

THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE

THE CASE OF NICOLAE STEINHARDT

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Theology – especially since the patristic era – seems to need the mediation of philosophy, particularly Greek ontology, in its relationship and dialogue with the world.¹ In our rapidly changing post-Hellenistic and post-Christian world, in which the mediating role of ontological philosophy has, for some decades now, fallen into abeyance, the question is: which disciplines can assume this role and serve as mediators between theology and secular thought, translating into today's contextual language and models the eternal truths and values of the Christian Gospel, and of the ecclesial way of life?

The present paper, far from suggesting a theology of repetition or its opposite – i.e., any kind of theological minimalism – proposes to explore the possibilities of theological encounter with the contemporary world offered by the dialogue between theology and modern literature, specifically using as a case study the person and work of the Romanian monk and author Nicolae Steinhardt. Literature seems to claim a non-theological understanding of universality and catholicity, while also providing theology with the

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¹ This paper is partly based on my previous writings, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'Theological Pre-suppositions for the Dialogue with Modern Literature', *Nea Hestia*, 1765 (2004), pp. 324-362 [in Greek], and Idem, 'De la création théologique à la création artistique: Prologomènes au dialogue entre théologie et littérature moderne', in : *Thinking Modernity: Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship Between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture*, eds. Assaad E. Kattan and Fadi Georgi (Tripoli/Lebanon and Münster, 2010), pp. 37-77. I would like to warmly thank my colleague the Rev. Dr. Gregory Edwards for his gracious help in the translation of Nicolae Steinhardt's quotations, and for the editing of the English text of this paper. I am also happy to extend my thanks to Rev. Dr. Sorin Selaru of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Bucharest, and the Office of Representation of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions, to Dr. Viorel Coman, Research Fellow at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, and to Fr. Antoine Lambrechts, Librarian at the Abbey of Chevetogne, for their help and assistance in my searches related to the Romanian originals of the works of Nicolae Steinhardt.

contextual language and schemes it needs to communicate its message to the people of post-modernity, and thereby cease to address today's issues in a dated and self-referential language.

THEOLOGY'S INTEREST IN MODERN LITERATURE

In fact, nowadays literature seems to have assumed the role of representing and narrating people's lives; it summarizes and recapitulates the secular quest for the truth and tries, in its own way, to express a vision of catholicity and universality. That is why there cannot today be a serious theological dialogue with contemporary thought without knowledge and critical reception of modern literature, especially as the latter represents the modern world through the art of writing. If theology were to refuse to dialog with modern literature, this would imply a rejection of the implications of the theology of incarnation, namely the possibility of the entire cosmos and human history becoming the flesh of the Son of God. The affirmation of the need for a dialogue between theology and modern literature is neither an attempt to introduce the contradictory concept of "Christian literature",² nor a case of theology patronizing literature and the other arts or disciplines, according to the medieval model of the hierarchy of the sciences, in which theology occupied the preeminent position. In following this medieval model, unfortunately many Orthodox (and wider Christian) theologians have claimed theology's right to inspect and patronize literature, as they cannot understand and accept the specific requirements of literary language, and the distinct function of literary myth. They would prefer that literature speak the language of theology, as well as for it to confirm its specific theological truths and doctrines.

The fact remains that the emergence of modern literature coincides with the depreciation of the religious worldview and the self-assertion of the individual, which began with the Renaissance and culminated with the

² This concept of Christian literature expects literature to speak theological language and to do for theology what theology should do for itself, namely, to give ultimate answers instead of imaginative constructions and representations of reality (cf. Robert Detweiler, 'Review [of the book by John K. Illinger, *The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature* (New York and Nashville/TN, 1963)]', *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 32/2 (1964), pp. 139-141, here 141).

Enlightenment and modernity. The emergence of modern literature is related, in other words, with the emergence of the anthropocentric perspective – the self-assurance, which was unusual until then, and the confidence felt henceforth by the human being in his or her own powers and capabilities. This caused modern people to discard religious guardianship and the constraints of tradition. As a result, modern artistic identity is mainly characterized by the autonomy of artistic creativity in relation to theological and religious influences, as well as the affirmation of the individuality of the artist, detached from religion, tradition and community, and his or her sovereignty over artistic work.

In this perspective, the self of modernity is no longer a creature of God, a being who lives in communion and prayer, and who is part of a whole which transcends him or her, but a subject sufficient in itself, founded on independence and self-referentiality, and removed from tradition, community, and religion; it is a being who claims to shape, organize and set the world at will.³ To quote a well-known definition by Alain Renault, the subject of modernity refers to

the idea of the human being as the source of its representations and actions, as their foundation or as their author. The human subject thus conceived is one that no longer expects to receive its norms and laws either from nature or from things, nor from God. Instead, this new type of person claims to find his moral clues by himself, from his reason and will.⁴

By highlighting the individual self and by tending to “idolize” humankind, modernity displaced God from his throne and raised up humanity as the supreme law and measure of all things. Thanks to his or to her ability to reason (*ratio*) and his/her advances in science, technology, and art, the individual human being of modernity can now also be called “author” or “creator”.

Initially inconceivable without the theological concept of creation originating within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the status of creator henceforth ceased to be the exclusive prerogative of God, to the extent that its use – after

³ Peter Bürger, *La prose de la modernité* (Paris, 1994), p. 21; Idem, ‘L’esthétique de la modernité: une rétrospective’, in *L’esthétique des philosophes*, eds. Rainer Rochlitz and Jacques Serrano (Paris, 1995), pp. 81-90, here 82.

⁴ Alain Renault, *L’individu. Réflexions sur la philosophie du sujet* (Paris, 1995), p. 6.

its displacement by the process of secularization – was transposed to the field of artistic and literary activity.⁵ Imitating God the Creator – who, if He has not been exiled to the heavens, was at least decidedly pushed into the private sphere – or usurping His place, the artist henceforth claimed use of the title of creator or author, while according to another idea dear to modernity, the place of religion was now to be taken by art.⁶ However, it is not the sacred art of the Middle Ages and the great religious traditions – marked almost exclusively by religious references and the eclipse of the subject, the corporeal, and secular themes –, but the art which extracts the individual from the divine order of the world, tradition, or community, with its collegiality or anonymity, thus transforming him or her into an object of study and artistic theme, and of particular attention, making him or her a recognized subject of artistic creation independent of or even outside the religious sphere. “Artistic creation”, as Charles Taylor has stressed, “becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition. The artist becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as agent of original self-definition. Since about 1800,” continues Taylor, “there has been a tendency to heroize the artist, to see in his or her life the essence of the human condition, and to venerate him or her as a seer, the creator of cultural values”⁷.

Due to the autonomy of the individual vis-à-vis the religious community and church institutions, and following the end of the “religious” sense of the world that came with the Enlightenment and modernity, art (especially literature) in modern times has emerged as a representation of secular life, as a secular anthropology and cosmology, even as a secularized “theology”. The emergence of modern literature, and the novel in particular – which is, according to Bakhtin, the literary genre of modernity *par excellence*⁸ –, refers

⁵ For the transition from the theological/religious to artistic creation, cf. François Trémolières, ‘La création, de la religion à la littérature’, in *L’acte créateur*, eds. Gilbert Gadoffre, Robert Ellrodt and Jean Maulpoix (Paris, 1997), pp. 33-38.

⁶ Olivier Boulnois, ‘La création, l’art et l’original: Implications esthétiques de la théologie médiévale’, *Communications*, 64 (1997), pp. 55-76; Jean-Marie Schaeffer, ‘Originalité et expression de soi: Eléments pour une généalogie de la figure moderne de l’artiste’, *Communications*, 64 (1997), pp. 89-115.

⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge/MA and London, 1991), p. 62.

⁸ Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, transl. by D. Olivier (Paris, 1978), pp. 441, 444, 447.

to the emergence of the individual in the bourgeois world of the West. We can then understand the words of Adorno that “the novel was the specific literary form of the bourgeois age”.⁹ And as Bakhtin further observes,

the novel became the main character of the drama of literary development of the new times, precisely because it is the one which best reflects the changing trends in the new world. Because it is the only [sc. literary] genre born of this world, at all points of the same nature as it [...]. Among the major [sc. literary] genres, only the novel is younger than writing and the book, and it alone is organically adapted to new forms of silent reception, that is to say, reading.¹⁰

Indeed, the novel introduces a break since it is related to the passage from an epic world to a fictional world. It is involved in the process leading from a closed world, semi-patriarchal and opaque – one dominated by the sacred tradition of a distant past, national heritage, and distance from the present, which is expressed in literary terms especially through the epic – to the new conditions of a world in the making, for which the main characteristics are pluralism, multilingualism and dialogue, personal experience and free invention, a world of review and continuous reassessment when a new perception of time revalorizes the present and future.¹¹ This is why modern literature, especially the novel, seems to be the “philosophy” and “theology” of the individual, or even the “gospel” of the bourgeois world freed from religion. It could then be argued that modern literature portrays a cosmology and anthropology, a “soteriology” that is similar to, but distinct from, theology. At the same time, modern literature represents a non-theological discourse (*logos*) of catholicity and universality, a discourse which, beyond the fragmentary ontological language of philosophy, attempts, through poetry, narrative, and the use of literary myth, to provide both allusive and polysemic – while also more inclusive and universal – responses to the great questions of human being. We might even say that the literary *logos*, thanks to the use of myth and its allusive and symbolic language, presupposes and implies a

⁹ Theodor Adorno, ‘La situation du narrateur dans le roman contemporain’, *Notes sur la littérature* (Paris, 1984), pp. 37-43, here 37.

¹⁰ Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, pp. 444, 441.

¹¹ Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, pp. 448, 464-465.

sui generis apophaticism, which would be worth studying and comparing to theological apophaticism.¹²

Narrative discourse, for its part, claims to answer questions that philosophy has seemingly failed to answer, such as the fundamental question – from Plotinus and Augustine to Heidegger – “what is time?” To this question, as indicated by Paul Ricoeur in his classic work *Time and Narrative*, the answer, if there is any, cannot be given ultimately by philosophy and the phenomenology of time, but by narrative: we cannot ascribe or represent time through concepts; we can only narrate.¹³ Implicitly recognizing the same weakness and the same impasse, the late Heidegger experienced the so-called *turn* (*die Kehre*), abandoning the large systematic philosophical works in favor of smaller non-systematic texts, in which it became manifest the attraction exercised on him by a non-philosophical thought and language, such as that of the poets Hölderlin and René Char.¹⁴ Previously Heidegger himself was harshly critical of ontology and metaphysics, criticism which was well

¹² Kalaitzidis, ‘Theological Presuppositions’, p. 343; Kalaitzidis, ‘De la création théologique’, p. 53; cf. Evangelos Gkanas, ‘Novel and Theology: Incompatible Ways?’, *Nea Hestia*, 1765 (2004), pp. 392-406, here 406 [in Greek]; Terry R. Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford, 1988).

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: vol. I-III*, transl. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago/IL, 1984, 1985 and 1988); Jean Grondin, ‘L’herméneutique positive de Paul Ricoeur: Du Temps au récit’, in *Temps et récit de Paul Ricoeur en débat*, ed. Christian Bouchindhomme (Paris, 1990), pp. 121-137; William C. Dowling, *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: An Introduction to Temps et récit* (Notre Dame/IN, 2011). A similar approach lies at the root of the rich discussion related to the legitimacy and relevance of the systematic discourse in theology, as well as the theological use of narrative (i.e., story, parable, biography and auto-biography), and furthermore the narrative theology as a method of doing theology. Out of an extensive bibliography on the subject, see among others: Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville/TN, 1982); Terry R. Wright, *Theology and Literature*; Stanley Hauerwas, L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids/MI, 1989); Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York, 1993); Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge, 1996); Gerhard Sauter, John Barton, eds., *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story* (Aldershot, 2000); Choan-Seng Song, *In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts: Story Theology* (Eugene/OR, 2011).

