred reality Eliade spoke of, a reality possessing the truth of the world, in its spatial-temporal dynamic wholeness, as well as that of the individual. This form of participation is similar to Plato's participation to in ideas experienced by the highest initiates of the wisdom lovers. The act of writing is hierophantic and the sacred is to be discovered in common occurrences or by exiting the prose and coming face to face with it in a new formula: in theology.

From the theology read between the lines to the revealed word

The theology of Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania is primarily one that needs to be read between the lines, one that in its ascent leaves the sacred behind and unveils the truths of the revelation. There are countless nuances here: from comparing the poetic inspiration to the divine grace, the artistic word to the primordial Logos²⁹ all the way to explicitly adopting a theologian's stance. In the postface to the volume *De dincolo de ape* [From beyond the Waters] I wrote that the texts, however heterogeneous, are united by an implicit Christic perspective³⁰. The idea had of course been pushed too far³¹, however, it tempted the exegetes of Anania's work to adopt a reading key that had to take theology into consideration. The literary themes and motives go beyond the theological setting, yet it is true that the presence of the theological element is unquestionable. Here is a commentary written by Aurel Sasu:

“The poetry of A. [Anania] tends to achieve a state of forbidden purity, provoking the divine who is familiar and accessible chiefly as suffering and loneliness. Devoid of drama, Arghezi's attempt to touch the mystery is turned into a communion of songs: the joy of invoking the light and delicately accepting the self wandering between two nights.”³²

Considered to be “one of the most important poets of religious inspiration of the Romanian 20th century literature”³³ by Liviu Petrescu, Valeriu Anania is seen by the critics as occupying a place from where he ascends even higher, towards theology: as Dan Ciachir said, he is “firstly a poet, and secondly, a poet bearing witness.”³⁴ Furthermore, his interpretation of Eminescu’s *Luceafărul* [The Morning Star] structured around a parallel to the Prologue in the Gospel of John proves once more that his hermeneutical universe has a theological background. The Hyperion-divine Logos parallel is not exclusivist at all and it does not try to explain religiously the genius-character in Eminescu’s poem; instead it respects and preserves its mystery, merely highlighting the possibility of an alternative theological interpretation that a masterpiece can allow for³⁵. One of the clearest affirmations completely justified by the hymnographic poetry of our author states that he is “a religious poet of Orthodox expression”³⁶.

Deciphering the theological elements is not always so difficult: the references to the Holy Scriptures present in Anania’s work – in his plays, for example, he employs impressive resources of biblical wisdom³⁷ – or the way he versifies Gospel parables, such as the prodigal son in *Hoțul de mărgăritare* [The Pearls Thief]³⁸. On the other hand, his writing may have been influenced by the great patristic literature of the East: the symbolism of the light finds its aesthetic justification in St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite, the mystical understanding of beauty reminds us of St. Maximus the Confessor³⁹ and St. Basil the Great, who also put forth the idea of the *pankalia*, the beautiful and perfect creation⁴⁰. It should be mentioned here that Liviu Petrescu formulated a purely theological vision stating that in the case of Valeriu Anania:

“the theologian usually overwhelms the poet, in the sense that the writer cannot afford to drift away in the slightest from the teachings of the Church, in order to build his own metaphysics, of Christian inspiration, with a great freedom of interpretation, as Lucian Blaga or Tudor Arghezi had done, both severely reprimanded by the theologians.”⁴¹

Despite the fact that this affirmation doesn’t always hold true due to the complexity of the work in question, it is still worthy of our attention because it explains some hermeneutically tricky texts, such as the final part of *Miorița*, in which the mother’s despair takes the form of the akathistos hymn and voices a bliss only the belief in afterlife can explain.⁴²

In addition to the theology one understands by reading between the lines, Bartolomeu Anania, as a man of the Church, has also written a theology that won the foreground – by revising the Bible translation – proving in the end that literature had only been a preliminary laboratory. His literary habits are still at work, ensuring an ever higher eloquence. For

instance, when presenting some biblical figures such as the Mother of God, St. John the Baptist, or even Herod Antipas, Bartolomeu Anania makes use of literary procedures and analyses their psychology during various events. St. John the Baptist's doubting Christ's messianity is described as a psychological crisis, a state of mind illustrated in detail by the author⁴³; the *fiat* uttered by the Virgin Mary is presented in the context of a pious and convincing portrait⁴⁴; Herod's political panic at the Birth of Christ, which would eventually lead to the massacre of the innocents, as well as his religious fright – the anguish of a king who thought he was a god⁴⁵ – are illustrated by the means of antitheses.

