

Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, Confessor in the Communist Prison

Carmen-Maria BOLOCAN*

Prof.PhD

“Dimitru Stăniloae” Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania

Abstract:

In our study we will try to bring to light, as much as the bibliographical sources allow, the image of a great scholar, monk and confessor in the Communist prisons, metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală.

Sufferance in the Communist prison and not only there was and still remains, in a spiritual sense, the interior frame of the prodigal son. It is always necessary to have a renewal. To such a renewal, metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală was also subjected. He tried through sufferance to resemble the Model – Christ and to become himself a model for the future generations.

Our father is part of the academy of great spirits assigned to confess the teaching of the eternal Teacher and Bishop, our Lord Jesus Christ, fathers Iustin Pârvu, Cleopa Ilie, Daniil Sandu Tudor, Bartolomeu Anania, Roman Braga, Dumitru Stăniloae, C. Voicescu. But the real list of those who suffered is endless... May their memory, the example of their life and activity be eternal !

Keywords:

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* bolocancarmenmaria@yahoo.ro

Introduction

As a school of holiness, the monastery has mainly the role to render concrete the Christian manner of living on earth, if we refer to our faith. It is the appropriate environment to accomplish on a human level what Christ revealed as God. That is to reflect divinity on our life, a life which is not incompatible with eternity despite its limited aspects. This is also shown in the Rules for the organization of the monastic life: each monastery must

organize its life so that it shows a high spiritual existence, practice of the Christian virtues, humble living of the liturgical services, rich spiritual assistance and example of Christian life both for its inhabitants and for the worshippers (*Regulamentul pentru Organizarea Vieții Monahale...*, 2006, 1).

Sufferance, whenever endured or thought with honesty, proves that crucifixion has not been useless, that the sacrifice of Christ is fruitful” (Steinhardt 2003, 276). In a spiritual meaning, the Christians that are in a prison go through the stages of the inner tragedy of the prodigal son. They feel the need of a rebirth. Every spiritual rebirth is based on a profound interior commotion in the abyss of the sorrow.

The prisoners have understood that they had no other choice but to abide by the destiny in prison as the will of God. The mystery of the sufferance could only be understood by looking at the Cross. Sufferance creates moral greatness for it is a catalyzer of the noble and superior zeal of the human soul. From a Christian point of view, man must aspire to become like Christ. The entire Philokalia is nothing but a teaching, a pedagogy of the manner in which we can become like Christ. To the extent in which we resemble Christ, to the extent in which we come closer to salvation, we need a transfiguration, a transfiguration of our soul. From a natural man, the Christian must become a man with Grace (Brânzaș 2001, 22-24).

I. Slatina Monastery – monastic centre of Moldavia

The Carpathian and sub-Carpathian chain Stânișoara develops on the eastern part of the Eastern Carpathians, starting from the north from Rarău Mountain and continuing to Piatra Neamț with a length of 120 km and transversally they have a width between 30 and 60 km starting from the left bank of Bistrița River to the sub-Carpathian hills of Moldavia. The Stânișoara Mountains have always been rich in secular woods, in glades and sheepfolds where they got their names from. But these mountains

have been especially blessed by God with hidden places, very appropriate for secluded life and for monasteries. For this reason, in the Carpathian chain Stânișoara many hermits of Moldavia have lived and many monasteries have been built, and Slatina Monastery is one of them (*cf.* Bălan 2001, 74).

In this extremely picturesque place through the variety of the landscape and the richness of the forests of pine-trees and beech Alexandru Lăpușneanu decided to build his monastery:

The monastery was built by local and Transylvanian craftsmen, and it was consecrated, according to historian Grigore Ureche, on the 14th of October 1558, but the constructions continued even after this date, when a royal house and cells were built together with the towers and the defense walls. The painting, works of some Moldavian painters from the 16th century, was completely redone in the 19th century.

In another document we are told that Metropolitan Gregory II from Neamț is the one who urged the ruler of Moldavia to start building the Slatina Monastery. Unfortunately, the old pisania by Alexandru Lăpușneanu was lost and the one existing now was put there by abbot Nil, in 1582, and it says nothing about the consecration of the place or about the contemporary hierarchs (*cf.* Corugă 1971, 1240).