¹⁴ Cf. the texts by Heidegger, ‘Le tournant’ and ‘Les séminaires du Thor’, in Martin Heidegger, *Questions IV*, transl. by Jean Beaufret, Francois Fédier and Jean Lauxerois (Paris, 1976), pp. 140-157 and 196-306; Idem, *Acheminement vers la parole* (Paris, 1976); Jean Grondin, *Le tournant dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger* (Paris, 1997).

received and creatively engaged with, primarily by the French school of phenomenology, and especially its leading representative, Jean-Luc Marion. The latter, in the name of an authentic Christian – and indeed Patristic – tradition, radically deconstructs any attempt at theological ontology, writing about the end of metaphysics.¹⁵

ORTHODOX TRADITION FACING THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY AND MODERN LITERATURE

If we have to admit with Bakhtin and literary and human sciences scholarship that the emergence of modern literature, and the novel in particular, is linked with modernity and the emergence of the individual, we should at the same time not forget that the same scholarship has now established the close relationship between the novel and the biblical writings and tradition.¹⁶ In fact, according to some recent studies, we cannot even think of modernist literature apart from its Christian or religious roots or semantics.¹⁷ We must here admit, however, that the closed, semi-patriarchal, and opaque world, the world of authority and heteronomy, dominated by the sacred tradition of a distant past, national heritage, and distance from the present, which is expressed in literary terms through the epic, is, among others, the world of Byzantium and the Fathers, the world of some lived expressions of our Orthodox tradition – or at least their dominant interpretation,¹⁸ as it is for other religious traditions.

¹⁵ See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, transl. by Thomas A. Carlson, with a foreword by David Tracy, and a new preface by Jean-Luc Marion (Chicago/IL and London, 2012).

¹⁶ Cf., for example, Mark Knight, Thomas M. Woodman, *Biblical Religion and the Novel, 1700-2000* (Aldershot, 2006); Terry R. Wright, *The Genesis of Fiction: Modern Novelists as Biblical Interpreters* (Aldershot, 2007).

¹⁷ Cf. Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (New York and Cambridge, 2010); Erik Tonning, *Modernism and Christianity* (Basingstoke and New York, 2014).

¹⁸ In regard to this crucial issue, it may be time to adopt a more critical stance and to engage in a fruitful discussion beyond the stereotypes and the repetitions of the famous 'return to the Fathers'. I invite the reader who wishes a fuller discussion to consult the paper, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'From the 'Return to the Fathers' to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 54 (2010), pp. 5-36.

In fact, traditional societies, in both East and West, were based on the sacralization of the mechanisms of authority and dominance, on the authoritarian version of a mingling of the religious and the cultural/political, and on a particular understanding of a sacred narrative, a sacred text, law, or even sacred tradition. They thus internalized the element of authority and heteronomy to such an extent that they made it an inseparable part of the static and established theistic/theocratic, hierarchical, medieval model. The (largely willing) acquiescence of the church and theology to this process, where there was obviously a reciprocal negative influence between theology and society, often led to a theology of authority and heteronomy, which in turn bolstered the sacralization of power and the corresponding understanding of religion in terms of power; the church was imposed on society externally and from above, and social prohibitions of all sorts were made sacred. All this basically rolled back the hard-won “gains” of Trinitarian theology and the Incarnation, and negated the scandal of the Cross and the mystery of the empty tomb. The fundamental implication of Trinitarian theology was thus forgotten: the notion that the very being of God is communion and love, that the Trinitarian God himself exists only as an event of communion and love.¹⁹ Reference to God the Father, instead of pointing to liberating and loving Fatherhood,²⁰ ended up referring to a divine policeman upholding the established order, a punitive and vengeful God in the mold of Freud’s “sadistic father” syndrome.²¹ Theology and spirituality have thus lost their paradoxical and antinomic character and regressed to the religious authoritarian models that preceded the New Testament. Meanwhile, Christian morality came to be linked conclusively to a spirit of law, to hetero-determinism, and to virtue imposed from without. Additional consequences of identifying Christianity with heteronomy were the eclipse of the anthropological in favor of the theological or the exclusive hetero-definition of the former by the latter; theology and eschatological experience were replaced by metaphysics; the natural and corporeal were devalued; the church was devoted to the civil authority

¹⁹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in the Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood/NY, 1985).

²⁰ Olivier Clément, *La vérité vous rendra libre: Entretiens avec le patriarche œcuménique Bartholomée I^{er}* (Paris, 1996), p. 159.

²¹ Olivier Clément, ‘Purification by Atheism’, *Sobornost*, 5/4 (1966), pp. 232-248, here 238.

whatever it might be, or the civil authority was hallowed by the church. Finally, and inevitably under these circumstances, it led to the historical marginalization of the church, the liberation of modern societies from any kind of religious guardianship, and the radical secularization we experience today.

In the Christian perspective of the Incarnation, however, God does not impose Himself as an external authority or through legal coercion. Instead, He comes in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate, crucified and risen Son and Word of God, as an inner presence, as *kenosis* and the self-offering of *eros*, as love and freedom, granting humans reconciliation with God through adoption as sons, eternal life and union with God, the call to communion and relationship with Him, and the possibility of participating in the mode of the life of the Holy Trinity – that mode of life which is, as Jesus Christ has revealed to us, the love and communion of divine Persons equal in honor, interpenetrating each other in mutual love. Here we have a perspective determined by the new reality in Christ, the reality of sonship by adoption, and by the call to relationship and communion with the Trinitarian God which is constitutive of the person, God being at once the Other (*Allos*) *par excellence* and supremely close to human beings through Christ Jesus. And in this perspective, the demand for autonomy is not circumscribed by self-reference and an egoistic, narcissistic self-confidence, but, to borrow Thanos Lipowatz's formulation, is related to the *allonomy* of the finite subject.²² In other words, it relates to the subject's free relationship with God, the infinite and absolute Other, which gives rise to relationality and the *ek-static* character of the person, to a transcendence of individualism by opening up the self-sufficient subject to a relationship with every other who is the image of the Other *par excellence*, the primary Other.²³

The sacralization of the mechanisms of dominance, and the internalization of the element of authority and heteronomy to which I have just referred, still characterize, to a large degree, the world of the Orthodox East,

²² Thanos Lipowatz, 'Modernity and Secularization', *Nea Hestia*, 1837 (2010), pp. 509-516 [in Greek].

²³ Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity: An Introduction* (Athens, 2007), pp. 79-82 [in Greek; English translation by Elisabeth Theokritoff, forthcoming at St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York].

and are an inseparable part of the wider problem of Orthodox Christianity's lack of encounter with modernity.

In fact, throughout recent history, Orthodoxy (with the possible exception of the diaspora) seems to have been afraid of modernity and has not embarked on a meaningful dialogue with it. And there is no indication that such a dialogue – much less a substantive encounter – between Orthodoxy and modernity is on the agenda. It remains to be seen if this lack of knowledge and suspicion are due to a radical and basic incompatibility of these two realities (Orthodoxy and modernity), or if, on the contrary, they are due to certain historical conditions.

In the current situation, the altogether decisive question which must be asked from the Orthodox side is: “Did Orthodoxy come to a halt before Modernity?” Or again: can Orthodox theology only survive in traditional or traditionalist environments, borrowing schemes and forms of rural society, to which are linked its liturgical and theological symbolisms, rhetorical models of preaching, structures of church administration, and above all its normative perceptions concerning the relationship between the secular and the sacred, the religious and the political, church and society? Has the Orthodox Church accepted the achievements of modernity and its consequences in the religious and social domains, or is it still tempted to return to pre-modernity, considering post-modernity and post-secularization only through the lens of the *revenge* of church and religion against modernity and secularism, thus mimicking the Catholic Church's anti-modernist reaction before it accepted the new reality and decided to begin dialogue, notably at Vatican II?²⁴

The above critical remarks do not imply that there is no possibility for a fruitful dialogue between theology and modern literature, or that the former has nothing to gain or to learn from its encounter with the latter. Let us now – after this theological critique of authority and heteronomy and the reflection on Orthodoxy and modernity – consider the modernist novel for example, which flourished particularly during the first decades of the 20th century, with M. Proust, R. Musil, J. Joyce, and V. Woolf. Certain anthropological conditions appear in the works of these authors that seem to favor an attempt to dialog with theology. The anthropocentric perspective of the classic novel had as its starting point the ideal of a full personality. This personality

²⁴ Cf. Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity*.

discovered in itself the foundations that allowed it to be constituted as an autonomous and self-sufficient reality, a personality transparent both to itself and to the reader. This anthropocentric self-sufficiency seems to be outdated in the modernist novel. Contrary to what happens in the classic novel, modernist prose goes on to break down the concept of identity. People are no longer described as solid entities determined by their nature or essence, but as liquid, changing realities. In some cases, one can even speak of a radical dismissal of the subject. The result is a dynamic anthropology which refers neither to essences nor to the immutable core of existence.²⁵ This anthropology could be of particular interest for theology, especially for one working with the idea of the dynamic constitution of the human being, which occurs eschatologically. In other words, it might be that this anthropology is interesting for a theology that teaches that the identity of the human being is not to have its own identity, but to go out of himself or herself so that the formation of his/her identity occurs eschatologically.²⁶ I believe that such a theology might engage in a fruitful way with the modernist novel, which is often used as a workshop for exploring modes of exiting from one's personhood.²⁷

In this context, the theological approach to the work of the great Russian historian and theorist of literature Bakhtin, to which I have already referred, would be of great interest. Indeed, Bakhtin represents the unique conglomeration of a solid knowledge of literature and Western modernity, a strong commitment to the Orthodox tradition,²⁸ and a novel approach. This, together with the undeniable role of the subject and the individual, also

²⁵ Yiannis Dimitrakakis, 'Notes on the Modernist Prose', *Nea Hestia*, 1765 (2004), pp. 382-391 [in Greek].

²⁶ Georgios Skaltsas, 'Man as a Mirror of the Eschaton According Saint Gregory of Nyssa', *Synaxi*, 59 (1996), pp. 45-59 [in Greek]; Idem, *La dynamique de la transformation eschatologique chez Grégoire de Nyse: Étude sur les rapports de la pensée patristique à la philosophie grecque ancienne*, thèse de doctorat (Paris, 1998).

²⁷ For the eschatological dimension as a presupposition for the dialogue between theology and modern literature, cf. Kalaitzidis, 'Theological Presuppositions', pp. 331-335, and Idem, 'De la création théologique', pp. 44-47.

²⁸ Katerina Clark, Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge/MA, 1984), pp. 120-145; cf. Caryl Emerson, 'Russian Orthodoxy and the Early Bakhtin', *Religion and Literature*, 22 (1990), pp. 109-131.

highlights the dialogic principle²⁹ as well as a relational ontology, which, in other words, suggests the reality of the person. It is noteworthy that Bakhtin specialists were brought not only to focus on the Christian aspect of some of his writings,³⁰ but also to propose a comparative study of its thought with Orthodox theology³¹ as well as with the work of the distinguished Greek Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, commonly considered, along with Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon, as one of the leading exponents of a theology of personhood.³²

It would be interesting and fruitful for our discussion to attempt to associate and connect – and not to radically oppose, as is usually the case among the Orthodox and especially among some of the theologians of personhood – the subject and the individual to the person, and to explore the contribution of the Christian (and especially the Orthodox) tradition to the emergence of the subject, and to the issue of individuality. An attempt was made in this sense in some of my previous publications,³³ but due to time and space limitations, I can only briefly summarize below some of those ideas.

²⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, transl. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin/TX, 1981); cf. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtine: Le principe dialogique* suivi de *Écrits du Cercle de Bakhtine* (Paris, 1981); Michael Holquist, *Bakhtin and His World* (London and New York, 1990).

³⁰ Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* (New York and Oxford, 1993); Carol A. Newsom, 'Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth', *The Journal of Religion*, 76 (1996), pp. 290-306; Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge and New York, 1998); Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (Atlanta/GA, 2000); John A. Barnet, *Not the Righteous But Sinners: M. M. Bakhtin's Theory of Aesthetics and the Problem of Reader-Character Interaction in Matthew's Gospel* (London and New York, 2003); cf. Susan M. Felch, Paul, J. Contino, eds., *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith* (Evanston/IL, 2001).

³¹ Charles Lock, 'Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology', *Journal of Literature and Theology*, 5 (1991), pp. 68-82.

³² Sophie Olivier, 'Bakhtine aux États-Unis', in *L'héritage de Mikhaïl Bakhtine*, ed. Catherine Depretto (Bordeaux, 1997), pp. 133-148, here 148; cf. Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, transl. by Norman Russell (Brookline/MA, 2008); Idem, *The Schism in Philosophy: The Hellenic Perspective and Its Western Reversal*, transl. by Norman Russell (Brookline/MA, 2015); Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*; Idem, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London and New York, 2006).

