

COURAGE IN THE MONK'S SERMONS NICOLAE DELAROHIA

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Abstract: One of N. Steinhardt's reference works, Dăruind vei dobândi, published posthumously, includes over 40 sermons delivered between the 70s and 80s by this intellectual who entered the monastic life at the Rohia Monastery. The critical analysis of this paper highlights Steinhardt's preoccupation with the theme of courage and the use of a subversive message about communism by reference to the text of the Bible. Courage was a burden of Steinhardt's creation, an aspect that becomes evident through his works, in which he pleads for the courage to act, to express your opinion, to take an attitude toward injustice, to persevere, to be loyal and not to betray, despite the pressures, to open new paths, but the quintessence of this preoccupation culminates with the detailed analysis of courage from a religious perspective in the sermons given by N. Steinhardt during the monastic life at the Rohia Monastery. The work Dăruind vei dobândi is one of the few theological works in which such an important place is given to this Christian virtue - courage, and is an existential guide based on Christian precepts and models. N. Steinhardt proved his courage during the sermons delivered at the Rohia monastery the courage to express one's opinion, to urge vigilance, critical attitude, resistance to abuses of any kind, through the emphasis placed in words of faith on the idea of freedom, dignity, the general good, which represented in the years of communism a real frond attitude.

Keyword: N. Steinhardt, courage, Bible, monastic life, sermons, anti-communism

Essays, poems, works of philosophy or psychology, motivational books, conferences and debates were written about courage, and over the centuries, many intellectuals, artists, statesmen, scientists considered courage as a main ingredient of success in life but also a proof of human quality. Of course, *ab initio*, a distinction must be made between courage and insolence, the concept to which we refer, having a positive connotation, in the sense of being reckless and daring to act, not for egocentric purposes, but in the spirit of justice, truth and goodness. Irrefutably, courage encumbers the idea of spiritual endurance, strength of character toward the vicissitudes of life, the power to continue to believe when everything seems lost; "We need courage every day, every hour, every minute: the courage to demolish, the courage to build, the courage to hate, the courage to love, the courage to move forward, the courage to look back"¹.

The perspectives from which courage can be analyzed as a character trait are multiple: the courage to dream, to hope, to risk, to believe, to start new projects, to protest, to face death, to love, to be good, to forgive, to start over, to admit your own mistakes, to adapt, to face small or big phobias, etc. A constant supporter of this quality, as a laudable trait of character was N. Steinhardt who, in many of his works, whether it is journalism, literary criticism, memoirs, interviews, shows an obvious propensity for this human virtue. In fact, the traits of behavior considered essential by Steinhardt are courage, dignity and loyalty. Courage was a leitmotif of Steinhardt's creation, an aspect

¹ Giovanni Papini, <http://www.citapededia.ro/index.php?id=271243> (6 years 2021).

that becomes evident through his works, in which he pleads for the courage to act, to express your opinion, to take an attitude toward injustice, to persevere, to be loyal and not to betray, despite the pressures, to open new paths, but the apogee and quintessence of this preoccupation culminates with the detailed analysis of courage from a religious perspective in the sermons given by N. Steinhardt during the monastic life at Rohia Monastery.

If in the volume *Dăruind vei dobândi* the theme of courage is extracted from various pericopes or biblical fragments, highlighting the hermeneutic qualities of Steinhardt, in previous works the principle of firmness and strength of character is systematically reiterated by both the common man and the artist or the literary critic. In his work *Între viață și cărți*, Steinhardt inserts an essay entitled "Return to Courage", addressing the issue of courage in art, whether painting, sculpture, literature or cinema, where grace and inspiration are paramount but are insufficient without the sparkle given by the audacity to use the pen, the brush, the chisel or the directing indications: "talent, of course, this is self-evident; but especially courage is required of the artist who is taken seriously - courage and fear of concessions"². The artist must be authentic, avoid conformity, must have the courage to approach new techniques, controversial topics, be a true "soldier", must be the voice of the people, which is why Steinhardt praises, among others, writers like Charles Péguy, André Malraux, James Joyce, Thomas Becket, Albert Camus or painters like Picasso, who created instinctively, by feeling, without taking into account fashion or possible reluctant reactions of art lovers: „When things reach their limit and they are no longer shallow but serious, when everyone has to say their name and openly state their principles, the artist also steps into the sign of courage and sincerity"³. In fact, the same wording that supports the need to firmly disclose the position to be taken on a controversial issue is found in the essay "Monastic Reflections" in the volume of religious sermons: "They appear, even in the most secluded life and more detached from those of the world, moments when it becomes obligatory to decide: to show which side you are on and what kind of a man you are. Then (and we find many examples during the period of polytheistic persecution or of the iconoclastic emperors) these dominant qualities become: courage, dignity, restlessness; the model in such circumstances will be the gentle Jesus going fearlessly and boldly to Golgotha"⁴.