After 1574 (the end of Ioan Voda's rule), hieromonk Nil, the sole leader and abbot of the monastery completes the Church with the inscription ("pisania"), and took the model of coat of arms of Moldavia from Putna. The pisania is carved in stone in Slavonic, fixed on the wall of the church, above the entrance door. By the end of the 17th century, when the Polish entered into Moldavia, Slatina was ruined and it passed through several difficult moments in 1821 also, when a group of Greek revolutionaries found refuge into the monastery. The edifice was restored by hierarch Philaret Beldiman in 1834, who rebuilt the tower at the gate of the monastery. From 1962 Slatina Monastery became a nun monastery (*cf. Monumente istorice bisericesti...*, 1974, 228).

II. The man who grew up with the Church of his nation

Generalizing, the Church and the State are two forms of the divine will, two manners of expression of the human life. The relations between them are necessary. The state educates persons as citizens, in political liberty, but it does not deal with problems such as: wisdom, religious life. The State itself needs the citizen to be religious. The relation between Church and the State is one of reciprocal acknowledgement. The Church and the State, the spiritual kingdom and the profane one must coexist in harmony (*cf.* Meyendorff 1996, 23).

The Church has always wished to manifest freely and to be accepted as a communitarian identity. In order not to be outside the law, it used manners of organization in agreement with the State legislation, but also with its teaching of faith. It made great efforts to become legal, it made huge efforts to pursue the persecutors that its manifestations are not a threat for the State. The main component of the relation between Church and the political power was that referring to the preaching and defense of the faith. The Church opposed the abuse done by the royals in matters that concerned the teaching of faith. For this reason, the hierarchs of the Church were not only once removed by the emperors because they did not share their opinions regarding the Christian dogma. The patriarchs or bishops thus had two options: they either subjected to the doctrinarian views of the emperors and kept their throne, or they opposed the sovereign and were replaced (*cf.* Gabor 2012, 13).

Anyway, in the life of the Romanian people,

The Orthodox Church has never been a rival or a real competitor of the State, but the space in which the perishing world of the earth meets the eternal Kingdom of heaven, the arch between the «broil» of today and the hope of the Judgment day. To this respect, in all its history, the symphony between the Church and the State was marked by the tension between ideal and insufficient, between the tradition of continuity and the tendency of renewal (Cojocaru 2005, 14-15).

During the persecution of the Orthodox Church, almost 2000 priests were arrested together with intellectuals, politicians, students and farmers who opposed the new regime, suffering and dying for their creed. Orthodox, Reformed, Roman-Catholics or Greek-Catholics, the priests were dragged in cuffs, beaten, starving, forced to work hard and killed in

prisons. The jails and work camps had become real living tombs in which thousands of martyrs and confessors who passed through the Communist prisons, were convicted for the simple reason that they wanted to preserve the faith of the ancestors. The priests were especially chased because they did not want to join an atheistic party that tried to control them for the regime to be sure that they will not oppose it. The presence of the members of the clergy in prisons between 1948 and 1964 was beneficial. Through the presence of the hundreds of priests in jails there existed a real Christian spirituality. The priests have done their duty, both through their teaching and through the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. Due to the priests, a large number of those who were imprisoned could die a Christian death: confessed and communed. The clergy, including the young men and most of the people, were persecuted for their Christian faith and not for their political views or for other reasons (*cf.* Baciu, 2004, 257).

The criteria for conviction was faith. The priests were convicted for their faith in God, for the power with which they preached faith to the people, because they fulfilled their duty of apostles. The confessed Christ and that is why they were sacrificed. Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, Constantin Galeriu, Father Arsenie Papacioc, Archimandrite Benedict Ghiuș, Father Cleopa, Father Iustin Pârvu convicted when he was 30 years of age, Father Ioan Negruțiu, Father Nil Dorobanțiu, Hieromonk Sofian Boghiu, Sandu Tudor (he was the abbot of Rarău Monastery with the eremite name Daniil), Father Nicolae Grebenea, Antonie Plămădeală, Father Arsenie Boca, Father Dimitrie Bejan, Father Mina Dobzeu, Father Ioan Bunea, Father Ilie Lăcătușu, Father Gheorghe Calciu Dumitreasa, nun Mihaela Nicoară, Father Constantin Bucescu, Father Constantin Voicescu and many others are part of a long list of those who were imprisoned (*cf.* Lucinescu 2008, 75).