His theological reflection enjoys the writer's experience and the restoring hermeneutics mentioned by Sandu Frunză⁴⁶ are often clad in spiritual hermeneutics: plunging within when things have to be pondered from within is not just a subjective adventure, it also aspires to meet the truth of the Christian faith⁴⁷. When writing a text about the Deisis icon, Anania is interested in how the Final Judgement is presented in its "spiritual dynamics"⁴⁸. He operates a spiritual hermeneutics, presenting the figures of the icon along the lines of the Holy Tradition and amending both the Gnostic and Sophianic accents of Paul Evdokimov (in *Woman and the Salvation of the World*), and Jung's psychoanalytic interpretation. Moreover, when he discusses the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts and their importance for the historical-critical method, he stresses that the Christian revelation is complete:

"Undoubtedly, what is now being added to the scriptural documentary treasure adds nothing to the Revelation. (...) These new pieces of information confirm the Revelation and bring a substantial contribution only to theological erudition. For any true Christian the historical reality of our Saviour's person is unquestionable, but for those who doubt it, the confirmation of Jesus' historicity by a non-Christian document is invaluable."⁴⁹

This proves once again that Anania operates with the theological hermeneutics of the Church's Tradition that Christianised the philosophy, the culture, and the customs of the peoples it came in contact with: "There are plenty of analogies, it is true, but we shouldn't neglect the fact that the Christian religion has always asserted its truth, not its originality."⁵⁰

The orator⁵¹ completes Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania's theological portrait. Some pages bear witness to a frantic search for understanding, but not for its own sake, but for the sake of including in his sermons the empathic "we" any speaker bears in mind. The foundation is not only inter-subjective because from a theological point of view "the man is the measure with which God is measuring"⁵². The episode of the Resurrection, for example, is the occasion on which he launches a bewildering question:

why was Mary Magdalene, a repented sinner, the first witness of the Resurrection and not one of the Apostles? The answer is inevitably filled with the orator's desire to empathise with his listeners: because Mary Magdalene represents us all, the sinners, the prodigal, she is "the human prototype for whom God came into the world."⁵³ Quite often the texts end in rhetorical apotheoses signalled by the crescendo of the phrases and meanings⁵⁴. "The homiletic advantage" the theologian-orator has are his literary experience, on the one hand, and an "exemplary knowledge of the Holy Scripture", "his tremendous force of persuasion", "cultivating and living the empathy with his listeners", on the other hand, and last but not least, "'the advantage' of never having been a university professor or of having a Th.D." – this last paradoxical idea underlines the vitality of his preaching and the avoidance of academism⁵⁵.

His theological originality is manifested more potently in his scholia on the frescoes and the icons of the Romanian monasteries in Oltenia, in his book, *Cerurile Oltului* [The Heavens of the Olt]⁵⁶. The principle of interpretation leads the reader to an authentic understanding of the ecclesiastic art and architecture: they always have a spiritual finality, namely "the holiness of man's personal encounter with God in prayer"⁵⁷. In this book the restorative hermeneutics of the sacred is overcome in the direction of the traditional paradigm of "a truly theandric Christian vision where the divine and the human, the theological and the anthropological open and enlighten themselves mutually"⁵⁸. The theologian has the main part now, even if he uses the literary-philosophical means of the dialogue to expound his ideas. Fr. Ioan I. Ică jr writes that we are first dealing with a Romanian theology and only secondly with a Romanian theology of the icon, which bases its analyses on a spiritual understanding of the iconographic phenomenon in its entirety – and this recommends the hierarch Bartolomeu Anania "as a unique thinker in the contemporary Orthodox theological context".