³³ See, for example, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, 'Individual versus Collective Rights: The Theological Foundation of Human Rights. An Eastern Orthodox View', in *Orthodoxy and Human Rights*, ed. Eliza Diamantopoulou (Bruxelles, forthcoming); cf. Idem, 'Theological

Since the emergence of the modern subject and the individual is often regarded by Orthodox *milieux* as precluding the possibility of a theological reception of modernity and of the culture of subjectivity/individuality, it is important to remember in this case that historians of ideas and literary theorists have suggested that the subject is already present in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine; less well known is the fact that elements of subjectivity can also found in the poems of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, mainly in his long autobiographical poem *De vita sua*.³⁴ More recently, scholarly interest in the issue of the formation of the self in Byzantium and Orthodox liturgical texts has grown.³⁵

Presuppositions', pp. 344-346, 348-349; Idem, *Orthodoxy and Modernity*, pp. 47-67; Idem, 'De la création théologique', pp. 50-51, 56-58.

³⁴ Out of an extensive bibliography on the subject, see for example: Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity: vol. 2* (Westport/CT, 1973), pp. 600-624; Gregor von Nazianz, *De vita sua*: Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, ed. Christoph Jungck (Heidelberg, 1974); Jacques Fontaine, 'Une révolution littéraire dans l'Occident latin: les Confessions de S. Augustin', *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique*, 3-4 (1987), pp. 173-193; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge/MA and London, 1989), pp. 127-142; Brian L. Horne, 'Person as Confession: Augustine of Hippo', in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, eds. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 65-73; Jean-Claude Fredouille, 'Les Confessions d'Augustin: Autobiographie au présent', in: *L'invention de l'autobiographie*, eds. Marie-Françoise Baslez, Philippe Hoffmann and Laurent Pernot (Paris, 1993), pp. 167-178; Jean Bernardi, 'Trois autobiographies de S. Grégoire de Nazianze', in *L'invention de l'autobiographie*, pp. 155-165; Rolande-Michelle Benin, *Une autobiographie romantique au IV^e s.: le poème II, I, 1, de Grégoire de Nazianze*, unpublished doctoral thesis (Montpellier, 1988); Peter L. Gilbert, *Person and Nature in the Theological Poems of S. Gregory of Nazianzus*, PhD dissertation thesis, (Washington D.C., 1994), pp. 1-16; Grégoire de Nazianze, *Le dit de sa vie*, traduit, présenté et annoté par Alessandra Lukinovich, mis en vers libres par Claude Martingay, introduction du Père Tomáš Špidlík (Geneva, 1997); Francis Gautier, *La retraite et le sacerdoce chez Grégoire de Nazianze* (Turnhout, 2002); Stelios Ramfos, *Yearning for the One: Chapters in the Inner Life of the Greeks*, transl. by Norman Russell (Brookline/MA, 2015), pp. 114-116. For an overview of autobiography in Byzantium, see Martin Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz*, Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 22 (Vienna, 1999).

³⁵ See, e.g., Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia/PA, 2014). Cf. the abstracts of the Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium of March 18-19, 2011, on the 'Byzantine Self', organized by Stratis Papaioannou and Maria Mavroudi, at <http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/scholarly-activities/past/the-byzantine-self/> and <http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/scholarly-activities/past/the-byzantine-self/doaks-byz-colloquium-2011-03-18-19-abstracts.pdf/>. See also the paper by Stratis Papaioannou, 'Byzantium and the Modernist Subject:

It may be that the emergence of the genre of spiritual autobiography in East and West during the first Christian centuries, and its crucial importance for the early emergence of the subject and the shape of modern literature, is inherently bound up with the dimension of inwardness and cultivation of the inner man, of 'plumbing one's depth', etc., which the Christian message introduced (which is not to detract from the communal structure and social dimension of Christianity). Indeed, here it is worth noting that the personal reception and acceptance of the gospel message and most certainly one's entry into the church body cannot be understood on the basis of collectives such as a people, nation, language, culture, etc., but only on the basis of an absolutely personal act, free from any sort of biological, cultural, or ethnic determinism. Thus, the radically new element introduced by the ecclesial way of life is the personal calling addressed to us by God through Jesus Christ, a call to evangelization, to an encounter and relationship with him, as well as the response to this calling, which is equally personal. Hence, God's calling and revelation address the person but at the same time they also create a community (as it became clear from the number of the twelve disciples of Jesus, who symbolically represented the twelve tribes of Israel); Christ's message is foundational for the person as well as for the community of the faithful. It is probably unnecessary to emphasize that personal does not mean simply individual, but nor does it mean collective; that personal calling and the response to that calling do not lead to either individualism or collectivism, but rather to the ecclesial communion of persons, the communion of saints. In this manner, the New Testament transcends the Old Testament model, where God's calling and his agreement/covenant with his people Israel – while not ignoring the personal element – could not be understood apart from the notion of the nation or the chosen people, or apart from the relationship with the land of the fathers. The New Testament seems to ignore this perspective. We may take a few examples from the Gospels and Acts, such as the calling of the twelve,³⁶ followed by a similar invitation addressed by Jesus to others,³⁷

The Case of Autobiographical Literature', in *Byzantium/Modernism: The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*, eds. Roland Betancourt, Maria Taroutina (Leiden and Boston/MA, 2015), pp. 195-211.

³⁶ Matt 4:18-22, 10:1-4; Mark 1:16-20, 3:13-19; Luke 5:1-11; 6:12-16.

³⁷ cf. Mark 10:21; Luke 9:59-62.

Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus,³⁸ the parable of the Good Samaritan,³⁹ Jesus' encounters with Zacchaeus,⁴⁰ the pagan Canaanite woman,⁴¹ the Roman centurion,⁴² or even the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's well.⁴³ These are absolutely personal events and choices not mediated by any form of corporate entities or communities, by religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, or class collectives. And furthermore, these personal choices very often run counter to or against the specific communities that people belong to, inasmuch as they violate the framework and boundaries laid down by those communities; interestingly, however, such acts of autonomy do not lead to a private religiosity or an individual version of faith and salvation.

It is therefore expected that, in face of the challenges posed by modernity and post-modernity and therefore by modern literature, the new generation of Orthodox theologians will be able to re-interpret and further develop in new directions the theology of personhood, which despite representing a radically anti-individualistic way forward for the church, faith, life, and human being, nevertheless makes no sense apart from the questions raised by modernity and its overarching agenda, since in essence those are what it is trying to confront.⁴⁴

NICOLAE STEINHARDT AS A CONTEXTUAL EXAMPLE OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND MODERN LITERATURE

In order to speak on theology and literature in the framework of the discussion on the issue of contextuality in Orthodoxy, I eventually decided not to deal with this issue in a general and abstract way,⁴⁵ but to be fully contextual,

³⁸ Acts 9:1-19. Cf. Acts 22:6-16, 26:12-18.

³⁹ Luke 10:25-37.

⁴⁰ Luke 19:1-10.

⁴¹ Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

⁴² Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:43-54.

⁴³ John 4:4-42.

⁴⁴ This last idea is explored in more detail in Theophilos Ambatzidis, 'Theology of the Person and Modern Individuality', in *Orthodoxy and Modernity*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos, Winter Program Volos Academy 2001-2002 (Athens, 2007), pp. 211-262 [in Greek].

⁴⁵ Which I already did in Kalaitzidis, 'Theological Presuppositions', and Idem, 'De la création théologique', and for which there is an ongoing discussion with an ever-expanding

and came to the conclusion that it would be interesting and challenging to study, in the remainder of my paper, the case of the Romanian monk and author Nicolae Steinhardt – a writer who was considered to be “a representative of Christian existentialism in the lineage of Berdyaev and G. Marcel”,⁴⁶ and at the same time the “patriarch of Romanian literature”,⁴⁷ and a prominent figure in European literature according to many critics.⁴⁸ This attempt will give us a very characteristic example of what kind of challenges and possibilities modern literature poses for theology⁴⁹.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicolae (Nicu) Aurelian Steinhardt (1912-1989) belongs to the remarkable young generation of interwar Romanian writers, essayists, and philosophers, known under the label of “the Generation of ’27”.⁵⁰ He was born near

bibliography. Out of an extensive bibliography on the subject, see among others the more recent works of Heather Walton, *Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces* (Farnham, 2011); Zöe Lehmann Imfeld, Peter Hampson and Alison Milbank, *Theology and Literature After Postmodernity* (London, 2015), as well as the journals *Literature and Theology* (Oxford), *Religion & Literature* (Notre Dame/IN), and *Christianity and Literature* (Wheaton/IL).

⁴⁶ Mircea Ardeleanu, ‘Nicolae Steinhardt et Cioran: une relation ‘marginale’ mais cruciale’, in *Cahiers Emil Cioran – Approches Critiques X: Cioran et Noica*, ed. Eugène van Itterbeek (Sibiu and Leuven, 2009), pp. 218-227, here 220.

⁴⁷ Virgil Bulat, ‘Afterword’ (in which is included a Biography/List of Publications of Steinhardt), in Nicolae Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας* (Diary of Happiness), μτφρ. ἀπὸ τὰ Ρουμανικὰ Νεκτάριος Κουκοβίνος, Ἐπίμετρο Βιργίλ Μπουλάτ (Athens, 2006), p. 504.

⁴⁸ Maciej Bielawski, for example (Maciej Bielawski, ‘Nicolae Steinhardt and his ‘Journal of Happiness’’, 1999, at: <https://nicolaesteinhardt.wordpress.com/2009/01/15/maciej-bielawski-nicolae-steinhardt-and-his-%E2%80%9CJournal-of-happiness%E2%80%9D/>), calls him “the last European”, as “his life and way of thinking and being embraced some of the most characteristic dimensions of the European culture and its values”.

⁴⁹ I offered a previous example of a contextual study between theology and modern literature, and the challenges the latter poses to the former, in my paper ‘Orthodoxy and Eroticism in the Writings of Gabriel Matzneff’, *Nea Hestia*, 1825 (2009), pp. 447-469 [in Greek].

⁵⁰ I borrowed information on the life and the work of Nicolae Steinhardt from the Foreword of Virgil Tsiomos (Virgil Tsiomos, ‘Foreword’, in Nicolae Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 7-8), as well as the ‘Afterword’ (in which is included a Biography/List of Publications) of Virgil Bulat, both published in the *Diary of Happiness* (Nicolae Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 7-8, 499-524, respectively), and from the

Bucharest, in the Pantelimon commune in 1912, in a deeply Romanized (as evidenced by, among others, the names given to the child) middle-class Jewish family (later in his life, this Jewish lineage would cause him problems and troubles, as he would be subjected to anti-Semitic discrimination during the fascist governments of World War II Romania). His father Oscar Steinhardt was an architectural engineer, and a decorated World War I soldier for his heroism in the battle of Mărăști. Nicolae Steinhardt attended primary and secondary school in his village of Pantelimon, high school at Spiru Haret – where despite his Jewish background, he was taught Orthodox religion by a priest – and college in Bucharest. He was classmates or friends with Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, and Eugène Ionesco, who later made brilliant careers abroad, while also being linked through friendship and common intellectual interests with other distinguished essayists and philosophers who remained in Romania, such as Constantin Noica, Alexandru Paleologu, Mihai Șora, Sergiu Al. George, and Dinu Pillat. Surprisingly, some of these brilliant intellectuals used to belong to the ultra-nationalistic, fascist, and pro-Nazi movement of the Iron Guard, and the Legion of the Archangel Michael, having as their mentor the philosopher Nae Ionescu.⁵¹

limited secondary literature available in international languages listed below: Olivier Clément, 'Préface', in Nicolae Steinhardt, *Journal de la félicité*, trad. du roumain et annoté par Marily le Nir (Paris, 1995), pp. 7-14; Aurelian Crăiuțu, 'Steinhardt N.', in *The Encyclopedia of the Essays*, ed. Tracy Chevalier (London, 1997), pp. 813-814; Idem, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places: N. Steinhardt's Uplifting Lesson', in *Philosophy, Society and the Cunning of History in Eastern Europ*, ed. Costică Brădățan (Oxford and New York, 2012), pp. 83-97; Bielawski, 'Nicolae Steinhardt'; Ardeleanu, 'Nicolae Steinhardt et Cioran'; Irina Ciobotaru, 'Nicolae Steinhardt and the Challenge of Ethics: the Sacred Untruth, Whispered by Christ', *DOCT-US Journal* (Biannual Publication of the Doctoral School of University of Suceava), 1/2 (2009), pp. 72-79; Lavinia-Ileana Geambei, 'Jurnalul fericii' – the Phenomenon of Reflexivity', in *Language and Literature: European Landmarks of Identity*, 6 (2010), pp. 233-239; Dărie Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity and the Meaning of Suffering: the Cases of Simone Weil and Nicolae Steinhardt*, Master Thesis submitted to Central European University (Budapest, 2010), pp. 26-28; and from posts on the web: <https://nicolaesteinhardt.wordpress.com/in-english/>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolae_Steinhardt/. A major difficulty I faced in the part of the present paper related to Steinhardt was the lack of international translations of his works, except for the *Diary of Happiness* for which, since there is not an English translation, I used the Greek and the French ones. All the references to that book of Steinhardt are to the Greek translation of 2006.

