Nicolae Steinhardt and the Challenge of Ethics – “the Sacred Untruth, Whispered by Christ”

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Résumé: Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989) est une personnalité importante de la culture roumaine, bénéficiant d’une reconnaissance posthume remarquable. La source de cette réception est représentée par un parcours existentiel et littéraire exceptionnel qui, une fois la période communiste dépassée, a été récupéré et pris par l’ère posthume en tant que repère moral. Le Journal de la félicité est l’œuvre capitale de Nicolae Steinhardt. L’auteur propose, par cette inédite symbiose entre la narration de confession et le journal d’idées, le sauvetage de l’enfer concentrationnaire et de la mort. La solution qu’il offre est le christianisme, en tant que forme de rapport sincère et réaliste à sa propre identité. La révélation de la solution chrétienne mène à une profonde compréhension des repères fondamentaux qui dirigent l’être humain vers le salut ou l’échec: la vérité, la liberté, l’amour. La vérité constitue le point de départ de l’autobiographie littéraire steinhardtienne et le fondement de la compréhension complexe de la vie chrétienne.

Mots-clés: Nicolae Steinhardt, vérité, autobiographie littéraire.

The starting point in the flow of remembrance in The Diary of Happiness is the issue of truth. The author opens his confession with the investigation scene through confrontation, in January 1960, a “pretext” to assign the coordinates of revelation of the Christian truth. The same scene is placed by George Ardeleanu “in contrast” with the minutes of the confrontation “written today, 13 January 1960 in Bucharest between the defendants Strelisker Beatrice and Steinhardt Nicu Aurelian”1. The differences of substance (and not just expression) between the literary confession and the document prepared by the Security officers are obvious, numerous, and natural. I will quote here an excerpt of the minutes taken from the CNSAS archives by George Ardeleanu, containing Nicu Steinhardt’s reply (as it appears in the Security officers’ “Latin”) and two excerpts from the first pages of The Diary of Happiness.

“I recognize those declared by Strelisker Beatrice, the facts taking place as she showed, most of them being already declared by myself during the investigation.

Indeed, at the house of Strelisker B., as well as at Alex Paleologu’s and Radulescu Mihai’s were organized several meetings of our group between 1956 and 1958. In these meetings the spiteful writings of Noica Constantin and the fugitives Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade were circulated. We had had discussions on these writings through which we praised the content of the above-mentioned, spitefully commented the popular democratic regime of R.P.R., and slandered socialist-realist litera-ture of our country and the progressive writers, while glorifying the Western literature and culture. [...] After Noica Constantin’s arrest, I talked with Strelisker Beatrice, Paleologu Alexandru, and Radulescu Mihai about our possible arrest and we agreed to destroy the letters and the other writings that could prove our complicity to Noica Constantin’s activities”2.

“She’s on a chair about two meters on my left; they are in front, at the desk. I see you would like me to let myself taken away by the spell of a semi-dream, by the dizzying smoke of a surrealist scene painting... Intellectuals might be weak, but knowing books is not something useless, as it can give, acutely, the feeling of a déjà vu or even a déjà imaginé... It helps in these times. Reading is not to be abandoned either [...]. Tough. Easy. Full of wise guile. There’s time. Christianity is not necessarily weak. Therefore:


2 Ibid, pp. 420-421.
-I do not remember anything. I have no recollection of having broken a glass. I never heard our tablemate saying something hateful.

-Hey, were you sitting at that table? And has not there been discussed anything hateful?

-I was at the table, it was my birthday and it had been hers on the eve. But nothing hateful was discussed.

-Don’t you remember?

-No, I don’t.

-But do you remember that you broke the glass?

-No, that either.

-Hey, is she your friend? (And he dramatically, ceremoniously points to her). Do you admit she is your friend?

-I admit it.

-Then? Why would she say that you heard what you haven’t heard? What, are you implying she is lying?

-I don’t know. I am not saying that she’s lying. I’m saying I don’t remember anything.