"Elegant and precise in his expression, displaying besides intellectual refinement, an authentic monastic discretion and spiritual sensitivity, the "scholia"- dialogues of this splendid book must be immediately received as constituting one of the great and few original books of Romanian theology of our time."⁵⁹

We cannot conclude this section on his theology without mentioning his work of revising the translation of the Holy Scripture, an endeavour which meant leaving behind his personal literary destiny and taking the final leap from the aesthetic to the religious:

"Ever since December 23rd 1990, when I began working with the Bible, I have not written a single page of personal literature, because I thought that

everything I had written up to that point was nothing more than a lifelong exercise of Romanian language preparing me for what God wanted me to do in my last years.”⁶⁰

Thus the writer and the theologian work together in an effort to present a Bible that was both accurate and had a suitable text for exegesis, and one whose style possessed the same transparencies of the Byzantine icon⁶¹. Gone are the times when he scoped the Bible of Șerban for the beauty of its language and “interested in exploring the sources of the language, looking for words, expressions, and grammar forms” he meant to bring brightness to his literary style⁶². He employs his literary interest in his attempt to come closer to the revealed word, with the awareness that this word is a lot more than theology: if theology is “speaking about God”, the Scriptures are “an utterance of nuclei”, “God speaking about Himself”⁶³. After all “the Bible is the Book containing all books (...) it is the Library; the Library *par excellence*, single and singular in its divine humanness”⁶⁴. These are the last traits of the cultural portrait of Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, defining him no longer as a writer, but as an “artist-liturgist of the Romanian word”, as Patriarch Daniel used to call him⁶⁵.

Politics and Faith

Admiring Romanian culture

Now it is time to analyse the controversial political journey of the man who has known both the Communist prisons and the freedom to live for eleven years in an anti-communist country such as the USA, ranking high in the hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Referring to his connections with political ideologies means emphasising once more his obsession with the origins, which in this particular context takes the form of patriotism and admiration for his nation’s fundamental characteristics, although he may criticise the errors of the Romanians.⁶⁶ I do not believe that we could understand much of the former political prisoner’s suffering and freedom – “a heart sensitive to traditional Romanian and Orthodox values”⁶⁷ – if we were to avoid his love of the Romanian people, with its folklore, myths, literature and achievements. The Romanians’ artistic and political beginnings overlap in time, which is quite a lucky coincidence⁶⁸, and Valeriu Anania “is one of the few who cultivate the bond between religion and local spirituality”⁶⁹. “I have always had the feeling that all the land in my country is sacred” says Val in *Cerurile Oltului*⁷⁰ [The Heavens of the Olt] explaining “his nationalism and his open, fervent and fundamental patriotism”⁷¹ he will profess before the authorities of his time.

His patriotism will take the various and complex forms of his admiration: for the national mythology and folklore, for Eminescu,⁷² Vasile

Voiculescu⁷³, Dionysius Exiguus⁷⁴, Mircea Eliade, etc. With regard to his interest in Romanian mythology and his attraction towards folk wisdom, they are constantly present: in various studies, in which he writes about Eliade⁷⁵, for example, or in his own literary creation, in which he re-writes myths, stories and legends of great importance for the Romanian people (*Miorița*, *Meșterul Manole*, *Youth without Old Age*, etc.). They are so strong that when Al. Mironescu read the manuscript of *Miorița* he reproached its “pagan atmosphere” and “the lack of a Christian component”, whereas Voiculescu supported his freedom to create⁷⁶, and a teacher from Bucharest listening to the same play being read on the radio on a different occasion, called it a genuine “overflow of Romanian patriotism”⁷⁷. Valeriu Anania said that “Folklore runs through my veins, I have it from my mother. Nevertheless I do not want to show in my work folklore itself, but rather what lies behind it, the myth. Folklore is like a literary means, the myth is an existential nucleus”⁷⁸, but some other time he was enthusiastic about the splendour of Romanian carols – yet another opportunity to express his love for the Romanian people: “... how can you not love a people who ennobled their sense of duration through their faith in the perpetuity of the Embodiment? And how can you not love a land in whose linen God has warmed His holy little feet?”⁷⁹ Therefore, his political involvement or his non-involvement have to be discussed while bearing in mind his ardent patriotism, in which someone with malicious intents might detect legionary echoes⁸⁰.