Those who had important positions in the new structures of power, starting with Vasile Luca and Ana Pauker to Teohari Georgescu, they all wanted to destroy everything they considered to be reactionary nests, especially in Ardeal. The regional communist representatives met with a completely stunning resistance especially in to urban centres in the south

of Transylvania: Braşov and Sibiu (here was the residency of the Orthodox Mitropoly of Ardeal with its famous Andreiana Theological Academy, a real symbol of the Romanian nation, as well as the Roman Mitropoly United with Rome, Greek-Catholic from Blaj) (*cf.* Vasile 2005, 57).

In the summer of 1945, in the religious circles there was a rumor regarding the purification of certain hierarchs and priests from Ardeal. In the context of a wish for political cleaning, it has come to adopt several laws of purification that wanted to verify all the institutions, including the religious ones. Vasile Luca considered that the fascist remains “penetrated into our public life, starting with the administration, state apparatus, Church, school and finishing with the poisoned mentality of the people” (Vasile 2005, 43).

The clergy who criticized the political regime had nothing to wait for but verifications, arrests and detentions over longer or shorter periods of time. Massive arrests took place even from 1945 in all the regions of the country. Recent studies and researches have shown that thousands of Orthodox priests, as well as Greek-Catholic and Roman-Catholic or pastors of various protestant churches have gone through detention (*cf.* Drăgulin 1991, 91-98).

The number of the arrests grew considerably in 1948. The members of the security were more and more irritated when the Patriarch Justinian Marina intervened to free the clergy arrested. On the 12th of December 1948, Patriarch Justinian requested from all the eparchies tables with all the priests arrested, which led to a clear situation presented by the patriarchate to the Ministry of Cults. When all this data reached the General Direction of Security, it launched investigations all over the country, which ended with the following conclusions: the intervention of patriarch Justinian “was interpreted as a political victory of the Orthodox Church, which thus received the right to involve and throw out of gear the state affairs” (*cf.* Drăgulin 1991, 236).

It is in 1963 and 1964 that the Communist regime in the context of the internal changes, an especially because of international pressures, moved to freeing political prisoners, including priests. The liberation of the political prisoners was established through the decrees no. 767/1963 and

no. 176/1964, decrees that have never been published in the *Monitorul Oficial*, and not much is known regarding their content (*cf.* Bălan 2000, 250).

The life of a man slips through the fingers simple moments given by the spring smell of the moist ground, by the calming of the summer heat into the water of a river, by the tasting of the fruits taken straight from a tree, by the sound of the steps through the carpet of leaves in autumn, by the joy of the playful snowflakes in winter and by so many other moments that are in a continuous remodeling every single day and across the centuries. The fact that we will present here names of people and places, years, studies, papers, occupations, functions, works, missions, all these just help identify the person we will refer to in the following pages.

Antonie Plămădeală was born on the 17th of November 1926 in Bessarabia, in a village called Stolnicești – county Lăpușna and he was baptized Leonida. He studied at the Theological Seminaries from Chișinău (1937-1944) and “Nifon” from Bucharest (1944-1945), at the Faculty of Theology from Bucharest (1945-1948) and at the Theological University Institute from Cluj (1948-1949). He attended doctoral studies at the Theological University Institute from Bucharest (1956-1959). We must underline the fact that in these institutions, while Antonie Plămădeală was studying, important representatives of theology activated. There was gala galaction, Nichifor Crainic, the philosopher Savin and the professors of the old school who had the experience of the Russian Orthodoxy, such as Constantin Popovici, father Luca and many others – the elitist spirit of faith was educated in this combination. The respect for the human being, the respect for his spirit and faith was one of the most powerful principles taught in these schools (*cf.* Buda and Maica Anastasia 2012, 235).