⁵¹ For the complex and ambiguous relationship of Nae Ionescu and the generation of '27 (Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica) with the Fascist movement of the Iron

In 1934, he received his Bachelor Degree (license diploma) from the Law and Literature School of the University of Bucharest, while in 1936 he successfully passed the bar exam and also defended his doctoral dissertation in Constitutional Law on the legal thought of Leon Duguit.

For the next two years (1937-1939), he traveled to Switzerland, Austria, France, and England, and got to know the new artistic and philosophical trends of Europe, but also Western Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism), while he even had the chance to attend theological conferences.⁵² During the same period, he published articles in important Romanian literary reviews, and by 1934 he had already published a volume of provocative literary criticisms entitled: *In genul ... tinerilor* (In the manner of... youths), a witty parody of the ideas and style of other prominent members of his generation, such as Constantin Noica, Mircea Eliade, and E. M. Cioran. He also co-authored (with Emanuel Neuman) two books on Judaism written in French.⁵³

In 1939, Steinhardt worked as an editor for *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (a government-sponsored literary magazine), but lost his job between 1940-1944 due to the implementation of a policy of ethnic cleansing by the Iron Guard regime (the National Legionary State: 1940-1941⁵⁴), supported

Guard, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and the anti-Semitist ideology, cf. Cosmin Florian Porcar, 'Philosophy in Totalitarianism: Constantin Noica and the "Păltinis School"', *Journal for Communication and Culture* 1, 1 (2011), pp. 90-96; Mara Magda Maftei, 'The Context's Influence on the Evolution of Cioran: The Options of an Engaged Philosopher', *Proceedings of World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology*, 70 (2012), pp. 302-308; Mircea Platon, 'The Iron Guard and the "Modern State": Iron Guard Leaders Vasile Marin and Ion I. Moța, and the "New European Order"', *Fascism* (Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies), 1 (2012), pp. 65-90; Keith Hitchins, 'Interwar Southeastern Europe Confronts the West. The New Generation: Cioran, Yanev, Popovic', in *Philosophy, Society and the Cunning of History in Eastern Europe*, ed. Costică Brădățan (Oxford and New York, 2012), pp. 8-25. Especially for the relation of Steinhardt to Cioran, cf. Ardeleanu, 'Nicolae Steinhardt et Cioran'. On the generation to which Steinhardt belonged, cf. Hitchins, 'Interwar Southeastern Europe'.

⁵² See for example, Steinhardt, *Tò Ημερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 92-98.

⁵³ Steinhardt, *Essai sur la conception catholique du Judaïsme* (Bucarest, 1935); Idem, *Illusions et réalités juives. Considérations réalistes sur quelques problèmes juifs* (Paris, 1937).

⁵⁴ The Iron Guard (also known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael or the Legionary movement) was the name given to a far-right movement and political party in Romania in the interwar period. The Iron Guard was ultra-nationalist, anti-communist, anti-Semitic, anti-capitalist, and reflected the anti-individualism and the emphasis on the

initially by General Ion Antonescu, before the latter established his own dictatorial regime (1941-44). Four years later, when the Antonescu regime collapsed in 1944, Steinhardt regained his job but lost it again in 1948, after the Communist Party of Romania forced King Michael I to abdicate, which then led to the installation of a communist regime. In this new socio-political situation, Steinhardt, a non-communist intellectual, faced new problems and theretofore unknown troubles, as he was seen as an “enemy of the people”. Thus, from 1948 to 1959, Steinhardt suffered a new period of deprivation

collectivity often found in sociopolitical movements in Eastern Orthodox societies, while also trying to promote – and at the same time politically exploit – the Orthodox Christian faith. Following Stanley G. Payne (Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914-1945* [Madison/WI, 1995], pp. 279-280, 281), “the Legion was the most unusual mass movement of interwar Europe. It is generally classified as fascist because it met the main criteria of any appropriate fascist typology, but it presented undeniably individual characteristics of its own.” What characterized especially the Iron Guard was the peculiar and explosive mixture of religious mystic with extreme political action, aiming not only at the prevalence of the fascist ideas (as did the other fascist movements in Europe), but also seeking spiritual and transcendental goals, “the spiritual resurrection! The resurrection of nations in the name of Jesus Christ!”, its founder Corneliu Zelea Codreanu put it (Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 280). According to Radu Ioanid, Romania’s most significant fascist movement willingly inserted strong elements of Orthodox Christianity into its political doctrine to the point of becoming one of the rare modern European political movements with a religious ideological structure. It also drew on the support of the minority of Orthodox clergy that was devoted to it, a number of whom stood as Legionary candidates in the 1937 elections. However, continuing to follow Ioanid’s analysis, Orthodox Christian spirituality underwent significant modifications within the Iron Guard mindset, owing to attempts by the movement to canonize certain saints chosen from among the “Legionary martyrs” as an integral part of its intense cult of death, instinct, the providential leader, youth and of martyrs to the cause of the nation. Thus, Ioanid concludes, despite its pronounced Orthodox character, Legionary mysticism did not signify the total assimilation of Orthodox theology by a fascist political movement. On the contrary, it is to be seen as an attempt to subordinate and transform that theology into a political instrument in a way that made it the enemy of genuine Christian values and spirituality (Radu Ioanid, ‘The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5/3 (2004), pp. 419-453. For further research on the relationship between the Iron Guard and Romanian Orthodoxy, cf. Radu Ioanid, *The Sword and the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, transl. by Peter Heinegg (New York, 1990); Valentin Săndulescu, ‘Sacralised Politics in Action: the February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Mața and Vasile Marin’, in *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*, eds. Matthew Feldman, Marius Turda and Tudor Georgescu (London and New York, 2008), pp. 47-58; Ionuț Biliuță, *The Archangel’s Consacrated Servants: An Inquiry in the Relationship Between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Iron Guard (1930-1941)*, PhD thesis submitted to Central European University (Budapest, 2013).

under the Communist regime, unable to publish and forced to occupy only modest positions to earn a living. Our writer led a marginal life, while his refusal to testify against his friend and fellow student, the philosopher Constantin Noica, during the kangaroo court trial, led to his arrest, conviction, and imprisonment. The main allegations were those of “crimes of conspiracy against the social order”, and his supposed participation in the circle of “mystical/Iron Guardist intellectuals”, for which Steinhardt was sentenced to twelve years of forced labor in gulag-like prisons. Ultimately, he served just under five years, from January 4th, 1960 until August 3rd, 1964, in Jilava, Gherla, Aiud, and other communist jails.

The incarceration of Steinhardt in the prison of Jilava precipitated his decision to receive Christian baptism, which was secretly celebrated in the jail by his fellow convict Bessarabian Hieromonk Mina Dobzeu, on March 15, 1960. Besides his godfather Emanuel Vidrașcu, a former chief of staff and adjutant of Antonescu, and his friend Alexandru Paleologu, witnesses to the event were also two Roman Catholic priests, two Greek-Catholic priests, and a Protestant pastor. He would later many times recall the “ecumenical character” of his baptism, and would promise his fellow convicts to remain faithful to this.⁵⁵ According to many analyses, this central biographical episode was the principal reason for the writing of his major and most celebrated work, the *Happiness Diary*.⁵⁶

After his release in 1964, his refusal to adhere to communism and to collaborate with the regime led him to work, from the autumn of 1964 to the summer of 1968, as an unqualified laborer and truck driver for a food store until he retired, following a car accident in which he was seriously injured.

⁵⁵ See for example Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 108, 105, and *passim*. On hesitations before taking the decision to be baptized, and the preparations for and the way in which the secret baptism was celebrated in the communist jail by his fellow convict Bessarabian Hieromonk Mina Dobzeu, see Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 50-51, 55, 101-103, 105, 107-108, and cf. pp. 223-225 for the completion of his baptism in Bucharest, in September 1964, by chrismation and the receiving of holy communion. For the process of his conversion, and the way in which he relates it to the crucial question of Christian suffering, see Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Izabella Badiu, ‘Jurnalul Fericirii / Journal de la Félicité – traduction d’une identité en métamorphose’, in *Atelier de Traduction*, 11 (2009), pp. 123-132, here 131; Bulat, ‘Afterword’, p. 516; Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, pp. 27, 28; Crăiutu, ‘On Happiness in Unusual Places’, p. 86.

With the encouragement of his friends, he re-entered literary activity, illegally at first, by starting to write his *Diary of Happiness* (published posthumously in 1991, see below), but also legally during the '70s, by translating from English and French (Robert Graves, Rudyard Kipling, James Barlow, David Storey, Alain, Max-Olivier Lacamp, Gaston Rossier), and by publishing his celebrated literary works, such as *Între viață și cărți*, 1976 (Between Life and Books), *Incertitudini literare*, 1980 (Literary Uncertainties), or collaborating with well-known literary reviews. During the '70s, he was also allowed to travel again to the West, spending some time in Belgium (Benedictine Abbey of Chevetogne, and Leuven) and in Paris, where he reconnected with his former Romanian friends, now in exile (Neuman, Cioran, Ionesco), and with the new Western cultural and artistic trends. According to some,⁵⁷ in 1968 he delivered a series of lectures on the life of the monks of Moldavia "at the University of Chevetogne, one of the most important Catholic universities in the West". Besides the possible confusion between the Benedictine Abbey of Chevetogne and the Catholic University of Leuven (Louvain) – both in Belgium – spread by the text of his close friend Virgil Bulat,⁵⁸ what is certain is that Steinhardt translated into French and wrote a Foreword for the little book on the same topic written by Hieromonk Ioanikie Bălan, for which the leading Orthodox Romanian theologian Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae wrote a Preface.⁵⁹

But the painful experience of the trial, his conviction, and prison matured Steinhardt existentially, and convinced him of the futility of profane existence, preparing the way for his decision to follow the monastic way. Thus, a new chapter in Steinhardt's life began in 1973, with his first visit to the Rochia Monastery, in Maramureș (northern Romania), in which, according to his own words, he found, after many years of personal searching, the place he had been dreaming of, which combined the beauty of Transylvania and

⁵⁷ Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 520.

⁵⁸ Following the Romanian original, this confusion is reproduced at least in the Italian (cf. Gabriella Bertini Carageani, 'Presentazione', in: Nicu Steinhardt, *Diario della Felicità*, traduzione di Gabriella Bertini Carageani, a cura di Gheorghe Carageani [Bologna, 1995], pp. 7-17, here 10), and the Greek (Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 520) translations.

⁵⁹ (Hieromonk) Ioanikie Balan, *Vies des moines de Moldavie*, trad. du roumain par le Père Nicolas Steinhardt, Préface P. Dumitru Staniloae (Chevetogne/Belgique, 1986).

its people with the rich cultural life of the city of Cluj. He later met the auxiliary bishop of Cluj, Justinian Chira, who took an immediate liking to Steinhardt, and would become his friend and protector. On August 16, 1980, Steinhardt was accepted at Rochia Monastery, in the north of Transylvania, where he was tonsured an Orthodox monk and where he stayed until the end of his life. He worked as the monastery's librarian, dedicating at the same time an important part of his time to writing.⁶⁰ Thus, even with his withdrawal to the monastic and contemplative life, this author monk of the Rochia monastery did not put an end to his love for literature and culture, as he remained in contact with literary circles in Cluj and Bucharest, and followed, to the extent possible, the cultural life of these cities.⁶¹

His fame as a counselor, father-confessor and preacher continued to grow during this period, attracting dozens of visitors weekly to Rochia. Later, his sermons were published in Romanian in the volume *Give, and It Will Be Given to You*.⁶²

Nicolae Steinhardt died in Baia Mare city hospital, under unclear circumstances, on March 29, 1989 (nine months before the Romanian revolution against the Ceausescu communist regime), while on his way to Bucharest, to which he was traveling for medical reasons (he was suffering from a lung problem). His funeral, which was closely monitored by the Securitate (the secret police), was celebrated in the Rochia monastery by bishop Chira along with a number of priests and deacons, abbots and monks, and was attended by many of his close friends and admirers.