Political involvement and non-involvement

The idea of Anania’s political involvement with the extreme right wing Legionaries or the extreme left wing Communists still creates dissension. The main accusations we will have to take into account are those referring to Anania’s legionary past and his collaboration with *Securitatea*. As to his connection to the Legion, Valeriu Anania admits to having had “a green youth”⁸¹: he is recruited at fifteen in the Brotherhood of the Cross, active in the Central Seminary and pledges the oath destined to high school students in 1936, seduced by the movement’s spiritual elitism. Because he had “neither a mystical, nor soldiery” vocation⁸², just a keen sense of freedom, his commitment to the Legion was never complete, and following the legionary rebellion the organisation itself dissolves. This episode is the end of his legionary affiliation: “This concluded my legionary activity, and I haven’t had any other since then”⁸³. Despite this he is arrested because he had accidentally joined the mortuary cortege of Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu and is escorted to prison where his legionary file is drawn up, only to haunt him for the rest of his life⁸⁴. He will be imprisoned again in 1958 with a 25 years sentence of which he will serve six years and two months, in several famous prisons – Jilava, Pitești and

Aiud – still labelled a legionary⁸⁵. He will recant it several times, but never his legionary friends:

“I was cautious – Bartolomeu Anania writes in his Memoirs – without forcing myself to pretend; I felt free from the Iron Guard and I never would have imagined that sharing a piece of bread with some friends who had got out of prison could be a crime against the state order. // That is how in 1956, as soon as I found out that Radu Gyr had been set free after eleven years of prison, I rushed to see him in one of the wards of the Geriatric Institute, where he had been admitted.”⁸⁶

Later on he would argue against the Legionary movement by stressing the incompatibility between it and being an Orthodox priest: “a true clergyman cannot be a legionary at the same time”⁸⁷, an opinion he will also maintain in prison. In a way, this legionary past, while crucial to the accusations brought against him by the communists, was left behind.

More complicated and harder to erase are the accusations of having collaborated with *Securitatea*, either during detention, or later, after having been sent to the USA – the very fact of being sent there is an accusation in itself, since at the time, it was incredibly difficult to get out of the country if you were in any way hostile to the communist regime. When he became a patriarchal inspector for the ecclesiastic education in 1940-1950, Valeriu Anania declared himself to be anti-communist, but not militantly: “I went about my business and I was correct, to say the least, towards the political regime: an individual who kept (and sometimes voiced) his opposing opinions without turning them into actions against the state.”⁸⁸ This passive stance was unable to save him from political detention in 1958 and it will be the leitmotif of Anania’s defence on several occasions. As a matter of fact, I believe this defines him perfectly, his intention to stay away from politics and to dedicate himself to his literary carrier. But the political setting of the time was not inclined to accept his apolitical attitude as long as his legionary file ignored the passage of time and his change of convictions.

During his detention there are at least two episodes incriminating Valeriu Anania, two instances he admits to but finds extenuating circumstances for. The first one is when he wrote reports against close friends:

“... as I wrote, a desire grew within me to tell, to confess, to unburden my soul, to denounce, to leave out no detail. Even more so, my perspective was now overturned: whereas up to that moment I had been dominated by the will to protect my friends and say as little as possible about them, I now felt

the voluptuousness of uncovering deeds and attitudes making them enemies of the regime. (...) This drive – it was a drive – was in control of me the next day too... (...) I wrote and wrote and didn't stop and I marvelled at myself and I kept on writing, possessed by a rage against all those who were free while I lay in prison. I was writing like a madman, like possessed, I had become evil. I was aware of what I was doing up to a point, but I felt the painful pleasure of lashing my consciousness and committing a crime against my own nature.”⁸⁹

This entire confession is then explained by the fact that these denunciations had been made under the influence of “sincerity drugs”⁹⁰ administered in his food or coffee.

