Rhetoric of religious discourse in The Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania's sermons

Carmen DURA

Dans cette étude nous allons mettre en évidence la personnalité oratorienne de Bartolomeu Anania en analysant du point de vue rhétorique et pragmatique le sermon tenu le 9 octobre 2005 à la Cathédrale Métropolitaine de Cluj sur l'Evangile de la Résurrection du fils de la veuve de Naïn. Le discours religieux de Bartolomeu Anania se caractérise par une rhétorique complexe et représente une épreuve intellectuelle, spirituelle et émotionnelle pour l'interlocuteur. Le sermon respecte un plan rigoureux, les stratégies argumentatives sont diverses, les registres verbaux et les différents niveaux de langage fusionnent harmonieusement dans le discours. Le discours philosophique se joint de manière naturelle au registre familier et au style indirect libre. De même, les exemples puisés de la littérature vont de pair avec ceux de nature médicale ou de la vie quotidienne. Les sermons de Bartolomeu Anania peuvent devenir à tout moment un modèle d'art oratoire religieux moderne, le dynamisme des exemples, les stratégies des registres verbaux aidant l'orateur s'approcher de son public chrétien.

Mots-clés: rhétorique du discours religieux, Le Métropolitaine Bartolomeu Anania, stratégies argumentatives, *sermon*

Only three years have passed since the Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania, the Metropolitan of Cluj, Alba, Crisana and Maramures presented his paper, *Serban's Bible, theological and literary monument of Romanian Language* (2008), at the first edition of the National Conference "Religious text and discourse" in „Mihai Eminescu" Aula Magna[1].

The purpose of our study, written for the 2011 edition of the conference, is to bring back into attention the oratorical personality of Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania, through the analysis of a sermon on the Gospel of the raising of the widow's son at Nain, from a rhetorical and pragmatic point of view. This sermon, uttered on the 9th of October 2005, in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj, is audio recorded and lasts approximatively 31'58"[2].

For the Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania the rhetoric of religious discourse is a complex one, being an intellectual, spiritual and emotional challenge for the interlocutor. The sermon follows a strict plan, there are several argumentative strategies, the verbal registers and various types of language harmoniously blends in the discourse. The philosophical discourse naturally intermingles with the

[1] Translated by: prof. Manuela-Ramona Brumă.
[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qXID_SD56k&feature=related.

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

colloquial register and the free indirect style, and examples from literature are backed up with examples from medicine or every day life.

In his interpretation of the Gospel, Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania is inspired by the Socratic method, the layout of arguments and issues doesn't disclose what the speaker is aiming at. The climax of his speech regards the attitude that a Christian should have before death. This aspect is not revealed to us from the beginning, on the one hand because it is hard to understand this phenomenon, on the other hand because the audience should be prepared to accept certain truths of faith. This question appears only in the end, after debating more ideas.

The exordium is made through a digression meant to capture the youth's attention: "I said it many times before, it is a great spiritual happiness for me, as a spiritual father, to have in the church so many young people who are really interested in religious life and who take care of their soul, beside the preoccupations characteristic to their age". At the beginning, nothing seems to announce the depth of ideas and the solemnity of the speech. The preacher welcomes the young students in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj at the beginning of the academic year: "Welcome!" After this captatio benevolentiae, inspired by the subject of the Gospel, the raising of the widow's son at Nain, that is the resurrection of a young man, the preacher says that what follows is for everybody: "...and we hope that, from this day on, you will benefit from the Divine Liturgy as well as from the sermon that I give you all who are present here".

We notice the use of certain positive politeness strategies[3]. In the example above, where the orator addresses the young people who are present, he uses exaggeration of interest towards his young interlocutors[4], in order to create a close relationship between the sermon's actants and to connect the speech to the Gospel topic having at its center a young man's ressurection. Address forms[5] preferred by the preacher are: *my beloved* (four occurrences), *my dear* (two occurrences).