THE DIARY OF HAPPINESS: ITS STRUCTURE AND SPIRITUAL CONSTITUTION

As already noted in our biographical sketch, Steinhardt developed a rich writing activity both before and after his detention, before and after his conversion to Orthodox Christianity. Apart from the titles of his books I

⁶⁰ According to Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 520, his patron bishop Justinian Chira gave him a monastic rule to continue his writing with the same – and even greater – zeal.

⁶¹ According to Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', p. 85, he kept his studio in Bucharest, even after his tonsure as a monk.

⁶² Nicolae Steinhardt, *Dăruind vei dobândi* (Give, and It Will Be Given to You) (Cluj-Napoca, 1992; last edition Rochia, 2006 Partial and uncomplete English translation at: <https://nicolaesteinhardt.wordpress.com/2008/08/30/giving-you-shall-receive/>).

mentioned in the previous section, and the many articles he published in well-known Romanian literary reviews, one should also notice the following refined literary expressions of Steinhardt's outlook, which included forays into literature, painting, music, cinema, ethics, religion, hermeneutics, science, history, sociology, cybernetics, politics, and the philosophy of culture: the seminal essay "Scrisorii pierdute Secretul", 1975 ("The secret of 'The lost letter'"); his important essay/manifesto on liberty "Taina libertății", 1987 (The mystery of liberty), a momentous apology of political courage and a firm denunciation of voluntary servitude; a posthumously edited book of essays and columns written between 1983 and 1989, and published in 1991 under the title *Monologul polifonic* (The Polyphonic Monologue); a posthumously edited book of sermons under the title *Dăruind vei dobândi* (Give, and It Will Be Given to You) (published posthumously in 1992, and in enlarged edition in 1994), a collection of sermons which are, in fact, brilliant oral essays full of theological insight and persuasion; a book entitled: *Monahul de la Rohia N. Steinhardt, Răspunde la 365 de întrebări adresate de Zaharia Sângeorzan* (Monk Nicolae of Rochia answers 365 questions asked by Zaharia Sângeorzan), 1992, containing opinions and answers from the author monk in the form of letters sent to the editor of the book; *Primejdia mărturisirii* (The Danger of Confessing), 1993, a volume of conversations with the writer and his disciple Ion Pinte, containing in addition a political essay entitled "The agony of Europe," some extracts from his *Diary*, and some unpublished essays; a posthumously edited volume entitled *Dumnezeu în care spui că nu crezi... Scrisori către Virgil Ierunca, 1967-1983* (The God in Whom you say you do not believe), and including letters from Nicolae Steinhardt to Virgil Ierunca (and to Monica Lovinescu) covering the years 1967-1983, in which the writer shared with his friends living in the West his thoughts and criticisms on books, films, and musical works, as well as his idea that all these artistic or literary expressions could be seen as a true testimony of the Orthodox faith, despite the fact that their foundation lies often in paradox and absurdity.⁶³

But his major and most celebrated work, which would bring him posthumous fame and would cement his status as a European writer, is without any doubt his *Jurnalul fericirii*, 1991 (The Diary of Happiness), which "describes

⁶³ Bulat, 'Afterword', pp. 523-524; Crăiuțu, 'Steinhardt N.', p. 814.

Steinhardt's *saison en enfer* and was unanimously hailed as a (sc. literary) revelation, combining irony and wit, vernacular language and sophisticated philosophical and theological references".⁶⁴

Steinhardt completed writing his *Diary* in 1972, but immediately afterwards, the existence of this manuscript was denounced to the secret police, and the first version, following a search of Steinhardt's apartment, was confiscated by the Securitate, which saw in it a "threat to the security of the state"! The manuscript of the first version was returned to Steinhardt in 1975 – thanks to the tireless demands of its author, and the intervention and persistent pressure of the Chairman of the Romanian Writers' Union of that time Dumitru Radu Popescu – after the Ministry of Interior checked the manuscript and determined that the security of the state was not finally threatened by this work. In the meantime, however, considering the manuscript of the first version lost, Steinhardt had begun to rewrite and revise the entire manuscript, preparing thus a second version. After the unexpected development of receiving back the manuscript of the first version, Steinhardt reworked both texts together, thus composing a third, consolidated version, which he managed to get to his friends Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca in Paris. Monica Lovinescu would later (from 1988 to 1989) broadcast this text during the "Book on wave" transmission, via Radio Free Europe.⁶⁵ The first version of the book was published in Romania in 1991 (two years after the collapse of the communist regime), and between then and 2012, ten editions were printed (amounting to over 200,000 copies), along with translations of this first version into foreign languages.⁶⁶ There are in fact several translations of this book (French, Italian, German, Greek, Spanish, Polish, Hungarian, Portuguese, Yiddish), which is considered a classic of European literature; unfortunately, there is no English translation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Crăiuțu, 'Steinhardt N.', p. 814.

⁶⁵ See Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 523; Badiu, 'Jurnalul Fericirii', pp. 127-128, and Geambe, 'Jurnalul fericirii', p. 234 for the adventures of Steinhardt's manuscript.

⁶⁶ Cf. Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', p. 86.

⁶⁷ According to a 2012 publication by Aurelian Crăiuțu, "an English translation (sc. of Steinhardt's *Diary of Happiness*) is due to be published by the University of Plymouth Press in 2013" (Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', p. 94, n. 11). To my knowledge this expected translation has not yet appeared.

This book reflects the immense literary and philosophical culture of Steinhardt, his awareness of European history and culture, his interest in 20th century philosophical trends such as existentialism, as well as biblical and patristic texts, and even world religions. As aptly noted by his friend and former fellow convict Alexandru Paleologu,

Steinhardt amazes me with his extraordinary capacity to assimilate information. He knows everything, he is in connection with everything: microphysics, cybernetics, biology, psychoanalysis, dodecaphonic music, abstract art, and so on. I cannot understand how he manages to do that, in what way he possesses the time to do it. His knowledge is enormous. He reads by an electronic rapidity and retains everything. Reading *Happiness Diary* you become struck by so much erudition.⁶⁸

It is difficult to classify Steinhardt's most brilliant and famous work, as the *Diary of Happiness*, a volume of about 500 pages, exceeds usual classifications. Far from being a mere journal or a purely "realistic" account of his prison experience, this is an unconventional book with its frequent use of paradoxes or near paradoxes, which sometimes defy translation.⁶⁹ It graciously combines in a unique and unprecedented way many literary genres: political and literary testament, diary and traveler's notes, prison memoirs and literary writings against prison and the communist gulag, a journal of readings, essays, theological, philosophical, political and artistic reflections, etc., but without any chronological, thematic, systematic order or sequence. This unrepeatable symbiosis between the narrative of confession and the diary of ideas represented by Steinhardt's *Diary*, which presents genuine Christian life and authentic Christian identity as a solution to the lack of existential meaning in the modern world, the totalitarian regime, the concentration camp hell, and death,⁷⁰ covers a period of time of forty-three years (from 1928 Vienna to 1971 Bucharest), and was built upon and written for

⁶⁸ Alexandru Paleologu, *The Alchemy of Existence* (Bucharest, 2001), p. 145 [in Romanian], cited in Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, pp. 71-72 [modified].

⁶⁹ Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', p. 86.

⁷⁰ Ciobotaru, 'Nicolae Steinhardt'; Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 507; Mihaela Daniela Cîrstea, 'The Diary of Happiness: A Way of Evading Time', *The Cogito – Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 5/1 (2013), pp. 18-22.

the sake of the crucial biographical event of the author's conversion and secret baptism in the communist jail, which makes the *Diary of Happiness*, in the end, a "journal of conversion".⁷¹ The crucial event of the conversion of the author is the center and the event that assures the unity of such a paradoxical, and unconventional text, despite or beyond its apparent lack of structure or coherence.⁷² Maciej Bielawski, in an effort to understand the structure of Steinhardt's *Diary of Happiness*, which lacked contents, titles, names, etc., and only had chronological indications (not following, however, any chronological order, or any order of logic), makes the following remark:

There is a certain kind of icon in which Christ is presented in the center, surrounded by various events from His Life, almost as a frame. The same is sometimes done for the lives of saints. Anyone gazing on the icon looks all over it, from the corner to the center and then to another corner, etc. The different events are related one to another and rooted in the central representation. Something similar happens in the *Journal* of Nicu Steinhardt. The central event is his conversion, baptism and his years in the prisons of Jilava, Gherla, and Aiud. All other events which occurred earlier or later and in many different places are profoundly related to this special, unique time, and space. Everything is seen and understood in the light of this space/time experience. Because of this dynamic, it should be said that the hidden structure of *The Journal*, the structure which shines forth from what seems to be a chaos of notes, is existential, theological and christological or even christocentric. In fact, this christocentrism is something essential for the person of Nicolae Steinhardt. His life, rich and fascinating that it was, passed through many different experiences, all the while very theological and centered in a mysterious way on Christ. *The Journal of Happiness* teaches us to look with the same perspective not only on the life of Steinhardt, but also on our own.⁷³

We can now understand the statement by Steinhardt's close friend Virgil Bulat that the *Diary of Happiness* is above all a book of initiation to Christianity.⁷⁴ The *Diary of Happiness* does not explain Christian Truth, but describes human existence in the light of unconditional faith in this Truth,

⁷¹ Badiu, 'Jurnalul Fericirii', p. 131.

⁷² Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, p. 28.

⁷³ Bielawski, 'Nicolae Steinhardt'.

⁷⁴ Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 516.

subordinating the other truths (political, historic, and intimate) to the Christian understanding.⁷⁵ But Steinhardt's Christianity is a joyful and luminous one; it is the inexhaustible and endless source of his inspiration and happiness, despite the fact that it proceeds from the most doleful of places and in the worst circumstances, i.e., the totalitarian regime, and the gulag-like communist jail, to the point that he writes in his *Diary*:

Cell 34 is a sort of long and dark tunnel, composed of numerous nightmarish elements. It's a cavern, a canal, subterranean bowels, cold and profoundly hostile; it's an empty mine, the crater of an inactive volcano; it's a fairly accurate image of dingy hell.

And yet, it was in this unbelievably hideous place that I was destined to spend some of the happiest moments of my life. How completely happy I was in cell 34! (I had not been happier in Brasov, when I was still a child going on a walk with my mother, nor later on the winding streets of London; nor in the famous hills of Muschel, nor in the beautiful white atmosphere of Lucerne; no, nowhere else!⁷⁶

Christian faith and religious practices (secret liturgical services, fasting, prayer, etc.), thus helped the author overcome the oppression, humiliation, and injustice, and transform sadness into happiness. As aptly noticed by Olivier Clément regarding this paradoxical and unusual experience of Steinhardt, "and always, joy 'to the bone'; hell – and this explains the title (sc. of the book) itself – has become, in the depths of the heart, happiness".⁷⁷

But above all, behind Steinhardt's paradoxical – and even indescribable – joy and happiness that emerged in the midst of the terrible world of the gulag-like jail, was his adult baptism in the prison, and his conscious and courageous decision to become Christian. In other words, it was his decision for Christianity and his personal commitment to Christ, an event – and joy

⁷⁵ Ciobotaru, 'Nicolae Steinhardt', p. 78.

⁷⁶ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Ἐδνηχίας*, p. 44.

⁷⁷ Clément, 'Préface', p. 10; cf. Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', pp. 89, 91; Izabella Badiu, 'Nicolae Steinhardt: Journal de la félicité – témoignage littéraire, spirituel et historique', in *L'Europe, la France, les Balkans: Littératures balkaniques et littératures comparées*, textes réunis par Roumiana L. Stantchéva et Alain Vuillemin, *Études balkaniques*, 39/3 (Arras, 2004), pp. 127-140, here 134; Cîrstea, 'The Diary of Happiness'.