In 1944 he found refuge in Romania. After 5 years he became a monk at Prislop Monastery, and changed his name to Antonie, then he was consecrated as a deacon and he was transferred to Slatina Monastery, where he activated as a teacher at the monastic school, and eventually he became a hieromonk:

Initiate into the monastic life by the advice of his spiritual father, Arsenie Boca from Prislop, who validated his monastic calling and made him a monk, brother

Leonida was taken under the robe of the spiritual overflow in the moment when he became a monk, consecrated by father Daniil himself, as a burgeon detached from the burning bush of faith that irradiated incandescently at Antim Monasatery (Buda and Maica Anastasia 2012, 236).

In the same year he was convicted in absence to seven years of prison for his activity against Communism and he was arrested only in 1954, imprisoned in Jilava jail, judged again and sentenced to four years of prison, then acquitted in 1956. In 1959 he was excluded from the monastery and clergy by the communist authorities and he was forced to find a job as a simple worker in various factories. It is in this period of time that he participated to the hesychast movement "The Burning Bush". Only in 1968 he was able to return to his activity as a priest, and he was appointed secretary in chief at the Theological institute from Bucharest. He attended studies in Theology and Philosophy at the "Heythrop College" close to oxford.

On the 15th of December 1970, the Holy Synod chose him to be a patriarchal vicar with the title "Ploieșteanul" (he was consecrated on the 27th of December), and he was entrusted with the department of "External Affairs", as well as with the economic department and with the Commission of church painting. He was also the rector of the Theological Institute from Bucharest. He defended his PhD theses in Theology at the College mentioned before (1971), and then at the Theological Institute from Bucharest (1972). On the 9th of December 1979 he was chosen to be bishop of Buzău, and on the 10th of January 1982 he was chosen to be the archbishops of Sibiu and metropolitan of Ardeal. Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală became known as one of the great contemporary ecumenists. He was a member in the Romanian synodal delegations that visited other Christian Churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant etc.). He was a delegate of the Holy Synod to the Fifth General Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches (Nairobi, 1975), when he was chosen as a member in the Executive Committee and in the financial one; he was the head of the Romanian delegation to the Sixth General Assembly of the same Council (Vacouver, 1983); he was a delegate to various meetings of several committees of the Ecumenical Council. He was a delegate at the General Assemblies of the Conference of the European Churches

(Engelberg 1974, Chania – Crete 1979), at various work sessions of the Consultative and Financial Committee. He participated to several sessions of the mixed international Commission for dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman-Catholic Church. He was delegated by the Holy Synod to assist the Romanian parishes from “diaspora” (U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Western Europe). Conferences, courses and communications in Spain, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, U.S.A., Australia and so on; he gave interviews to the press, he spoke on the radio and on TV in the countries mentioned. He was a Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy and of the Academy of Sciences from Chişinău (1992) and of several cultural associations abroad. He passed away on August, 29th 2005 (*cf.* Plămădeală 2021).

A worthy successor of Andrei Şaguna, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală was an international personality, a hierarch with authentic ecumenical views, lacking hypocrisy, he was a vocation scholar, a magician of the word and last but not least, he was a therapist of the soul:

After I learned how to read, I discovered in the belfry of the church a library with about five shelves of books. It was folklore, small books that I considered extraordinary treasures. My father, a church singer, was also librarian. From there I read in tears the stories of Ion Creangă and Petre Ispirescu as well as many others. For days I'd be sitting happy in the belfry cell. My father left me there alone when he couldn't find anything for me to do around the household and my biggest pleasure was to look into as many books as possible and choose for myself the ones to read at home, although I didn't have much time at home. There was always something to do. I was the babysitter for all my younger brothers whom I had to clean, to cradle – only I know how many times I turned them over and then cradled them to stop crying. The harder I cradled them, the louder they cried. Then I would pick them up from the floor. And it was hard for I myself was just a little boy. The books I would read, I would discuss later on with boys my age. I was living in two worlds: in the one of the village and in that of the books, one more beautiful than the other (*cf.* Buda and Maica Anastasia 2012, 15).