The narrative has a summary and anamnetic character and it presents the Gospel's topic of the day: "Today you were read the biblical story about the raising of the widow's son at Nain". There are three main ideas that the speaker underlines and develops:

---

[3] The most important studies in this field are : Robin [Talmach] Lakoff, «The Logic of politeness; or, Minding your *p's* and *q's*», „Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society", 1973, p. 292-305; Robin [Talmach] Lakoff, «What You Can Do With Words: Politeness, Pragmatics, and Performatives», in A. Rogers, B.Wall & J.P. Murphy (éds): *Proceedings of the Texas Conference on Performatives, Presupposition, and Implicatures*, Arlington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977, p. 79-105; Geoffrey N. Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics*, Londra, New York, Longman, 1983; P. Brown and S. Levinson, «Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena», in E. Goody (éd.), *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in social interaction*, Cambridge, CUP, 1978, p. 56-289; Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some universals in language use*, Cambridge, CUP, 1987.

[4] Brown, Penelope, Levinson, Stephen C., *Politeness. Some universals in language usage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 106-107.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 107-112.

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

1. Savior Jesus took pity and asked the mother: Do not weep!
2. He told the young man: Young man, I say to you, rise!
3. Fear seized all who witnessed this miracle and they glorified God Who, here, has visited His people.

The speaker connects the three ideas he intends to insist on by means of pragmatic markers such as: *then*, *and*. Both indicate the succession of ideas, the connection between them and make the audience pay attention to every idea. We note that the pragmatic connectors are specific to the speaker, because the sermon is a monologue:

"*After all, if we think about it*, on this road outside the city, life and death used to meet."

- *After all, if we think about it,* is an optional pragmatic marker from the commentary category and it accompanies the basic message, an assertion. The pragmatic marker *after all, if we think about it* indicates that the basic message is a personal observation of the speaker.

"*In other words*, stop crying, because soon enough you will not have a reason to do it, your tears will be meaningless…"

- *In other words* – pragmatic marker with explanatory function.

"*However*, in this case, the Saviour Christ urges her to stop crying because of the miracle that He was intending to do and that He actually did".

- *However* is an optional pragmatic marker, indicating the speaker's desire to draw the others' attention on what he wants to communicate.

"*You see*, all of these are like the orders of a powerful commander, that are obeyed without protesting".

- *You see* - verb in the imperative mode, a pragmatic marker, it has a locutive signification as it draws attention on the suggested idea and comes as a conclusion to the previous examples.

"*So*, my beloved, death is an accident as it was not created by God and if it's an accident, it's not natural."

- *so* (adv.) – pragmatic marker with a conclusive function.

"*But*, my beloved, we ask ourselves: what is death?"

"*But*, again: why are we afraid of death?"

- the adversative conjunction *but* occurs in initial position, in the first example it indicates the speaker's intention to move to another idea, whereas in the second example it warns the public that a previous question is discussed and insists on finding a persuasive answer.

"*Well (n.n. ei bine)*, and in those times, a risen from the dead was meant to frighten you."

"*Well (n.n. ei bine)*, this man, in the first part of his life, searched for a meaning."

"*Well (n.n. ei bine)*, why was he (our note, Socrates) so serene?"

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

- *Well (ei bine), Ei* (interjection with emotional value), *bine* (adverb) – a prepositive pragmatic marker, draws the audience's attention and introduces an explanation, a narrative sequence or a problematical question.

"*And*, under these circumstances, which is more meaningful to mankind, more beautiful in its greatness: the death of Socrates, the philosopher, the thinker that we are still admiring, or Jesus'death that has delivered us ..?"

- *and (și atunci)*, *și* (a conjunction), *atunci* (an adverb acting as a conjunction) – are discursive markers, they indicate that the question that follows is a conclusion to the parallel between Socrates's death and Jesus Christ's; the adverb *atunci* acquires a conclusive and anaphoric value because it has an initial position.

At the same time, looking at different types of pragmatic markers, we notice the speaker's preference for certain pragmatic markers (*but, well*), that mainly have a phatic value.

The speaker resorts to a variety of strategies in his monologue: often he uses rhetorical questions that are accompanied by one or more examples and gives the answer through inductive strategies; he also uses dilemma, entimema, syllogism. The examples are chosen from everyday life, literature, the Bible, personal experience, philosophy.