– which people who are simply “born” Christian and are accustomed to belonging by tradition or ethno-cultural heritage to a Christian community, have not experienced. As Steinhardt himself notes in his *Diary*, describing the happiness he experienced after his adult baptism,

Those baptized as children can’t know or suspect what baptism means. More and more frequent happiness assaults rush on me. You would say that each time the besiegers go higher and they strike with more power, with more precision. Therefore it is true that baptism is a holy mystery, that there are holy mysteries. Otherwise this happiness that surrounds me, embraces me, dresses me, vanquishes me couldn’t be so unimaginably marvelous and whole. Silence. And an absolute lack of care. For everything. And a sweetness. In mouth, in veins, in muscles. Also a resignation, the feeling that I can do everything, the impulse to forgive everyone, a lenient smile that spread everywhere, not localized on the lips. And a sort of gentle air layer around, an atmosphere resembling that of some childhood books. A feeling of absolute safety. A mescalinal union in everything and a complete detachment in serenity. A hand that is tended to me and an abode with guessed wisdom.

And the novelty: I’m new, I’m a new man: whence so much freshness and renewal? It comes true, Revelation 21:5 (RSV): “Behold, I make all things new”; also from Paul: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come (RSV). New, but unspeakable”.⁷⁸

STEINHARDT’S LUMINOUS AND JOYFUL CHRISTIANITY, AND ITS ECUMENICAL OPENNESS

But if we have to underscore the decisive role of faith and hope in the conception and the construction of the *Diary of Happiness*, since the latter offers an unconventional apology of Christianity as the religion of freedom and courage,⁷⁹ we should also not forget that Steinhardt’s Christianity is a luminous, loving, joyful, and liberating faith,⁸⁰ provocative and paradoxical, faithful to the spirit and not to the letter of the law; it is not a conventional

⁷⁸ Steinhardt, *Tò ‘Ημερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 109; for the whole context of his baptism, and the particular conditions under which it took place, see pp. 101-102, 105, 107-109.

⁷⁹ Crăiuțu, ‘On Happiness in Unusual Places’, p. 90.

⁸⁰ Steinhardt, *Tò ‘Ημερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 179, 201, 203, 226.

legalistic religion, aiming at providing psychological assurance to religious people. As he himself notes in his *Diary of Happiness*,

Christ came to earth first and foremost to scandalize us, to bring fire and division, to praise Mary, who sat without doing anything, and to rebuke Martha, who worked continuously. He avoided encounters with the Pharisees, preferring to keep company with thieves and prostitutes. He didn't hesitate to violate the Sabbath; he came to shake us and to pull us out of our dignified and inherited presuppositions, our flawless reasoning, our common habits, to yank us out by the roots and to burn us with a fiery sword. He did all this in order to rouse us from our slumber and to see something new, something completely new, unexpected, and unimaginable: freedom and compassion. Pulling us out from sin, he does not lead us into an ill-fated virtue, but to absolute freedom, and, at the same time, as the Blessed Augustine says, he removes from us our tendency to deal with things superficially and lose the essence (a tendency which also hindered Martha), and to lead us to joy.

From slaves, we become free people. From trouble and confusion, we move to peace and joy.⁸¹

A fervent lover and proponent of liberty, and an opponent of unconditional obedience and dogmatism, Steinhardt experienced in his life the gulag and the prison, and the painful deprivation of freedom. Through his existential trial (but also thanks to previous positive personal experiences), he decided to convert to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Entering this new world, not only did he discover joy as the eternal theme of Christianity, but also came to learn the value of courage and inner liberty.⁸² This is why throughout his *Diary* he rejects a totalitarian-like morality, i.e., a moralistic understanding of Christianity. In other words, he objects to the ultra pietistic mentality so often dominant in religious and ecclesiastical circles, which appeals to the state or the police in order to fight sin, and to impose virtue in the public sphere!

The priests who hasten to praise the morality laws passed by certain totalitarian regimes (the abolition of prostitution, the prohibition of abortions, difficulty in

⁸¹ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 473; see also, pp. 52-53.

⁸² Crăiuțu, 'Steinhardt N.', pp. 813, 814.

obtaining a divorce) think, I believe, more according to the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law, which is the basis of such measures. Because the spirit blows only where there is freedom and where virtue comes through free will and each individual's choice. [...] I cannot, however, such as things are, agree with those priests [...] who celebrate the "Public Order" decrees about cutting boys' hair and girls wearing skirts.⁸³

Faithful to this liberating and benevolent approach of Christianity, Steinhardt radically denied the narrow-minded, petit-bourgeois, Pharisaic perception of Christianity, which is mainly or even exclusively interested in carnal sin, criticizing it in very powerful words, as is clear from the following quotation:

The truth is that one cannot infer, from the words of the Apostle Paul, the monopoly of carnal sin. It is mainly the Puritans who believe something like this, and this is their characteristic trait. Some have confused love with virtue and Christ with sexual temperance, as if carnal sin is all that exists and not committing it gives us license to do everything else with a clean conscience: envy, arrogance, hatred, selfishness, spitefulness...

Excessive importance given to sexuality often comes from thirst for gossip and scandal, and is explained by the fact that sexuality, which is common to all of us, is a way for some to downgrade important people to their own level. [...] They cheerfully paint them all with the same brush. This is the obsession of all those insufferable people who think that they have the key to Paradise in their pocket, since they do not engage in carnal sins.⁸⁴

This liberating and open-minded understanding of Christianity was also a naturally ecumenical one. Steinhart remained to the end of his life faithful to the ecumenical vision and promise given at the moment of his baptism.⁸⁵ As we are reminded by the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément in his "Préface" to the French translation of Steinhardt's *Diary*, in the prison of Gherla, Steinhardt attended each morning a moving secret ecumenical service which took place in a huge and crowded room of the jail; this secret

⁸³ Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 404.

⁸⁴ Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 446-447.

⁸⁵ Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 108, 105, and *passim*.

ecumenical prayer was attended by Orthodox and Catholic priests, Lutheran and Calvinist pastors, and was gradually joined by “sectarian” preachers. There was no light, perfume, or liturgical vestments, but everything revolved around emaciated men who were forced to whisper words and songs so that the guards could not hear. There were no icons, but instead the revelation that every human being was God’s image. According to Clément, this ecumenical gathering was the realization of the words of Lord Jesus: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (RSV).⁸⁶ Steinhardt was also convinced that there are multiple, unexplored paths that lead to salvation (quoting the Gospel of John 14:2, NRSV): “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places”,⁸⁷ while also being open to a vision of Christianity not exclusively Western or Orthodox/Eastern-Mediterranean. As he states characteristically, after reading a book by the distinguished Roman Catholic theologian (and thereafter cardinal) Jean Daniélou, Christianity is not obliged to wear the mantle of the Greeks or the Latins. Christianity is not only a Mediterranean religion, it is a universal religion; it belongs to everyone and we must become used to the idea that, as a religion, it can be represented from different perspectives, like those that are included in the basin of *mare nostrum*.

And Steinhardt comments:

Christ did not belong exclusively to any of our forms, as venerable and beautiful as they are. There have been and there always will be other rituals, other decor, other customs. In the future, we may encounter things that are completely different, and we should not be afraid. The colors, the melodies, the vestments, the voices, the movements change. The church, the faith, the dogmas, however, are things that are immortal and unalterable. There have been and there always will be other ways for human beings to rejoice, and to endure. The Cross of Christ, however, remains through the ages. So why, then, should we be surprised? Why should we fear that *something other*? Are we not members of a church to which Christ promised a new heaven and another life?⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Clément, ‘Préface’, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 219, 84.

⁸⁸ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 461-462.

STEINHARDT'S CHRISTIAN AFFIRMATION OF MODERN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Steinhardt's fascination and relationship with Christianity and Romanian Orthodoxy started from his childhood, and was first related to the socio-cultural life and festivities of his native village Pantelimon near Bucharest, and more precisely to important manifestations of Orthodox religious life like the liturgical services of the church of his village (which his family attended from time to time despite, its Jewish origins), and the hue and the tone of its bells, or the specific atmosphere of the great ecclesiastical feasts of Christmas and Easter.⁸⁹ As aptly noted by the political scientist Aurelien Crăiuțu, "far from being an abrupt event in his life, Steinhardt's conversion was, in fact, the outcome of a long and arduous spiritual journey that had started three decades earlier, with his interest in Judaism and his attempt to find his spiritual home in the synagogue",⁹⁰ which finally he did not, without however falling into anti-Semitism after his conversion.⁹¹

Steinhardt's relationship with Christianity matured in the time both before and during his years of prison and camp, as well as during his existential trial, and especially following his baptism. After his release from prison in 1964, his faith deepened and became much more cultivated, when

⁸⁹ Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 56, 65-66; cf. 154. Steinhardt's attraction to and fascination with the cultural or 'exterior' elements of Romanian Orthodoxy comes sometimes to the point of a religious culturalism or even to a sort of nationalism (which paradoxically coexists with his well-known cosmopolitanism), praising and exalting Romanian uniqueness and particularity, Romanian customs, dietary traditions and drinks, landscapes and climate, or even openly confessing his love for the "Romanian phenomenon"! (see for example Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 67; cf. Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 515). This exaltation of 'Romanism' by Steinhardt could partly explain his early sympathy for the legionary movement (the ultra-nationalist Legion of the Archangel Michael and the Iron Guard Party) in the second half of the '30s, before he began to distance himself from it, when the movement became blatantly anti-Semitic and pro-fascist and took power in Romania in 1940-41 (temporarily supported by General Antonescu). The relationship of the young Steinhardt with the legionary movement seems to be a kind of taboo issue, since international publications (with the exception perhaps of Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément (cf. Clément, 'Préface', p. 8) neither refer to nor provide a satisfactory explanation for such a paradoxical sympathy coming from a Romanian intellectual of Jewish origin.

⁹⁰ Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', p. 85.

⁹¹ See for example the diary notes of Steinhardt himself in Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 152-155, 407, 426, and Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, p. 35.

he was finally able to experience the Orthodox liturgical services, come to understand the meaning of icons in the Eastern tradition, and began reading the texts of the Church Fathers, Orthodox liturgical books, and classic books of Orthodox theology and spirituality such as the *Philokalia*, the *Synaxarion* (lives of the saints, especially St Seraphim of Sarov), the *Menaion* (from the Greek *Μηναιον*, containing the set hymns for fixed dates of the calendar year), and *The Way of a Pilgrim*, as well as the writings of John Climacus, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Palamas, Nicholas Cabasilas, Paisius Velitskovski, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, Sergius Bulgakov, Alexander Schmemmann, Paul Evdokimov, and Olivier Clément.⁹² Regarding especially the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément and his influence on Steinhardt coming to Christianity, the author monk would later confess: “I have long been the best opinions on the admirable Olivier Clément; I enjoyed his book on the Patriarch Athenagoras – another wonderful man; the book on S. A. [Alexander Solzhenitsyn] moved and enchanted me: the author who is described and analyzed revealed in all its greatness and purity without equal”.⁹³

What is surprising in Steinhardt’s journey to Christianity, beyond his childhood experiences, is his early encounters with expressions of Christian theology and his interest in the Orthodox tradition, long before his baptism, as well as preliminary signs of and experiences pointing to his conversion. As early as the summer of 1938, when he was staying in Interlake, Switzerland, he came into direct contact for the first time with Anglican theologians and

⁹² See for example Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 78, 120, 249-250, 341-342, 389, 412, 447, and *passim*

⁹³ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Dumnezeu în care spui că nu crezi... Scrisori catre Virgil Ierunca (1967-1983)* (The God in Whom you say you do not Believe) (Bucharest, 2000), p. 196, cited in Badiu, ‘Nicolae Steinhardt’, p. 140. Izabella Badiu has even traced a similarity in the spiritual paths of Clément and Steinhardt: “Olivier Clément est pourtant beaucoup plus que le théoricien, le spécialiste français de l’orthodoxie. Il est un converti orthodoxe et en effet un rapprochement, bien fondé par son texte *L’autre soleil. Quelques notes d’autobiographie spirituelle* (Paris, 1975), pourrait se faire entre son parcours et celui de Nicolae Steinhardt. La grande influence chez les deux jeunes agnostiques vient de l’orthodoxie russe, notamment par la voix de Nikolay Berdiaeff à qui Olivier Clément consacra plus tard plusieurs de ses livres et, plus généralement, de la ‘Weltanschauung’ russe dont le porte-parole semble rester Dostoïevski. Les affinités entre Steinhardt et Clément sont toutes naturelles et, même s’ils ne se sont pas connus personnellement, ils ont communiqué à travers leurs écrits”, (Badiu, ‘Nicolae Steinhardt’, p. 140).