The young Leonida, coming from the countryside, was deeply marked by the valences of the universe of his childhood, oriented towards everything that is Christian tradition and knowledge gathered from the pages of the books in the dusty belfry. All this knowledge of things brought

the young Leonida on the benches of the theological seminary “Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni” from Chişinău, dreaming to become a priest, but when his family had to flee from the army of the Russian invaders, his parents transferred him to the seminary “Metropolitan Nifon” from Bucharest. He embraced monasticism in a very natural manner, together with father Arsenie Boca, in Prislop Monastery. And since nothing is coincidental in life, a thing demonstrated by the events in the life of the young theologian Leonida, later on monk Antonie, from a students’ trip in the Făgăraş Mountains, in search for a praying oasis, intellectual recuperation and meditation, a destiny will be born: “my love for Sâmbăta remained as a vibration to the ineffable, as a meeting with the ineffable. That was in fact my meeting with God” (Aioanei 2013, 362-363).

The relationship with Sâmbăta Monastery becomes a vivid one, with an atmosphere of early Christianity:

My relations with Sâmbăta, a monastery built by Brncoveanu in 1699, are spiritual and providential relations. There I discovered my monastic life. It was an atmosphere of early Christianity. The faith was alive... (Plămădeală 1999, 178).

As a student he spent almost all his vacations at Sâmbăta Monastery. In 1946 he discovered a quality religious movement, initiated by father Arsenie Boca, a student of father Dumitru Stăniloae, a student at the anatomy classes of professor Reiner, a pilgrim in the Holy Mountain Athos and besides all these, a very good psychologist, an open and clear mind, a spiritual father both for farmers and refined intellectuals (cf. Plămădeală 2000, 273).

Metropolitan Antonie said that at one time there was a group of 12 students from various faculties, whom father Daniil had taken with him to spend a time of formation, so they could join the group from Antim:

one day he took me as well in the belfry from Antim, where he lived, he read some prayers and then he considered me as one of the members of his household (*Școala Rugului Aprins mi-a fost suportul de cea mai eficientă rezistență și speranță*, interview with Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, published in the journal *Tribuna*, 2001, 7-8).

Influenced by this quality religious movement named The Burning Bush, in 1946 they went to visit and listen to father Arsenie Boca. Until

1948 they spent every vacation at Sâmbăta, enough for the desire to start growing in young Leonida to become a monk. In 1948 he flew in Transylvania, in Braşov, on a project site, then he went to Baia Mare and in spring he arrived in Cluj. In a single month he passed the exams for the 4th year and took his bachelor's degree, then he left from Cluj with an unknown destination. He arrived at father Arsenie who had been forced by the authorities to leave from Sâmbăta and now he was at Prislop, an empty skete in Haţeg. When he was asked if he still had courage to become a monk, father Arsenie Boca told him: "Stay. We will both take responsibility! From now on you are brother Leonida. I will talk to hierarch Mager to make you a deacon. Then we will make you a monk" (Plămădeală 2000, 275).

III. Following the Way, dressing with the Truth and living the Life

An old royal edifice and a royal necropolis, Slatina Monastery close to Fălticeni is one of the rare pearls of Bukovina. Many worthy sons of the Romanian nations have connected their names with this monastery. Here are some of the representatives: Metropolitan of Moldavia Veniamin Costachi, hierarchs Sofronie Miclescu, Calinic Miclescu, Partenie Ciopron, Adrian Hriţcu, the very well-known spiritual father Cleopa Ilie, archimandrite Dionisie Udişteanu, protosyncellus Petroniu Tănase, a former abbot of the Romanian Skete Prodromos from the Athos Mountain, archimandrite Arsenie Papacioc, eremite Paisie Olaru, eremite Daniil Sandu Tudor, as well as many other men of culture, writers, politicians, one of the most important personalities that connected most intensely with Slatina Monastery was the hierodeacon and future hieromonk Antonie Plămădeală. He was very attached to several monasteries, such as Cernica, Antim, Râşca, Prislop and Crasna Skete, but he was also very attached to Slatina Monastery from Moldavia:

I came to Slatina with the recommendation of father Arsenie Papacioc, in 1950, where father Ilie Cleopa was abbot at that time. When I arrived he was not home. I waited until he came. When he arrived – I think he had spoken to father Arsenie Papacioc about my situation – father Cleopa took me to a discussion in a glade behind the monastery. I had nothing to hide. I told the truth, that I was convicted, that I was followed, but that I hoped times will change, that they will improve. So

I stayed at Slatina and I became one of the brothers. While father Cleopa made the community to grow, so it had come to 100 brothers. The community was formed mostly of young monks because everything was very well organized, but not all of them could resist and observe the monastic rules and so some left and were replaced by new-comers. In the end there were 100 monks, those who had found their vocation. He accepted me, I told him I was convicted in absence. Father Cleopa told me he accepted me and no one else has to know anything... My abbot from Slatina, Cleopa, often told us, when we climbed the mountain, how he was accepted in the monastery by abbot Ioanichie from Sihăstria Monastery. Of course, he had also other subjects he wanted to talk about. After father Cleopa, father Emilian Olaru became the abbot (Șeuleau and Dumitriu 1999, 93).