A technique commonly used by Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania is the *self-repetition* (repetition of an element by the same speaker who originally emitted it[6]). "The repetition consists in the iteration of a speech element (sound, word, phrase, sentence, clause), once or several times"[7]. In this way, the speaker focuses on two language functions: the emotive function and the phatic one. The phatic function is expressed by taking some sequences from previous statements, a permanent/close contact being thus maintained between the speakers. The repetition also induces the ceasing of the flow of communication, when the speaker insists on a certain topic. In this sermon's analysis, we notice a certain type of repetition: a monologic, integral and distance repetition.

During the sermon, we notice the reiteration of certain questions and answers, in order to settle them into the listeners' mind, to underline certain conclusions, to make an impression on the audience, to point out the main ideas etc. The complete repetition involves morphological, syntactic and intonational changes[8]:

- 2 occurrences:

"Are we mourning for the dead person or for us, those who are left behind?" / "Are we crying for him or for those who have lost him?"

"It's not important that you die, it's important how you die."/ "It's not important that you die, you die anyway, it's important how you die…"

"The question is the following one: between Socrates' death and Jesus's, which one is greater?/ "And so, which is more meaningful for mankind, more beautiful in

[6] GALR, vol. II, *Enunțul,* p. 755.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 753.

[8] Maria Cvasnâi Cătănescu, *Structura dialogului din textul dramatic cu aplicare la dramaturgia românească*, Bucharest University Publishing House, Bucarest, 1982, p. 48.

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

its greatness: the death of Socrates, the philosopher, the thinker that we are still admiring, or Jesus's death, that has delivered us ..?"

- 3 occurrences:

"Let's ask ourselves: why are we afraid of death?" / "Why are we afraid?" / "And once again: why are we afraid of death?"

"Because death is not something natural in the existence of immortality." / "Therefore, death, my beloved, is an accident, it wasn't created by God, and if it's an accident it's not natural." / "Because it is an accident, because it is something unnatural, we feel that death shouldn't happen."

1. *The first ideea that is suggested by the preacher is presented as a rhetorical question, using the author's plural*: "We ask ourselves: What did he mean by that?" (our note: it refers to what Jesus said to the mother)

The feeling of compassion is deeply human and this is emphasized through a comparison. The first thing that comes to our mind when we attend a funeral is to tell the mourning persons to stop crying. So, after the preacher emphasizes Jesus' human dimension, he gives additional information: "He let her know the miracle He was about to make, in other words He told her: Stop crying because soon enough there will be no reason for you to cry. There will be no point in your mourning, because it won't have a reason. Cry no more!")

The second rethorical question anticipates our own possible reaction: "Of course we can ask ourselves: why are we crying at a funeral?" In order to support his argumentation, the orator uses the following dilemma: "Do we mourn for the dead person or we mourn for ourselves?"

By paraphrasing a French poet ("Each time we leave, we die a little.), the speaker states an entimema: The separation is a little death, inducing to the audience the idea that all small breakups prepare us for the great and final separation.

The second rethorical question is reiterated: "Are we crying for him or for those who lost him?" It is a dilemma only from a stylistic point of view because the speaker doesn't seem interested in the second part, but he answers only the first part of the question. From a Christian point of view tears would be justified only if the man died as a sinner. It is a difficult answer to give, but, in the case of the Gospel, the Savior asks the woman to stop crying, thus anticipating the miracle that was about to produce.

2. *The preacher notices that the rhetoric of the Gospel is an antirhetoric:* "Like any other miracle described in the Holy Bible […], this one is described in simple words, too… As you noticed, there are only a few lines, with simple words, without introductions nor figures of speech…Our Savior Jesus displays the same simplicity when he makes a miracle, He doesn't make a speech, He doesn't prepare it, He simply makes it, in one second, He behaves like a commander who gives orders whereas death or disease – if case be – obey Him."

The comparison using the medical terms that follows emphasizes Jesus's power. If before an operation a doctor prepares himself but he also prepares the patient, for

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

Jesus nothing is complicated. Therefore, in the case of the Gospel that is debated, we can speak of an antirhetorism avant la lettre.