had the opportunity to occasionally attend their conference (of the International Theological Association “The Oxford Group”). He was particularly influenced by an Irishman he met at that conference, while his future conversion was also predicated decades beforehand by his trip to London in 1939, during which he stayed at the house of an Anglican priest and attended mass, becoming familiar with Anglican practice and religious organizations.⁹⁴ Reading his *Diary*, we understand that his baptism in jail was not something that happened suddenly, but was rather prepared for a long time. The question of conversion to Eastern Christianity preoccupied Steinhardt intensely for many years. On this point, it is not without significance that during the ‘50s and the period preceding his arrest and imprisonment, which coincides with the first years of the communist regime in Romania, Steinhardt started attending the meetings of a group of Orthodox intellectuals in Bucharest and made many friends who were conscious Orthodox Christians, while he was also interested in reading and studying Christian theological literature. At the same time, he visited churches and monasteries, and consciously attended Orthodox liturgical services and celebrated great Orthodox feasts like Easter,⁹⁵ but not in the way he did in his childhood in his village, when Orthodoxy was the dominant socio-cultural element. In the Romania of the ‘50s, Orthodoxy was barely tolerated, and many priests, monks, and simple believers were persecuted by the communist dictatorship for their religious practice and activities. During this period, he began to adopt Orthodox religious practices (like making the sign of the cross) and even to consider, not without hesitation and even fear, the possibility of baptism, as he himself confessed in his *Diary*, in a note going back to January 1954:

I am afraid. Do I really want to be baptized or is it just a diversion? Perhaps I am simply looking for some consolation, an escape, a new joy amidst all the sadness that surrounds me? [...] No, it is from uncertainty and a form of shame. [...] What will my friends and relatives say?⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 92-98.

⁹⁵ Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 248-252.

⁹⁶ Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 426.

But Steinhardt had the feeling that in some way he was always a Christian, a kind of *anonymous Christian*, or an Orthodox Christian *avant la lettre*. Looking back on his life at the time when he was writing his *Diary*, he does not hesitate to view it as Christian, for it had been, from the beginning, a life under the sign and the shadow of the Cross. As he noted again in the *Diary*,

Later, when I read the *A l'ombre de la croix*, I realized that I had spent my entire childhood [...] under the shadow of the Cross. At that time, I did not yet know that not only would I not escape from under the shadow of the Cross, from its call, and from the bells I heard as a young child, but, on the contrary, I would find the solution to life by sitting at its base and embracing it.

The lure of the Cross had taken me by the hand from a very young age and had tamed me. But the weight of the sins from which I had been unburdened (a weight that had dragged on my shoulders and was unbearable in prison), was for me the best ticket for a show with ... free entry.⁹⁷

It is noteworthy that Steinhardt's new commitment (after baptism) to Orthodoxy did not close but rather reinforced his open-mindedness, and enlarged his intellectual and spiritual horizons. His conversion and monastic or mystic experiences were not lived as a withdrawal from the world, but as a new Christocentric vision of the world, which informed his new vision of culture.⁹⁸ Thus, it is not without significance for our discussion that, after his conversion, and even after entering the monastic life, Steinhardt continued to cherish, in addition to Orthodox theology, modern European literature and secular culture, to the point that he dared to make use of literary quotations even in his sermons. That is the case, for example, with his sermon on the biblical parable of the two coins thrown by the widow into the offering box (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4), giving him the opportunity to preach and to reflect on the theme "Give, and It Will Be Given to You" (Luke 6:38, RSV). In this sermon, he did not hesitate to refer to and to quote a poem by the French poet Henri Michaux (1899-1988), in order to make more clear and understandable that with this parable Christ asks something

⁹⁷ Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 227. cf. p. 425.

⁹⁸ Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, *passim*.

entirely different from giving from our surplus, i.e., to give what we do not have. After quoting the little poem by Michaux,

You have to help him with what you do not have.

Giving what you do not have, you acquire too, the naked, the deserted, that which you lack.

With what you think you do not have, but which is and which will be in you.

Deeper than the depth of your self. More mysterious, more opaque, yet clearer, a fast spring that flows unceasingly, calling, inviting to communion,

the monk Nicolae Steinhardt commented:

I think that nowhere outside of the Gospels have clearer and more Christian words been spoken than in Michaux's little poem, which stupefied and enthused me. Maybe in some fragments of *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Demons*, maybe Cervantes creating El nuestro Senor Don Quijote, El Christo espanol, maybe Albert Camus in the text about Oscar Wilde (titled *The Artist in Prison*) and about the way to Christ not through suffering and pain (a good way, though an inferior one) but by an excess of happiness and moments of euphoria (a superior way). I think nowhere has a poet or writer spoken more clearly of the unapproachable One.⁹⁹

The same can be said regarding Steinhardt's prodigious amount of literary and philosophical readings, which included, among other, G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens, Cervantes, John Milton, John Galsworthy, Charles Peguy, Marcel Jouhandeau and Henry de Montherlant, Mircea Eliade and Nikolai Berdiaev.¹⁰⁰ The breadth and variety of his interdisciplinary interests are indeed astonishing, ranging as they did from theological essays to non-academic literary criticism, from liberty to false idealism, from exile to physics experiments, from contemplation to the new French quantitative historiography, whereas he wrote with equal interest, competence, and sympathy about Michelangelo Antonioni and Voltaire, Dickens and Barbusse, Eliade and Beaumarchais, Daudet and Aitmatov, Maria Callas and Dosto-

⁹⁹ Steinhardt, Nicolae, 'Dăruind vei dobândi', in *Dăruind vei dobândi* (Rochia, 2006), pp. 197-204, here 198.

¹⁰⁰ Crăiuțu, 'Steinhardt N.', p. 813.

evsky, Kurt Gödel and Thomas Mann, Mateiu Caragiale, Marshall McLuhan and Sinclair Lewis.¹⁰¹

This great variety and richness of Steinhardt's readings and writings – in other words, his literary journey – was not self-referential. Throughout his work and life, it became clear that he was rejecting the ethics/aesthetics dichotomy.¹⁰² His perception of art was not the kind of “art for art's sake”, since for him art is fundamentally an introduction to mystery,¹⁰³ while the aim of art (echoing on this point the great Russian film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky) is to prepare humans for death.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, for this author monk, art, every kind of art but especially literature, and even the “anti-Christian” writings, points eschatologically to Christ and to His Kingdom, for Christ is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the recapitulation of all creating beings, the Savior of fallen humanity.

In Steinhardt's work, especially in his *Diary*, intellectual and literary references counterbalance the religious element.¹⁰⁵ The writer monk of Rochia is not a religious author in the strict sense of the term; he is not seeking through his writings to serve the contradictory and narrow-minded concept of Christian or religious literature. His potential readers exceed the visible or canonical boundaries of the church; they are not just what we call *religious people*, but rather the ordinary and multi-colored people we meet every day, ranging from faithful to religiously indifferent or even openly hostile. For Steinhardt, Christianity was not a sect of “the pure”, but a living witness in the world, never forgetting however that it takes its origin out of this world. He consequently experienced, in his Christian life and writings, the biblical “in the world but not of the world”, being at the same time both author and monk, and “dividing his time between the cultural attractions of Bucharest and the contemplative atmosphere of Rochia monastery”,¹⁰⁶ using two names for his publications, Nicolae Steinhardt for his literary writings, and Monahul Nicolae Delarochia for his sermons and theological (and other)

¹⁰¹ Crăiuțu, ‘Steinhardt N.’, p. 814.

¹⁰² Crăiuțu, ‘Steinhardt N.’, p. 813.

¹⁰³ Clément, ‘Préface’, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Crăiuțu, ‘Steinhardt N.’, p. 813.

¹⁰⁵ Badiu, ‘Jurnalul Fericirii’, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ Crăiuțu, ‘Steinhardt N.’, p. 813.

reflections.¹⁰⁷ It is therefore understandable why he was able to read literary texts as what they are first and foremost, i.e., literary texts, and not theological treatises or dogmatic textbooks, and to consider literature, at the same time, as a possible mediator between theology and secular thought, without seeking, however, any kind of theological patronizing of literature. With his literary work, Steinhardt was doing theology, bearing Christian witness in the modern world (totalitarian, in his specific context!), but without having the illusion that literature should or could speak the language of theology, even though his secular friends thought of him, not without some irony, as having a theological view on everything!¹⁰⁸

We are not then surprised to see the writer monk drawing conclusions that clearly bear the imprints of a Christian perspective, while quoting for example French secular – and even anti-Christian – poetry and prose, especially modern literature.¹⁰⁹ Reflecting on time, he suggests for instance that Mallarmé creates a “synthetic portrait” of a Christian in the verse “Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui”.¹¹⁰ Or, appealing to Christianity as the religion of joy (a theme that constantly reoccurs in the pages of his *Diary*), he maintains that even the jocular verses of an openly atheist poet such as Jacques Prevert:

Notre père qui êtes aux Cieux
Restez-y
Et nous, nous resterons sur la terre
Qui est quelquefois si jolie,

could be understood and interpreted in a Christian perspective.¹¹¹ In the same way, Steinhardt comments on extracts from Balzac’s novels *Ursule*

¹⁰⁷ Bulat, ‘Afterword’, p. 520.

¹⁰⁸ See Steinhardt’s reply to his friend Alexandru Paleologou’s critique that he theologizes everything: “Humans’ great trait is neither the ability to laugh or cry, nor to lie, nor think. It is to theologize. As Julian Huxley said characteristically: ‘humans’ essential difference is their theological thinking”, Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁹ Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, p. 34.

¹¹⁰ ‘The virgin, the enthusiast, and the beauty of today’, Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 177.

¹¹¹ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 335-336.

Mirouët and *Colonel Chabert*, as well as Proust's affirmation of happiness,¹¹² while answering the question "where is God in the work of Proust? Or in the novels of Mauriac?", in the following terms: "Where is He? Let me tell you where He is. He is not on a certain page, because the authors are not theologians. He is nowhere. He is everywhere, as in the world".¹¹³

The same could be said for the way in which Steinhardt perceived and interpreted provocative or even controversial films such as Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, and Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, as well as paintings by Paul Klee, in which, irrespective of the artist's intention or faith, he discerned an authentic Orthodox Christian spirit, a genuine preaching of the Gospel through art, and a spirit of repentance, complete renunciation and asceticism, as it becomes clear by reading his posthumously edited volume entitled *Dumnezeu în care spui că nu crezi... Scrisori catre Virgil Ierunca, 1967-1983* (The God in Whom you say you do not believe).¹¹⁴

Steinhardt does not seek to turn literature – and, more broadly, art – into theology, but rather attempts to inoculate literature with the Christian spirit, the spirit of eternal and catholic truth or, in the opposite direction, to bear witness to the Christian way of life by appropriating secular and even anti-Christian literary texts. Our writer monk seems to suggest the idea that in today's secular world, a non-theological or allusive language is more appropriate for speaking about God. As Darie Dragoi rightly notes,

usually, in the area of religious writing, Romanian Orthodox writers mention as sources of inspiration and analysis only other religious writers: saints, Fathers of the desert, bishops, monks, and so on. In Steinhardt's writings, one finds commentary on secular poetry. He even extracts Christian meanings from openly atheistic authors, as well as music, literature, biology, fairy tales, and much more.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Ἐκτενχίας*, pp. 81-83, 332-333.

¹¹³ Steinhardt, *Tò Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Ἐκτενχίας*, p. 80.

¹¹⁴ Steinhardt, *Dumnezeu în care spui că nu crezi*; Marian Sorin Rădulescu, 'Review' [of the book by N. Steinhardt, *Dumnezeu în care spui că nu crezi... Scrisori catre Virgil Ierunca (1967-1983)*] (Bucharest, 2000), at: <http://hyperliteratura.ro/dumnezeu-in-care-spui-ca-nu-crezi/> (18.01.2013).