In his conversations with Nicolae Băciuț, being asked what manifests the courage of the literary critic, Steinhardt reiterates the idea of sincerity, avoiding compromise, superficiality and complacency, by "cold" analysis of literary works, by the ability to admire, by professionalism and permanent updating with literary novelties and especially assuming the courage "to face some risks: upsetting friends, colleagues, compromising a situation"⁵. The fact that he "practiced" his courage, not only theorized it, is revealed by his writings and deeds, by the testimonies of his friends or those who knew him, including those who were concerned with the analysis of his literary criticism: chestertonian courage and taste for paradox did not contradict humility, as it

² Nicolae Steinhardt, *Între viață și cărți*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010, p.278.

³ *Ibidem*, p.281.

⁴ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Dăruind vei dobândi*, Editura Mănăstirii Rohia, 2005, p.362.

⁵ Nicolae Băciuț, *Între lumi. Convorbiri cu Nicolae Steinhardt*, Editura Libris, Brașov, 2016, p.39.

might seem. His points of view, striking from their unique angle, aim to rehabilitate what intellectual arrogance considers archetypal, banal, unattractive"⁶.

In his written work on his prison experience, N. Steinhardt "makes dozens of references to courage, operates real forays into the history of Romanians regarding the courage of rulers, saints and martyrs"⁷. Of course, *The Happiness Diary*, which is both a memorial work and a guide to life, a plea for the Orthodox Christian religion, encyclopedic writing, not necessarily enlightening, but, especially, triggering literary, historical, philosophical curiosities, artistic and not only, it is also an exemplification, an assumption and an implementation of this quality often invoked by the author - courage. Referring to this work, we can identify Steinhardt's reckless spirit from different angles: temporally, if we consider the fact that the manuscript was written during the years of communism; of the content, because it represents an anti-communist manifesto preaching freedom and love of orthodoxy; as a form, because the author of a memoir cannot rely on the argument of fiction to avoid the judgment of others or, in this case, the punitive measures of the political system; spatially, given that the diary was written in the monastery, a territory of humility and submission to which Steinhardt adds strategic valences: a bastion of offensive against the totalitarian regime. Upon his release from prison he is aware that the prison experience overlapping with Orthodox baptism has turned him into a good man, so that courage, a latent character trait, with intermittent manifestations until then, has surfaced, being in the last three decades of life. an indispensable help in the creative decisions and actions that followed: "I went into prison blind, with vague autogenous flashes of darkness, which split the darkness without scattering it and I come out with my eyes open. I came in pampered, sprawled. I come out healed of fashions, troubles, ifose. I entered dissatisfied. I go out knowing happiness. I entered nervously, annoyed, sensitive to trifles. I go out carelessly. The sun and life told me little Now I know how to taste the slice of bread as small as it is. I come out admiring above all courage, dignity, honor, heroism. I go out in peace. With those I wronged, with my friends and enemies, and even with myself "⁸.

After taking the monastic path of becoming a monk at the Monastery of St. Anne of Rohia, Steinhardt delivered during the '70s and '80s several religious sermons that were included in the work *Dăruind vei dobândi*, published posthumously. Even if the theme of courage runs like a red thread through all of Steinhardt's literary creations, paradoxically and apotheotically, the words of faith on which he turned his attention in the last years of his life contain most of the references to this character trait, courage becoming, almost, a scoundrel. Aware of the dissident connotation of his decision to convert to Orthodoxy and to practice this confession - "Faith is therefore recognized as a form of courage, and courage is declared, like faith, a mystery"⁹- Steinhardt develops in his homiletic discourse the theme of courage, seen as a Christian virtue.

⁶Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, „Escală în timp și spațiu”, în *N. Steinhardt în evocări*, ed. îngrijită de Florian Roatiș, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2012, p. 113.

⁷ Macarie Motogna, *Virtutea curajului la N. Steinhardt*, în Revista „Tabor”, http://www.tabor-revista.ro/ro.php?module=content_full&id=10511(16 ianuarie 2021).

⁸ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 313.