The second episode refers to the re-education process in Aiud. Although he was kept in ward XI, destined for those with tuberculosis, usually opposed to any re-education idea, he writes his name, of his own free will, on the list of those who accepted it, after others had done the same. He structures his renunciation of the Iron Guard on the very incompatibility between the Legion and the Christian faith⁹¹. Though there are some who accuse him of having actively participated as a communist re-educator, Valeriu Anania defends himself by saying he survived re-education by memorising the poems he would only much later publish: “I began cautiously, with simple things, short verses, single rhymes, only to rise to ever more complicated forms. The feeling of achievement lighted up my soul; this work was not only a form of escape from the investigation and a way to occupy my time, but also an act of creation in which I felt fulfilled.”⁹² Even if it is still uncertain whether he had really been a communist re-educator in the prison of Aiud – he denies it, but he is contradicted by Ion Cârja's accusation⁹³, a final verdict is out of the question for now – he gave a significant testimony of having opposed the atheist readings which followed after the re-education programme:

“One night Mihalexe announced in the club that now that the political re-education was over, the programme of anti-religious education will begin and he invited someone to read a chapter of an atheist book. I didn't say anything, but after the meeting I went to his room and warned him that if this programme continues, I will adopt the standpoint I had in the tuberculosis ward XI. I told him he can report this to the Administration. I have no idea if he reported it or not, but that was the first and the last anti-religious reading.”⁹⁴

This testimony argues in favour of his innocence.

After being released from prison in 1964 he is sent to America in 1965 because the situation of the Romanian exile was complicated due to the frictions between the two bishoprics, one lead by Valerian Trifa (the “Vatra” bishopric of the state of Michigan, accused of being a legionary) and the other – the Detroit bishopric – lead by bishop Victorin Ursachy, suspected of being a communist⁹⁵. As it has been previously said, the fact that he got out of the country and was sent on such a high mission does seem to incriminate him as a collaborator of the political police, and Ion Mihai Pacepa’s testimony in his book *Orizonturi roșii* [Red Horizons] makes it even clearer: metropolitan Bartolomeu is said to have been an agent of the communist *Securitate* sent to the USA to “take over an émigré religious newspaper called *Credința* [Faith] and use it for influence.”⁹⁶ Anania’s defence is as follows: “I went to the USA of the Americans’ own accord. I was not an officer and I did not collaborate. If I say I had nothing to do with DIE [The Direction for Foreign Information] but Pacepa says I did, it’s just a question of who you will believe.”⁹⁷ Also arguing in his favour is the episode when Bartolomeu Anania confronts Antonie Plămădeală, who had been sent to America where the Romanians were agitated by the Hungarian irredentists claiming Transylvania⁹⁸. The CNSAS document containing the declaration of “Apostol” (Antonie Plămădeală) states that “on May 25th 1976, agent “Apostol” returned from a visit to the United States, where he had to determine the Orthodox clergy and the Romanians to fight the irredentist actions, and said he faced serious impediments. Thus, Archimandrite Anania opposed most of the measures taken by the embassy of our country and by the source Apostol.”⁹⁹ From this document it may be inferred that the archimandrite’s attitude was opposed to the communists’ intentions, and it cannot justify the idea of collaboration, but quite to the contrary. Supporting this idea there are other testimonies to his firm refusal of the communists’ suggestions. Between 1965 and 1976 he did not accept the collaboration offers the political police extended, neither in the USA, nor in Romania, arguing that he doesn’t need to be a bishop (a rank he refused in the United States), nor does he need money or protection. His refusal is brought to its last consequences when he declines the offer to become metropolitan of Transylvania after Nicolae Mladin¹⁰⁰. He likewise rejects the social-democrats declaring he wants nothing to do with “any kind of politics, I just want to do what I have to do”¹⁰¹.

Anania’s continuously reiterated intention of remaining politically neutral has already been mentioned in this study: Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania stressed it on various occasions that he did not wish to be politically engaged, so that he could pursue his literary career and protect his freedom, a freedom which actually takes the form of non-involvement:

“Since I didn’t belong to the exiled, I didn’t have to revile the communists. Since I wasn’t a communist, I didn’t have to revile the Americans.