We were almost 100 then, hieromonks and brothers, it was a beautiful community life and the spiritual living was special. We officiated daily the Holy Liturgy, the daily cycle of services, and then we all had our duties given by the abbot. The services of the Church are especially considered to be a living tradition in Orthodoxy. In the monastic life they are even more. I remember now the names of several fathers who were at the monastery at that time, such as father Petroniu, who is the abbot of Prodromos Monastery from the Holy Mountain Athos, father Iuvenalie, father Olarau, father Arsenie, father Chiril, father Paisie, who is now the spiritual father from Slatina Monastery, brother Nicolae, now protosyncellus Nichifor from Neamț Monastery and many others. I remember there was a monk there who for three years did not have a bed in his cell and he slept on a chair. It is here, at Slatina Monastery that I had the chance to speak with Călinescu, who came with many writers among whom Dinu Pillat, Teodor Vârgolici and many others. Eventually I had a longer meeting with George Călinescu, a longer leisurely one so to say.

One day I was sent to Iași, to the Mitropoly, with a report through which father Cleopa asked for monk Daniil (Sandu Tudor) to be accepted into the community from Slatina Monastery and to assign him to Rarău Skete. It was a long story but eventually we succeeded. We, the ones from Slatina, knew him better. While I was at Slatina I had the duty in the chancellery, I dealt with all the documents of the monastery and I also helped in the church and wherever I was needed. I organized the library and the archives of the monastery, the lists of inventory and I also put together a sort of museum. When I thought I was no longer followed, I was caught, trialed and then convicted. After I served my time I returned to Slatina Monastery again, but there I was kicked out when I was in my third year of doctoral studies and I worked for ten years in a Factory of Plastics until I was recovered for the Church by Patriarch Justinian Marina and appointed secretary in chief at the Theological Institute from Bucharest (Fragments from a letter

addressed by Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală to archimandrite Timotei Aioanei. The letter was subsequently published in the volume *Portrete în cuvinte* 2007, 44. The letter dates from a period of great sufferance of the Metropolitan and it was dictated to nun Anastasia Buda).

Slatina Monastery did not have members from Bukovina or Bessarabia.

But it had started to become interesting for it had a wonderful abbot, the one who has lived until recently at Sihăstria Monastery, Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa. This was, of course, before I became a bishop. So, after passing through many troubles, some of which I hadn't solved – because I was already sentenced to 7 years of prison – someone told me about Slatina Monastery, which was far in Moldavia and where a spiritual breeze was starting to feel. With the help of father Arsenie Papacioc, I arrived to this monastery. It was not a sentence monastery. It wasn't a monastery taken into account by the hierarch. It was a simple monastery at the time, and it developed only later on. I went there in 1950, in May. When I saw everything was going well and the Security had not found me, I thought to myself this could go on forever. However, in 1953, of the presence of Bishop Partenie Ciopron who had come for the festivities of the Monastery, who didn't have a bishopric and he too was living in a monastery from Suceava county. Later on he became bishop of Roman. He consecrated me as priest in Slatina Monastery. I was only a deacon then. I had stated to move rather easily thinking that those who were looking for me had forgotten about me in a file. But they discovered me in Iași and arrested me. Meanwhile, Slatina had become a unique intellectual centre, preferred by the intellectuals of the country. Also, father Daniil Tudor had come there and he lived at Rarău. Since Slatina was very famous it was almost inevitable that I was discovered. Nevertheless, the Security had also organized better. I went to Iași because the Patriarch of Bulgaria was there, they caught me and then followed two years of investigation and trial. Although I had already been sentenced in absence to seven years of hard prison. I must remark upon the fact that at Slatina the monks have gotten used to our presence, with the theologians, and respected us accordingly. All those judged in my group had already been trialed and they were serving time. I managed to fool them for six years, but they still got me eventually. I was sure of it. At that time they started the searches for Sandu Tudor. I remember a man came to me, and asked me in great secret of him.... I told him he was at Voroneț in the big church for he had asked me about Daniile the Eremite. And that man left for Voroneț and he was told that Daniil the Eremite was buried in the church. Then he came to Slatina and told me I fooled him. After that he tried to find out from other where father Daniil might hide, but he did not arrest him, he only wanted to find out some things, for he had no reason to arrest the father. It was only later that I found out they were