The speaker analyses the command given to the young man ("Young man, I say to you, raise!") and mentions similar sequences from the New Testament to show that God acts as a commander when He speaks to a demon, a disease or death:

- the Raising of Jiar's daughter: "Child, I say to you, get up!";
- the Resurrection of Lazarus: "Lazarus, come out!";
- the healing of a man with a crippled hand: "Stretch out your hand!"
- the expulsion of a demon from a child: "Get out of him and don't come back again!".

All these examples demonstrate Jesus's divinity. The speaker concludes saying that Jesus demonstrated that He is the Lord of death, that death no longer exists starting with Jesus Christ and, thus, he asks the auditor the most difficult question: "But, my beloved, we ask ourselves: what is death as such?"

If we take into consideration the connections that the speaker makes with other biblical texts, we see another feature of Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania's sermons: the *intertextuality*. It is achieved by using the quote (see the examples given above) and paraphrase of a French poet's reply or the reply of a character in a drama, without indicating the source). Argumentation is broad, rigorous, showing the vast knowledge of the one who speaks.

3. *The third question brought into discussion in the Gospel is*: "What kind of feeling do we have when confronted to the idea of death or to death itself when this happens?" The answer leads to another question: "Usually, fear. Let's ask ourselves: Why are we afraid of death?"

To answer, the speaker uses the syllogism and he delays response:

"Death is natural. (M – major premise)

It is unnatural to be afraid of what is natural. (m – minor premise)

We must not be afraid of death." (Conclusion)

If we are afraid of death, it means that it is not natural. So, the major premise is false.

The preacher becomes the voice of Divinity. "Why are we afraid? I tell you, this answer comes from God, not from me. Because death is not natural in the human existence. When He created Adam and Eve, God made them immortal, as they had to be. And when He recquired them not to break his command, he warned them as follows: If you break this command, you will surely die, you will die with death." This shows that the assumption that death is natural is false. "So, death, my beloved, is an accident, it wasn't created by God and, if death is an accident, it isn't natural. What is natural as far as man is concerned is life…".

The speaker reiterates the question, as well as the answer, in order for him to set them up in the audience's consciousness: "But, once more. Why are we afraid of death? Because it is an accident, because it is something unnatural…we feel…that death should not happen."

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

After having explained the reasons we fear death, the speaker makes a new statement that he is about to exemplify: "The important thing is not that you die, but how you die".

The preacher explains the nuances of fear. First, he underlines that those who witnessed the resurrection of the widow's son were frightened not by the death in itself, but by the resurrection as such. "The resurrection of a dead person is such an unexpected phenomenon that it causes fear." He gives the examples from the horror literature: stories about ghosts, morois, about seeming death, about the bride who came out of her tomb. Secondly, people are frightened by the presence of God. For example, the preacher remembers St. Apostle Peter standing in the boat who, as soon as he sees God next to him, tells Him to leave because he is a sinner. The third nuance of fear of God is similar to a good child's fear of upseting his parents. The fear makes you behave well and not upset anyone.

After organising and explaining the three shades of fear, the orator uses "As already I told you" in order to reiterate the idea he wishes to develop: "As I already told you, my beloved, it isn't important that you die, you die anyway, it 's important how you die (…)".

Firstly, the preacher gives an example from his personal life, he tells the audience about one of his friends, a man of culture, Alexander Paleologu. He speaks about his intellectual quests and thus evokes their last conversation when the orator asked him what he felt in the vicinity of his death: "I feel serene and fulfilled. I have a wonderful family and, look, God gave me so many years – he was 86 years old when he died – […] I have a wonderful wife, a son, a child better than I could have ever dreamed of and a grandson. Do you think that's insignificant to be 86 years old and to have three generations having the same name around the dinner table? Am I worthy to thank God for what He gave me? Therefore, I go beyond with serenity and contentment." When he felt that he was near his end and before entering into coma, he called the priest, he confessed, he took Holy Eucharist and died serene, calm, reconciled, as a good Christian. This example is touching, because the preacher recognizes that it is the first time he speaks publicly about Alexander Paleologu.

The examples that were given are presented as narrative sequences, that are, nevertheless, kept dynamic by asking a question and giving the corresponding response. Although the sermon is a monologue, the preacher always gives the impression of a vivid dialogue. In the case of the examples regarding Alexander Paleologu's life and the life of Paisie Olaru, the question-answer sequence gives the impression of a journalistic style, as it resembles an interview.