⁹ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Dăruind vei dobândi*, p.87.

Looking back at religious literature, we find a similar concept around the middle of the century. twentieth century, to the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who was forced to leave Germany in the 1930s because of the contradiction between Nazi atheism and his profession of faith. In his work *Courage to Be* approached the theme of courage from a multiple perspective - philosophical, psychological and theological, in order to overcome ontological anxieties: "Courage that takes over the anxiety of meaninglessness is the limit to which the courage to be is able to reach. And in him all forms of courage are restored to the power of God, who is above the God of theism. The root of the courage to be is God who appears when God disappears in the anxiety of doubt"¹⁰.

A religious interpretation of courage, a comprehensive analysis of the reckless behavior of biblical characters is operated by Steinhardt in the volume of Christian sermons *Dăruind vei dobândi*. From this work resides the fact that the foundation and propagation of Christianity is an act of courage by assuming by Jesus Christ the role of first martyr, crucified for his faith, this "guilt" being summarized in the formula INRI, but also of His disciples who dared to spread the word of Jesus in times of hardship and repressive measures against Christian missionaries. In the sermon entitled "Courage" he says that "immediately after the theological virtues he occupies the leading place. Without courage, the existence of the Church would not be conceivable. It took the courage of its Founder to come into being; to last, that of His disciples"¹¹.

The fact that in the Gospels there are numerous exhortations to courage or narrations in which different biblical characters denote this character trait, is an additional reason for the monk Nicolae DelaRohia to place courage in the panoply of Christian virtues. In his characteristic style, tributary to his vast knowledge in various fields, especially literature, history and philosophy, Steinhardt refers to literary or historical figures who were limited to the trio "martyr-hero-courage": he admires the courage of the monks who they housed Colonel Chabert, a Balzacian character in the novel of the same title; the Jacobin revolutionary Sain Just is mentioned, who had the courage to support his cause to the point of sacrifice; the concept of the French philologist Brice Perain is invoked - "if you want to be free, you must not be afraid of death"¹², whose words he quotes in several of his works.

With patience and meticulousness, Steinhardt gathers into a bundle of verses all the passages from the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and Matthew, or from Revelation, in which the exhortation "Do not be afraid!" which comes in different forms: "do not be afraid"; "Let not your heart be troubled"; "Dare!"; "In the world you will have troubles, but Dare. I have overcome the world "(Mark 6:50).¹³ Analyzing disjunctively this subject, we identify the fact that the states opposed to courage, worry - fear - panic - fear, are generated by lack of trust, so lack of faith or wandering from the Christian paths. To prove this theory that the removal of Christ gives rise to fear, Steinhardt quotes verse

¹⁰ Paul Tillich, *Curajul de a fi*, <https://namtar.ru/ro/obuchenie/paul-tillih---muzhestvo-byt-1952-paul-tillih---muzhestvo-byt-1952/> (6 ianuarie 2021).

¹¹ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Dăruind vei dobândi*, p.85.

¹² Brice Perain, apud N. Steinhardt, *Dăruind vei dobândi*, p.86.

¹³ N. Steinhardt, *Dăruind...*, pp.87-88.

8/37 of the Gospel of Luke when Jesus helps the demon-possessed man by transferring the evil spirits that ruled him to pigs, but the crowd present at this miracle reacts unexpectedly: Instead of falling to his knees and thanking, he is frightened and asks Jesus to leave. "The causal link is clear: I ask them to leave because they are afraid. Fear, then, brings with it the breaking of Christ"¹⁴. Indeed, fear can be paralyzing all the more as it can manifest itself in any aspect of existence, but especially in relation to the meaning of life or what is beyond it, Tillich identifying three major fears: "anxiety of fate and death, the anxiety of emptiness and loss of meaning, the anxiety of guilt and condemnation"¹⁵.

Despite everything, fear can be overcome precisely by defying this feeling, by acting in spite of fear, by positive, imperative urges to trust, courage, such messages being found in abundance in the Bible. Of all the disciples of Jesus, Paul can be considered a true apostle of courage because in most of his epistles there are words of encouragement, even imperatives to "fight", in the sense of facing sin, hostility of people, fears, obstacles; The military evangelical style is also manifested in "active" verbs, encouraging, imperious, resounding verbs such as: persevere, ask, watch, wake up, conquer, look carefully, be ready, go, search, seek, beat, warm up"¹⁶.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, courage is associated with many other qualities such as perseverance, work, hope, mercy, love, kindness, but in the religious sense, the strongest equivalent is perseverance. "The overwhelming significance given to courage by both Christ and the Church stems from the fact that, as it is written in Matthew 11:12, «the kingdom of heaven is established by perseverance, and those who are persecuted seize it»"¹⁷.