¹¹⁵ Dragoi, *Conversions to Christianity*, p. 72 (modified).

It is surprising to realize how close Steinhardt's approach is to what today is called *World Dogmatics*. The initial distinction between *Church Dogmatics* and *Church and World Dogmatics* was first used by the American Anglican theologian Paul Valliere in his groundbreaking study *Modern Russian Theology: Bucharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov. Orthodox Theology in a New Key*,¹¹⁶ in order to describe the dominant theological trends in 20th century Orthodox theology, i.e., the *Neo-patristic synthesis* (Florovsky, Meyendorff, Schmemmann, Zizioulas, etc.) and the *Russian School theology* (Soloviev, Bulgakov, Florensky, etc.). While *Church Dogmatics* is primarily related to a theology proper, in other words to a theology *ad intra*, *Church and World Dogmatics* is intended to express an open-ended theological reflection on secular issues, seeking the dialogue of church and culture, theology and the contemporary world. To this twofold typology, the Greek Orthodox theologian Nikolaos Asproulis (to whose analysis I owe these brief remarks) added recently one more type, that of *World Dogmatics*. This third type, without minimizing the centrality of theology, looks for common ground (e.g., existential concerns) in order to bring the church and the world into closer contact and mutual inclusiveness, but this time from the perspective of the latter, since it begins with the world and the cosmic reality and then moves to the church and the ecclesial reality.¹¹⁷ It seems to me that this is exactly what Nicolae Steinhardt is doing in his writings: he departs from literature or secular culture and moves to the church and theological issues!

To be able to do this, Steinhardt was familiar, as I said above, with the European culture of the Renaissance and modernity, and with all the contemporary philosophical and literary trends. He accomplished in his personal journey, in other words, what the Orthodox Church as an institution had not, and what Orthodox theology still, with some rare exceptions, has not yet accomplished, i.e., a fruitful and non-reactionary encounter with

¹¹⁶ Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bucharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Edinburg, 2000).

¹¹⁷ Nikolaos Asproulis, 'Pneumatology and Politics: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Articulation of an Orthodox Political Theology', *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 7 (2015), pp. 58-71; cf. Idem, 'Is a Dialogue between Orthodox Theology and (Post) modernity Possible? The Case of the Russian and Neo-patristic "Schools"', *Communio Viatorum*, 54 (2012), pp. 203-222; Idem, 'Church and World Dogmatics': The Ecumenical Need for a Paradigm Shift in Modern Orthodox Theology and Education. A Reflection', *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 5 (2013), pp. 154-161.

modernity, with its culture and the contemporary world. Our writer monk is not shocked or surprised by secularization and atheism. He is aware of these quite “new,” for his time and country, phenomena of doubt and incredulity, thanks to his familiarity with European culture and modern literature, but also to his personal existential research and tribulation. In his *Diary of Happiness*, he many times confesses his doubts, hesitations, and vacillations, but also his faith in Jesus Christ and the life-giving message of His resurrection. “Doubt is the basic law in the culture of the West and the fundamental presupposition of Christianity,” he admitted.¹¹⁸ That is probably why he views incredulity or difficulty in believing as simply a step before genuine faith, as it became clear by his claim that the biblical confession “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (cf. Mk. 9:24) is the most honest, perfect, genuine, and faithful confession in the whole Bible, to the point that, “even if, from the entire New Testament, we knew only this, it would be enough to prove the divine essence of Christianity”.¹¹⁹

Steinhardt seems to be aware that Enlightenment and modernity marked the end of religiously organized societies, but not necessarily the end of the search for the true God or the thirst for genuinely spiritual life. Now, however, the presence of God is no longer imposed on the whole of society, nor is it an element of social order and organization. Faith in God is no longer considered a given, but something to be sought and found.¹²⁰ That is why he is so happy and proud about his conversion and baptism: because it was related to his free personal choice, the result of a long spiritual journey, full of trials. Steinhardt was not born Christian, but rather became one, thanks to his adult baptism, an experience which those baptized as infants cannot fully understand.¹²¹ He is then able to interpret positively the dominance of nihilism and nihilist philosophy, and the absence or the withdrawal of God from our secular world. As he notes characteristically in his *Diary*, “to begin with, I understand that in this world we are completely abandoned by God, as Simone Weil maintains, and that this abandonment is simultaneously the greatest proof of God’s ‘existence’ and love. This, Weil argues, is precisely

¹¹⁸ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 112; cf. p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 54.

¹²⁰ Cf. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, ‘La relation de l’Eglise à la culture et la dialectique de l’eschatologie et de l’histoire’, *Istina*, 55 (2010), pp. 7-25, here 17.

¹²¹ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 109.

why God ‘retires’ completely, in order to allow us to exist (otherwise, His presence would be tantamount to our annihilation), to grant us unlimited freedom, and to ensure our genuine and uncoerced faith”,¹²² concurring on this point with an adventurous patristic view – chiefly that of Gregory of Nyssa – according to which what seems to be God’s absence from our world (cf. atheism) is actually an act of withdrawal on God’s part so that humans could decide on their fate freely. As the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément pertinently remarked, “religions imagine the divine as an overwhelming fullness. Steinhardt sees it, on the contrary, as an emptying, identifying it with the most terrible human suffering [...]. For Steinhardt, as for all the great Orthodox tradition, God is innocent. He effaces Himself so that we can find the space for our freedom”.¹²³

On another central point of modernity, that of the replacement of theology by anthropology, and correspondingly the priority given to ethics over metaphysics, and the affirmation of the sensible and material world and bodily existence, Steinhardt seems to respond more adequately than many theologians. Not only did he insist on the reality of the humanity of Christ – especially on the Cross,¹²⁴ the affirmation of the material world practiced in the Christian sacraments and the veneration of icons,¹²⁵ as well as the inalienable and irreducible character of human freedom,¹²⁶ but he also clearly identified – following in this respect the teaching of the Gospel often forgotten by historical and institutionalized Christianity – the person of God with that of every human being, every neighbor, even affirming that hating and humiliating our fellow human being is equal to blasphemy against God:

¹²² Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 111; cf. p. 84.

¹²³ Clément, ‘Préface’, p. 12.

¹²⁴ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 70-75, 407. In another extract comparing the death of Jesus Christ with that of the ancient philosopher Socrates, Steinhardt notes: “The two deaths are completely different, and it is actually Christ’s that seems inferior, dubious. The truth is that it is much more human. Socrates’s death, in all its greatness, seems – by contrast – literary and unrealistic. Socrates moved from the human condition to that divine. Christ, himself sinless, descended to the basest strata of the human condition” (Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 76).

¹²⁵ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 407.

¹²⁶ Steinhardt, *Tò Hμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, pp. 80-81.

Sin against the Holy Spirit is the one sin that cannot be forgiven. I wonder if this includes the humiliation of one of our fellow human beings, who are made in the image and likeness of God Himself. Since we demonstrate our love for God by loving our neighbor (i.e., His creation), does it not follow that we demonstrate our blasphemy against God by hating our neighbor, shaming him, considering him a *thing* without a spirit within him? Shouldn't a Christian be able to understand that we blasphemy against God when we are not able to understand that which Simone de Beauvoir articulated so clearly: "The basis of all morality is respect for the freedom of the other, that each person should be considered a being whose freedom cannot be infringed".

I believe in the quasi-identification of these two words: spirit and freedom. I believe that when we rob a man of his freedom, we take away the seal of the spirit.¹²⁷

But valorizing every human being, every single human person, brings us to another central feature of modernity, i.e., the emergence of the subject and the self, and the affirmation of the individual and individuality, a feature which usually is perceived as opposed to the Orthodox tradition, which is considered in turn, communal and communitarian. Steinhardt does not expressly raise this crucial issue, but many pages of his *Diary* speak in positive terms of the individual who suffers in the communist jail and is oppressed under the collectivistic ideology which stands behind the totalitarian regime. The terrible experience of the gulag allowed him to cherish and appreciate even more the unique and irreplaceable value of the individual, while according to some analyses and commentary on the *Diary of Happiness*, the prison condition became a privileged place for the constitution of the self, the prisoners feeling a nostalgia for the eclipsed self.¹²⁸ In the *Diary*, "the author aims to achieve his own portrait, the self is the object of description and describing subject".¹²⁹ These very interesting aspects of Steinhardt's work, related to the wider discussion of the relationship between Orthodoxy and

¹²⁷ Steinhardt, *Tò Ὑμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 309; cf. also pp. 202-203, for the identification of Christianity with love and charity, and pp. 82-83 for the recognition of the person of Christ in the person of the poor and mendicant, of every human being in need, reconciling on this point his literary readings with his fidelity to the Gospel.

¹²⁸ Badiu, 'Nicolae Steinhardt', pp. 134, 138, 139; Cîrstea, 'The Diary of Happiness'.

¹²⁹ Geambei, 'Jurnalul fericirii', p. 235.

modernity, Orthodoxy and individuality, cannot, unfortunately, be discussed and further developed here, as they exceed the limits and the purpose of the present paper.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

I think it became clear from my presentation of Steinhardt's life and work, and from my analysis of the main axes and the literary, philosophical, and theological concerns of his writings, that the Romanian writer monk meets many of the presuppositions for the dialogue between theology and modern literature as treated in parts I and II of the present paper. Or better yet, he did not remain at the theoretical level of that dialogue, but rather experienced in his life and practiced with his work that desired dialogue.

I am neither a specialist of the work of Steinhardt, nor a literary critic. If the *Diary of Happiness* is a book of initiation into Christianity,¹³⁰ an unconventional apology for Christianity as the religion of freedom and courage; if the message of the *Diary* as well as of the whole of Steinhardt's work remain inconceivable in the absence of faith and hope,¹³¹ then it is perhaps not inappropriate nor incongruous to end my paper by quoting the closing lines of Steinhardt's most famous and celebrated work. It seems to me that it is not by chance that Steinhardt chose to end his *Diary* with a kind of confession, a public and dynamic confession of faith in Christ, which however reaffirms – and in no way nullifies – the values for which he fought all his life, inside or outside prison, before but also after his baptism and conversion – i.e., freedom and hope, dignity and honesty, joy and happiness as the spiritual fruits of a life of self-offering, sacrifice, and love, values which many modern and post-modern persons cherish and appreciate, either consciously or unconsciously:

If those who were tortured by remorse or by their political frustrations or by the endless questioning [...] were so easily broken, what example could I be, with the filth that plagues my every movement? What example could my life be, which has become fit for pigs? I call myself a Christian? Am I a Christian?

¹³⁰ Bulat, 'Afterword', p. 516.

¹³¹ Crăiuțu, 'On Happiness in Unusual Places', p. 90.

And yet, I am what I am. The bells toll for everyone. They toll even for me. They toll warmly, friendly. [...] Christianity preserves inside you something youthful, which does not allow you to become bored, frustrated, or angry. In the presence of Jesus Christ, I am obliged to not become angry or engage in quarrels with others, or even with myself. This is my good fortune, beyond all odds, which I had never imagined or expected: that there would come a day when I too believed in Jesus Christ and thus understood the words once spoken by Unamuno: "To believe in God means that you want him to exist and at the same time that you want to behave as you would if he were beside you".

I am a Christian and that is why joy visits me, a strange and unjustifiable joy. Only because of Christianity have I not become bowed, ashamed, and disappointed in the streets of the city, day and night. Only because of faith in Jesus Christ have I not also ended up (as François Mauriac says in his book *Destins*) one of these living corpses that carries with it the flowing water of life. Only because of Christianity can I understand that which the Holy Scriptures beautifully state, specifically in Acts 20:35 (RSV): "It is more blessed to give than to receive".¹³²

Abstract

In our rapidly changing post-Hellenistic and post-Christian world, in which the mediating role of ontology has become far from self-evident, the question of which discipline can assume the role of mediation between theology and secular thought has become crucial. The present paper, taking as its point of departure the work of the Romanian writer and monk Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989), suggests that modern literature is well equipped to play this role. Advocating a non-theological understanding of universality, literature is likely to provide theology with contextual schemes that might help the latter communicate its message in a postmodern world and thereby cease to address current issues by using an outdated and self-referential language.

¹³² Steinhardt, *Τὸ Ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Εὐτυχίας*, p. 498.