For the second example, he makes a parallel between Socrates' death and Jesus Christ's death. He tells about the two deaths and asks which one was more important. "Socrates's death is serene and quiet, wonderful, whereas Jesus' death is great through its tragedy, but especially through its finality[9]. He didn't suffer for

[9] See N. Steinhardt's comments on this comparison: "It would have been logical if the death of Socrates - the man had been marked by chaos, blood, betrayal and devastation; but it wasn't. It was as

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

the sake of passion and He didn't die for the sake of dying, but for our salvation. He came to crush death by His death, that is our death, and to restore us the life and the ressurection, He did it for love, while Socrates did not. Socrates was a wise man, a great wise man, but he wasn't able to love his neighbor, but only to admire him."

The conclusion resulting from the examples that were provided is that death is abolished through Resurrection.

A third example that the preacher gives us is a discussion which he had with Paisie Olaru: "Father Paisie, what feeling do you have when you prepare to go beyond? I have only one anxiety, that in my life of spiritual father maybe I tied someone whom I shouldn't have tied and that I untied someone whom I shouldn't have untied." If a man like Paisie Olaru can be anxious, a holy anxiety in front of death, all the more so we should be anxious, but it is a creative anxiety because you examine yourself…"

Through the three examples of the persons that were mentioned, the first of which is peculiar to the Romanian culture, the second to the universal culture and the third to the Romanian Orthodox spirituality, the preacher approaches the essence of his message: *What should be the Christian attitude when facing death?* "Before death you should be free of any burden which could press on your soul and then you'll die peaceful, but, nevertheless, there should be a creative anxiety, given that one is examining oneself."

Peroration resorts to affectivity, bringing as a final example the preacher's own attitude regarding death, the speaker detaching from philosophical ideas: "When I first read this text, I said (…) well, I don't know where I go or when I go, but I know that there is Someone Who knows and He knows that I should not know. And because of this short argument, which is based on faith, an element that philosophers never take into consideration, I don't have what is called metaphysical anxieties. I'm peaceful because God knows what to do with me and He knows how He will judge me and where I will sit when I go beyond."

The final tone is positive, optimistic and comes as an answer to the question: *What attitude should Christians have when confronted with death*?: "My beloved, the miracle of the raising of the widow of Nain's son should give you force when confronted with death and above all, it should make you optimistic in your life. We are human, we can be frightened in front of death, Jesus himself was afraid, as a man, for a second, but eventually, the belief in life and Resurrection should prevail".

Paraphrasing a statement from the sermon ("It is important not to die, but how you die."), I might add it is important not only to give the sermon, but it is also important how you present it to the listeners. This aspect is always in the attention of the Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania. As I analysed the discourse, I am convinced

---

serene and full of dignity as possible. On the contrary, Christ's death – on the whole - bears the seal of tragedy, disgust and horror. (Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii*, afterword, biographical and bibliographical references by Virgil Bulat, Rohia Monastery Publishing House, Rohia, 2005, p. 64).

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)

that the speaker consciously applies rules, norms, strategies, that should help him to complete communicative intentions, when addressing others.

The clarity of exposure doesn't exclude the complex strategies that are used, as the presence of monologue doesn't exclude the existence of dialogic structures. All these allow us to say that Archbishop Bartolomeu's sermons may become a model of modern church oratory at all times, the dynamic of examples, of strategies, of verbal registers, helping the speaker, and through him, the Divinity, reach his Christian audience.

References

***, *Gramatica limbii române*, vol. II, *Enunţul*, Romanian Academy Press, Bucharest, 2005 [= GALR]

Brown, Penelope, Levinson, Stephen C., *Politeness*. *Some universals in language usage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004

Cvasnâi – Cătănescu, Maria, *Structura dialogului din textul dramatic cu aplicare la dramaturgia românească*, Bucharest University Press, Bucarest, 1985

Steinhardt, Nicolae, *Jurnalul fericirii*, afterword, biographical and bibliographical references by Virgil Bulat, Rohia Monastery Publishing House, Rohia, 2005

BDD-A170 © 2012 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:00:14 UTC)