Through perseverance, N. Steinhardt also reached Christianity, the transition from Judaism to Orthodoxy representing a thought that had a long period of germination, and the decision of Orthodox baptism was untimely only through the prison space of this holy mystery, not by the act assumed, which was based on numerous readings, probing and comparative analyzes of several religious denominations. Probably one of the factors that determined his attraction to Orthodoxy is the special place given to courage in the New Testament. Compared to other religions that, in the face of injustice, plead for revenge or resignation, Christianity urges forgiveness and love, but also action, resistance and confidence in overcoming obstacles. "The new law can - in its operational aspect - be observed as follows: believe, love and do not be afraid. Fear - ugly sin in the eyes of the Lord; courage - a virtue very pleasing to Him and consubstantial to the Christian situation"¹⁸.

Of the more than 40 sermons included in the volume *Dăruind vei dobândi*, in more than half, in one context or another, the ideas are handled in such a way that they finally reach the womb of "courage", one of the speeches from being called exactly like

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, <https://namtar.ru/ro/obuchenie/paul-tillih---muzhestvo-byt-1952-paul-tillih---muzhestvo-byt-1952/> (6 ianuarie 2021).

¹⁶ N. Steinhardt, *Dăruind...* p.89.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.90.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p.91.

this: "Courage", and the rest of the sermons in which the theme of courage is approached referring to different saints, biblical parables or Christian themes: "The Hananeque Woman"; "God, let me see!"; "The Confessions of the Lord"; "Living Water (The Samaritan Woman)"; "The Parable of the Magi and the Parable of Herod"; "Saint Anthony the Great"; "Rejection of Christ"; "Trust"; "The verb to believe"; "Forgiveness"; "About pity"; "Saints and loved ones"; "Reflections on death"; "The Magnanimity of the Lord"; "Honoring the Holy Archdeacon Stephen"; "Two pieties that should not be abandoned: the veneration of the cross and the Mother of God"; "The Hunchbacked Woman (27th Sunday after Pentecost)"; "The Admirations of the Lord"; "The Holy Prophet Elijah"; "Demonism and secularity". Apart from these sermons, the theme of courage is also found in the essays "What do I owe to Christ?", "Orthodox Creed" and "Monastic Reflections".

An exercise often encountered in Steinhardt's pulpit oratory is contemporaneity, reporting to the present, having the courage to refer to the current problems of Romanian society in the '80s - indoctrination, injustice, foundry, starvation - the goal being, as noted by G Ardeleanu, "to take listeners or readers out of their lukewarm certainties, out of their comfortable habits, out of the stupidity of ready-made ideas, to provoke them to a revision of their existential projects"¹⁹.

The opening argument of *Dăruind vei dobândi*, which in the title "What I Owe to Christ" reflects Steinhardt's gratitude for the religious choice made, is written in his conquering and enveloping style, representing a true declaration of love for orthodoxy, by enumerating the many spiritual benefits infused by orthodox baptism, including healing from fear and instilling the courage to believe that I deserve to be a being of light: "From slave and cripple you made me a free and senior man; out of fear and mischief, a bold man; from the being of darkness, an eager for light and free to try the feeling that I am not forbidden to aspire to actually behave according to Your teaching and will"²⁰.

The next step after conversion, spiritually, a measurable step in years, was the entry into the monastic supper. Of course, the decision was made after years of thinking, of finding a suitable place, of "courting" the monastery of St. Anne of Rohia, but once assumed this position of monk, associated in Steinhardt's vision with that of "soldier of Christ", tried to implement the precepts of conduct that he himself formulated in "Monastic Reflections": on the one hand, humble, gentle and bright as a monk, on the other hand, brave, firm and persevering like a soldier. Exemplifying in these words of faith saints and loved ones, of course he lists St. Nicholas who is good and has as his main quality the help of those in need, St. Seraphim of Sarov for the happiness and joy he emanated; St. John of Nepomuk for his loyalty and dignity of not revealing the mystery of confession at the cost of losing his life, but as expected, in the suite of those appreciated are also people whose main quality was courage: Archbishop Dionysius August Affre who and - lost his life in the summer of 1848 showing courage and active involvement

¹⁹ George Ardeleanu, *N. Steinhardt și paradoxurile existenței*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2009, p.236.