buying time for later when they would arrest almost everyone. While I was at Slatina Monastery I was alone. There was no one there with mine of all they had arrested before. So I could never engage someone with me. The only one that could get arrested was Father Cleopa, but I defended him fiercely so they could not arrest him (Plămădeală 2002, 67-69).

Years passed by, writing letters to one or the other, but especially writing to the faithful people. Patriarchal vicar at Bucharest, right after he returned from England, bishop at Buzău in 1979, metropolitan of Ardeal, Crișana and Maramureș, in 1982, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală took over the vocation of writing that he defined as a “reestablishment of the truth” (cf. Plămădeală 1999, 63).

In the writings of Metropolitan Antonie we find, maybe best put into words, the urgent necessity to write. At a closer analysis of his works we can find, applied with a certain mastership of the word, the Kalokagathia principle, which directs us to the thinking of the great classics, such as Plato in “Republic” or Socrates in his dialogues:

I live every day under the terror of the duty of writing. I cannot afford to stop. No, I don't write only at home. Sometimes I find refuge at Păltiniș, but I also write on the plane and in any free time I have, between the international conferences, and at Bucharest. Everybody knows I carry my materials and writing instruments with me. I've written many chapters of my books in Jamaica, Tokyo, Leningrad, Geneva, Buenos Aires, Melbourne... I don't write only in cultural breaks. I am always in a cultural activity. Borrow me some time. I don't do much. But I think I'm on the path of my vocation. I want to use it all up. I don't know how much this will count, the future will tell (Aioanei 2013, 21, 47, 51, 78, 86, 97, 106, 110, 179 (see the Appendix of Chapter two)).

Mircea Eliade said once that “my vocation was culture not holiness”. Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală would have said for sure that his vocation was the holiness of culture. Meaning, as Metropolitan Antonie himself said that “real culture is made with the eyes looking to heaven”. They were both right. But the first was tempted by the meshes of the Oriental philosophy and the mystery of the history of religions and the latter was taken by monasticism – not before it sealed him for life with the name of “the father of monks”, Anthony the Great: “He is the saint that gave me strength, confidence and word when I had to do my duty as bishop” (Nemeș 2003, 98).

But why did Slatina remain so deeply carved into the heart of hierarch Antonie? The emotional confessions presented before represent the answer to this question. In Slatina the future successor on the throne of Șaguna experimented the living of the monastic life from the pages of the Paterikon. Slatina, led by its experimented abbot and spiritual father at that time, abba Cleopa, represented for Antonie Plămădeală a spiritual hive, where the prayer and the efforts of the brothers made the honey of the divine grace sweeten the calm moments of prayer and obedience. In the community from Slatina, hierodeacon Antonie received consecration to hieromonk through the hands of bishop Partenie Ciopron, thus experimenting the beauty of officiating the Divine Liturgy, surrounded by the fathers, brothers and many pilgrims who came to confess and receive forgiveness and teachings from the great spiritual fathers from Slatina.

What did hierarch Antonie learn at Slatina? Many saving teachings. To convince ourselves that Slatina was indeed a lavra such as the ones in Paterikon, we let the memories of the one who lived those moments speak. One of the virtues of the monk is poverty which disciplines, but in the same time it makes you free. This virtue he learned from an episode that happened at Slatina with a brother who had come to join the community in his old years, after he had worked for a bank almost his entire life. He had brought with him several pieces of good quality clothing that the abbot and the spiritual father did not accept to be given to the brothers. Later on, abba Cleopa gave it to the charity, to some beggars and thus taught a lesson to father Serapion who attached his soul to some luxurious pieces of clothing. The abbot Cleopa calms down his torment by reminding him: “you lost what you never had, for you are poor of your own free will, as a monk should be” (Plămădeală 2010, 142).