Since I was not an American citizen I didn't have to go to Bucharest to be registered at the United States' embassy, so the Romanian authorities could rest on my account."¹⁰²

His affirmation is reasserted by one of his disciples: "Father Anania was a free man *par excellence*, a man who refused to sacrifice his natural gifts to the service of ideological paradigms, predictable imperatives or circumstantial obligations."¹⁰³ Until new evidence surfaces, it seems that despite the shadows cast by some testimonies Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania did not collaborate with the Romanian political police.

Some brief conclusions

Due to their complexity it is hard to submit the life and work of metropolitan Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania to an interpretative synthesis¹⁰⁴ and therefore this study was only meant to highlight the relations between religion, literature and politics. With regard to literature and religious belief there is a clear ascendant movement from poetry to dramatic poetry, to religious prose and to the labour of revising the translation of the Bible and annotating it. If what mattered at first was the literary value of his work, this evolution will transform his writing experience in an *ancilla theologiae* once he began his adventure as a Bible scholar. The religious element made visible in the way he explores folklore and mythology will be gradually replaced by theology.

Regarding his relation with politics, despite all his efforts the much politicised time he lived in did not always allow him to keep away. Someone reading through his vast *Memoirs* will notice that the political setting determines the events, either from afar, or from an asphyxiating proximity, and its pressure is seldom absent. There are no definite conclusions to be drawn because we lack factual evidence in favour of or against his collaboration with the Romanian political police of Ceaușescu's period, but apparently he had not collaborated. Perhaps time will shed more light on this controversial issue. It is nonetheless clear that his *Memoirs* refer as insistently to politics as his literature does to the presence of the sacred in human life. Only time will tell whether this claim is nothing but a wise attempt to exonerate himself or a natural obsession with the cruel experiences he went through under a totalitarian regime.

Notes:

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² Valeriu Anania, *Memorii* (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 34. Even if this declaration has been repeated on many occasions, we should remember the excellent observation of Maria-Elena Ganciu: „...monk Bartolomeu never boasted about his monastic vocation. Even though he could have renounced his oaths after his detention, complying with decree no. 410, as most of the monks did, he did not.” See Maria-Elena Ganciu, “Bartolomeu Anania și ‘aventura’ monahală,” *Tabor* V, no. 1 (2011): 119.

³ For more details see the Ștefan Iloaie’s chronology in Valeriu Anania, *Străinii din Kipukua*, (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2003).

⁴ A dual and at the same time complementary status, see Bâgiu, 364.

⁵ Anania, *Memorii*, 27.

⁶ Valeriu Anania, *Publicistica*, vol. 2 (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2008), 104-105.

⁷ Valeriu Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995), 206.

⁸ Anania, *Memorii*, 66.

⁹ Anania, *Publicistica*, 2:33.

¹⁰ Bâgiu, 120.

¹¹ Bâgiu, 389.

¹² Anania, *Străinii din Kipukua*, 34.

¹³ Anania, *Străinii din Kipukua*, 82. This exclamation places the novel itself under the sign of true history (*moolelo*) as an account of actual facts, recorded by a fallen god and makes references to Mircea Eliade and his sacred-profane dialectics.

¹⁴ Valeriu Anania, *Amintirile pelerinului apter. Nuvele și povestiri* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2004), 46.

¹⁵ Nicoleta Pălimaru, “Valeriu Anania. Opera literară” (Ph.D. diss., Babeș-Bolyai University, 2008), 62.

¹⁶ Anania, *Străinii din Kipukua*, 88.

¹⁷ Anania, *Străinii din Kipukua*, 163.

¹⁸ Anania, *Străinii din Kipukua*, 89.

¹⁹ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 146.

²⁰ Anania, *Publicistica*, 2:213.

²¹ Bâgiu, 499.

²² Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 110.

²³ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 98.

²⁴ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 208.

²⁵ V. Fanache, preface to Valeriu Anania. *Scriitorul*, by Lucian Vasile Bâgiu (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2006), 14. The pilgrim talks about this interference in the story called povestirea “Talanga”: “my contemporaries gradually became accustomed to accepting half truths” (Anania, *Amintirile pelerinului Apter*, 90).