²⁰ N. Steinhardt, *Dăruind...*, p.12.

trying to reconcile the conflicting parties in the Parisian revolt or the peasant Nicolae Oprea from Sălișteța Sibiului who had the audacity and verticality to hold the Austrian authorities accountable for the religious changes produced in the century . XVIII, which caused the detachment of part of the Orthodox Christians from the "mother" Church.

Making a review of the biblical characters who had a courageous attitude, is mentioned the Virgin Mary, who showed gentleness and whose courage was converted into meekness and reckless assumption of the divine purpose assigned to him; the blind man who was grateful for his healing by Jesus and had the courage to defy the pressure of the Pharisees to reveal the identity of his healer; the Hananian woman of Samaria, appreciated by Jesus for her boldness and firm character in conversation with a Jew who was none other than the Messiah; the prophet Elijah, whose courage is manifested by the determination and firmness to quickly discern good from evil; Archdeacon Stephen, to whom courage takes the form of loyalty, being ready to risk his life to defend the faith: "The Lord respects and admires Stephen for the courage he shows, because he confesses Him and does not renounce, and not he is ashamed of his Savior, for he has confronted his adversaries and endeavored to prove to them the truth of the true faith"²¹.

Of course, much can be said about the courage present in the Bible, for Steinhardt's references to various verses are not an exhaustive treatment, but they reveal a deep concern for this aspect. Irrefutable, above all, motivating and guiding is the courage of Jesus Christ, proven on numerous occasions: when he faces the Pharisees in the synagogue on Saturday; when he defies them, performing many miracles and healings even on the Sabbath; when he reveals his identity in the Garden of Gethsemane, letting himself be taken by the soldiers and protecting his disciples; when he is left without guilt; when he bears the cross on Golgotha and leaves himself crucified to atone for the sins of mankind; when he endures the passions and does not rise immediately in the sight of all, in order to leave the people free-will, the possibility to choose what to believe, in order not to attract them to the faith by an indisputable act. The corollary of all these assertions - "The Lord despises fear, passes it through sins; the cowards are mentioned first among those destined for the lake of fire (Revelation 21: 8). Courage, the main virtue of the superior and noble man - this is the teaching and parable of Christ!"²² - it reveals the place of honor and the major role of courage in the life of every Christian. For Steinhardt, they are highly human undesirables such as fear, perfidy, obtuseness, stubbornness, narcissism, greed, and the list of Christian virtues includes: "courage, freedom, happiness, dignity, sacrifice, helping one's neighbor, realism, gentleness, humility "Evangelical Calm Madness."²³.

Nicolae Steinhardt represents a human and intellectual model worth following, which is part of the suite of Romanian values through his impressive work in terms of ideas, but also through the moral-Christian conduct, especially in the last decades of his life. The courage of the monk Nicolae Delarohia, to resume during religious sermons messages with a deep anti-communist character, is indisputable. N. Steinhardt's

²¹ *Ibidem*, p.282.

²² *Ibidem*, p.278.

²³ G. Ardeleanu, *op.cit.*, p.236.

audacity to wield the word, a double-edged sword that could be turned against him, turning him into an accuser on the part of the communist regime, sometimes gave shivers of fear to the survivors of the monastery, who were aware that the Securitate could take repressive measures, as had happened before in other places of worship; one such moment was the sermon on St. Elijah, when the monk Nicholas instilled the unjust behavior of the couple Ahab and Jezebel, in which one could easily reflect the image of the dominant couple in Romania in the '80s: "And so he described in the face of Ahab on Nicolae Ceaușescu and in the face of Izabela Elena Ceaușescu, so that I trembled in the church"²⁴.

Giving the work you will acquire is one of the few theological works in which such an important place is allocated to this Christian virtue - courage, and is an existential guide based on Christian precepts and models, the call to courage being outlined on the one hand, theoretically, through all the selected verses, through the examples from the Bible, and on the other hand, practically, by assuming during the sermons delivered at the Rohia monastery the courage to express one's opinion, to urge vigilance, critical attitude, resistance in the face of abuses of any kind, through the emphasis placed in the words of faith on the idea of freedom, dignity, the general good, which represented in the years of communism a real frond attitude.

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²⁴ Serafim Man în interviu cu Călin Cira, 27 septembrie 2008, apud Nicolae Steinhardt. *Marea convertire* de Silvian Teodorescu, Editura Integral, București, 2018, p. 106.