The spiritual life in Slatina Monastery was so advanced at that time that the Patriarch grants it jurisdiction over several other monasteries, trying to resemble the monastic organization in the time of Theodore the Studite. But despite of the efforts, that manner of organization could only partially be replicated, because the times were troubling and adversary to monasticism. The great joy was that at Slatina as in the large Eastern monasteries in the times before prayer never ceased. Each member of the

community read two hours from the Psalm Book, so that the church was never closed, and the Psalms were read permanently. Aside from the duties they all had in the monastery, the abbot took care of the education of the members. In the 50s there was a school here with two cycles frequented by 25 brothers who were about to take exams at the Elementary School from Găinești. The teacher of these novices was hieromonk Antonie himself, freshly received in the community from Slatina Monastery. After two years, abba Cleopa, with the approval of the Mitropoli of Moldavia, opened a real monastic school, a monastic seminary of three years, where there were approximately 40 monk students. The teachers of the theological school were members of the community as well: protosyncell Petroniu Tănase taught Typikon and Church Music; hieromonk Antonie Plămădeală taught Catechism, History of monasticism and Biblical Studies; hieromonk Valerian Pârvulescu taught History of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

To return to that living worthy of the pages of the Paterikon from Slatina, let us add another special lesson on humbleness and pride experienced there by hierarch Antonie. A monk of the community, Ioil, proved himself very painstaking so the Spiritual Council insisted that abba Cleopa consecrated him as a priest, although he had many doubts regarding the real humbleness and ardour of the young monk. Father Cleopa gave in to the decision of the Spiritual Council and consecrated him as priest. In the first forty days he was sent to Rarău Skete to officiate the Holy Liturgy daily, and after a few days father Cleopa receives the news that the angels light up the candles for him in the altar. He recognizes it is a demonic vision and calls hieromonk Ioil to Slatina Monastery and then, without giving any explanations, he sends him to the vineyard from Cotnari. The young hieromonk disobeys saying that he cannot work with mortals since “the angels light up the candles for him in the altar” and leaves the monastery. To this episode, abba Cleopa concludes that a humble John is better than a proud Ioil (*cf.* Plămădeală 2010, 182).

Now we understand why Slatina remained the cradle of the spiritual formation, the school of humbleness, of prayer and of service, of self-sacrifice for the future metropolitan of Ardeal. That is why, in his

memories, Slatina Monastery is that spiritual oasis to which he returned spiritually many times along his tormented life.

Instead of conclusions

The life in the communist prisons of the Romanian gulag was one of physical, psychological, moral and intellectual torture. The Church did not escape. The communists were determined to exterminate all the religions. Ideologically, the faith in God was defined as “opium for the masses”, incompatible with the achievements of the phantasm of social egalitarianism. With Christ’s law of love and with the tolerant spirit planted by the Church in our Orthodox nation, the extermination of the class enemy could not be started. That is why the old Church had to be replaced with the “church” of the scientific and dialectic materialism which had its own feasts, its own illegal “saints”, its own preachers of the dogma of the scientific materialism, capable to form the new man. Death was not death for them, but a passing through to a life infinitely superior. For those who believe in God, death is not a failure, it does not represent an ending point. It is the crossing that surpasses the two environments, a gate to Heaven. To die for Christ is a great happiness for a Christian. The one who really wishes to die for Christ, has to do so firstly for his passions.

Antonie Plămădeală was the most “ecclesiastic” of the Romanian writers and the most talented writer of the clergy. With him, the two literatures that lived in two parallel worlds, detaching the secular heterodoxy of the religious mystery, finally reunite in a bright synthesis from where tomorrow no doubt will come our prophetic and universal solution. For, equally with its Model, the Memory remains essential in the work of Antonie Plămădeală.

The reference to the martyr heroes, whose hearts are alive and work for the justice of God is a work for the earth we live on. Then the living hearts of the martyr heroes will be able to rest in peace for their sacrifice, brighter than our liberty (*cf.* Caraza 1991, 61).

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