²⁶ Bâgiu, 502.

²⁷ Sandu Frunză, “Autoportret în oglindă,” in *Pledoarie pentru Biserica Neamului*, by Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania (Craiova: Omniscop, 1995), 172.

²⁸ Anania, *Amintirile pelerinului Apter*, 110-115.

²⁹ Bâgiu, 98.

³⁰ Ioan Nicu Turcan, “Dialectica românească a dorului,” in *De dincolo de ape*, by Valeriu Anania (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2000), 157.

- ³¹ See the Bâgiu's criticism in Bâgiu, 438.
- ³² Valeriu Anania, *Poeme* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2006), 283.
- ³³ Anania, *Poeme*, 279.
- ³⁴ Anania, *Poeme*, 289.
- ³⁵ Vezi Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 141-146.
- ³⁶ Pălimaru, 170.
- ³⁷ Pălimaru, 211.
- ³⁸ The play is available in Valeriu Anania, *Teatru*, vol. 3 (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2007), 121-192.
- ³⁹ Bâgiu, 119.
- ⁴⁰ Bâgiu, 117.
- ⁴¹ Liviu Petrescu, preface to *Poeme alese*, by Valeriu Anania (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1998), 280.
- ⁴² Valeriu Anania, *Teatru*, vol. 1 (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2007), 223.
- ⁴³ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 23.
- ⁴⁴ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 28-31.
- ⁴⁵ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 35.
- ⁴⁶ Sandu Frunză, "Postfață. Pentru o hermeneutică restaurativă," in *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, by Valeriu Anania, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995), 239.
- ⁴⁷ See Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 14.
- ⁴⁸ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 8.
- ⁴⁹ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 52.
- ⁵⁰ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 55. This tradition of interpretation will be used by metropolitan Bartolomeu, for instance in Bartolomeu Anania, *Cartea deschisă a împărăției. O însoțire liturgică pentru preoți și mireni* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2005).
- ⁵¹ "His splendid speeches – writes Nicoleta Pălimaru – are a 'feast of words' for his listeners, as Socrates said in *Timaos*, placing Valeriu Anania among the great orators of the Church, endowed with the charisma of the words." See Pălimaru, 212. See also the book of sermons Bartolomeu Anania, *Cuvinte de învățătură* (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2009).
- ⁵² Anania, *Cuvinte de învățătură*, 6.
- ⁵³ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 38.
- ⁵⁴ See also the final section of the text on the *Deisis* icon in Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 25.
- ⁵⁵ These traits are listed by Vasile Gordon, "Mitropolitul Bartolomeu – schiță de portret omiletic," *Tabor* V, no. 1 (2011): 61-63.
- ⁵⁶ Valeriu Anania, *Cerurile Oltului* (Râmnicu Vâlcea: Episcopia Râmnicului și Argeșului, 1990).
- ⁵⁷ Ioan I. Ică jr, "O teologie românească a icoanei," in *Logos Arhiepiscopului Bartolomeu al Clujului la împlinirea vârstei de 80 de ani*, ed. Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxă Română a Vadului Feleacului și Clujului (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2001), 87.
- ⁵⁸ Ică jr, 86.
- ⁵⁹ Ică jr, 89.
- ⁶⁰ Anania, *Memorii*, 655-656.

- ⁶¹ Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxă Română a Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, eds., *Logos Arhiepiscopului Bartolomeu al Clujului la împlinirea vârstei de 80 de ani* (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2001), 97.
- ⁶² Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 79.
- ⁶³ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 72.
- ⁶⁴ Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, *Introducere în citirea Sfintei Scripturi* (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2001), 7.
- ⁶⁵ Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxă Română a Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, *Logos Arhiepiscopului Bartolomeu al Clujului la împlinirea vârstei de 80 de ani*, 14.
- ⁶⁶ See Valeriu Anania, *Pledoarie pentru Biserica Neamului*, ed. Sandu Frunză (Craiova: Omniscoop, 1995), 111-112.
- ⁶⁷ Alexandru Zub, "Cunoaștere de sine și creație: Valeriu Anania," *Convorbiri literare* CXLII, no. 2 (2009): 38-40.
- ⁶⁸ Anania, *Cerurile Oltului*, 24.
- ⁶⁹ Fanache, 7.
- ⁷⁰ Anania, *Cerurile Oltului*, 9.
- ⁷¹ Bâgiu, 24.
- ⁷² Valeriu Anania actually attempts an interpretation of Hyperion by comparing him to the divine Logos (Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 144-145).
- ⁷³ Voiculescu is seen as "an initiate of the hesychasm" (Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 187). His poetry is considered to be that of a charismatic. See Valeriu Anania, *Rotonda plopilor aprinși*, second ed. (București: Florile dalbe, 1995), 234.
- ⁷⁴ The fact that Dionysius Exiguus calculated the time passed after Christ's Birth becomes a national pride. See Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 58-60.
- ⁷⁵ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 97.
- ⁷⁶ Anania, *Publicistica*, 2:80.
- ⁷⁷ Anania, *Memorii*, 202.
- ⁷⁸ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 236-237.
- ⁷⁹ Anania, *Din spumele mării. Pagini despre religie și cultură*, 127.
- ⁸⁰ He will profess the same patriotism even after being elected archbishop of Cluj; when answering why the Church did not have a flag of its own he said: "For us Romanians the Church and the Motherland have one and the same flag!" See Anania, *Publicistica*, 2:206.
- ⁸¹ Anania, *Memorii*, 9.
- ⁸² Anania, *Memorii*, 13.
- ⁸³ Anania, *Memorii*, 24.
- ⁸⁴ Anania, *Memorii*, 29-32.
- ⁸⁵ Even despite all his intentions to be apolitical his short activity as the leader of the students organizing the strikes in 1946 Cluj will be overshadowed by his former allegiance to the Legion. The strike is declared after Hungarian workers from Dermata and CFR devastated the ground floor of the 'Avram Iancu' students' dormitory, and as a consequence of his actions as a leader he is expelled from the University (June 4th 1946) and is then arrested several times.
- ⁸⁶ Anania, *Memorii*, 232.
- ⁸⁷ Anania, *Memorii*, 39.

- ⁸⁸ Anania, *Memorii*, 187.
- ⁸⁹ Anania, *Memorii*, 299.
- ⁹⁰ Anania, *Memorii*, 300.
- ⁹¹ See Anania, *Memorii*, 328.
- ⁹² Anania, *Memorii*, 257.
- ⁹³ Anania, *Memorii*, 324. For a more detailed history of the relations between the two see Aurel Sasu, "Cine sunt eu?," in *Străinii din Kipukua*, by Valeriu Anania (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2003), 148 sqq.
- ⁹⁴ Anania, *Memorii*, 332.
- ⁹⁵ See Theodor Damian, "Bartolomeu Anania în perioada americană," *Tabor* V, no. 1 (2011): 30.
- ⁹⁶ Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Orizonturi roșii* (București: Venus, 1990), 380-381.
- ⁹⁷ Mihai Stoica, "Sfânta spovedanie la Secu" *Evenimentul zilei* (București, September 1, 2006), <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/sfanta-spovedanie-la-secu--409509.html> (accessed April 10, 2011).
- ⁹⁸ This episode is perceived by Anania in a broader context, where religion and politics are combined. See Valeriu Anania, *Pro memoria. Acțiunea catolicismului în România interbelică*, 2nd ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2005).
- ⁹⁹ See Mirela Corlățan, "Blestemul 'Apostol': Anania și Plămădeală s-au turnat cu același nume de cod", *Evenimentul zilei* (București, February 4, 2011), <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/blestemul-apostol-anania-si-plamadeala-s-au-tornat-cu-acelasi-nume-de-cod-920226.html> (accessed April 10, 2011).
- ¹⁰⁰ Anania, *Memorii*, 611-612.
- ¹⁰¹ Damian, 99.
- ¹⁰² Anania, *Memorii*, 414.
- ¹⁰³ Teodor Baconschi, "Părintele Anania," *Tabor* V, no. 1 (2011): 17.
- ¹⁰⁴ Dan C. Mihăilescu, "O cruce la răscruce," *Tabor* V, no. 1 (2011): 23.

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