“That is what I am left to do, this is the third way, to be a smart peasant and a wily gossip. Calm and steadfast. Meeting their standards. Hers and theirs. Not higher. I don’t remember. Full stop. And I don’t know. And I keep my mouth shut. I relapse into silence. I don’t recognize. I don’t give up. I don’t know, mate. I don’t remember anything. Confused as a goat. Neither in bed, nor under the bed. Neither in the cart, nor in the wagon. Like beans at Easter.

Uncle Lache selling goods at the market place: he wouldn’t offer any money off the price; Uncle Simache in the court: he would stand for himself.

Uncle Gruia bargaining: no and no and no.

I chose that the starting point in this chapter to be precisely this approach in “contrast” (the term is used by George Ardeleanu) because the “subject” itself of the analysis is the truth. Or, Nicolae Steinhardt’s confession in The Diary of Happiness, nine years after his arrest, highlighting the moral strength before the Board of Inquiry, may be charged at least with “heroic cheating”, to use Adrian Marino’s words. The document prepared by the Security shows a Steinhardt Nicu Aurelian who responds as his investigators expect him to and recognizes, resigned and docile, his guilt. In a context like that of the instrumentation of the process for the “Noica-Pillat lot”, it is recommended, though, the dismantled reception of the official documents as faithful reflections of reality. Considering several documents designed strictly for the forgery of truth as landmarks of the latter involves obvious risks. Such a warning is raised by the Canadian professor Bogumil Koss, a specialist in contemporary Eastern Europe: “We have to state clearly that access to an archive cannot be qualified as mémoire de travail. In most cases, including in Poland, this opening is partial and often manipulated. Personally, I think this operation raises many epistemological and moral problems. Today, we tend to recognize that truth is found in the archives of several institutions which everyone knew were only manipulating not only people, but truth itself. If we say that in the reports prepared by an officer (officer who, in turn, was forced to manipulate in order to maintain his position or to be promoted) of the secret intelligence we can find the “truth”, that means that we deliberately ignore the system. I find that blind trust in archives, shown in our societies which pretend to be liberal, is a mistake. It is about institutions which manipulated from the very start until the very end, were created to manipulate.” Bogumil Koss’s warning applies to the arrangement in contrast which I started with in this study.

The arguments “at hand” here are the textual ones. A report of four pages (File no. 118988, vol. XIX, ff. 324-327) records a disproportionate survey of two and a half hours, retaining (or concocting) those standard answers used as evidence for prosecution under the Code of Criminal Procedure established in 1952. Article 209 of this document severely punishes “conspiracy against social order”. Details of a “procedural” order (among which the so-called “head-against-the-walls beating”) do not appear in the official document, and neither are

3 Apud George Ardeleanu, op. cit., pp. 419-420.
6 From the preventive arrest warrant results that he “committed the offense of conspiracy against social order”, and from the execution one that, “together with others, he carried out propaganda and agitation for social change in the state, through discussions at clandestine meetings and by the contra-revolutionary writings of Noica C. and Pillat C. that he has commented in a hostile way against the regime.” (apud. George Ardeleanu, op. cit., pp. 434-436).
mentioned the “unnecessary” discussions about the glass broken at a party in August 1958 and which should have led the defendant to admit the subversive nature of the meeting.

In the first part of the confrontation is recorded the “satisfactory” statement of Beatrice Strelisker⁶ who yield to the pressure of Security and accepted the posture of prosecution witness. In the second part of the report comes the mirror “answer” of Nicu Steinhardt, an empty repetition of what was previously stated by his lot mate. Such a record, although official, does not reflect either the truth or the reality. It tries to frame several individuals according to the rigors of a penal code of Stalinist inspiration.

In opposition, the confession in The Diary of Happiness reflects the reality of the conscience subject to dramatic hardship, leading to changes of identity. In the Diary, Niculăe Steinhardt seeks “lighting” the spiritual, intimate truth. Thus, the literary character of the confession does not invalidate the veracity of the concrete event, but leads the receiver to a deeper level of understanding reality. Therefore, in this chapter, I start from the premise that The Diary of Happiness, as opposed to the proof-documents of the Security, records the true reality of the investigation and configures the honest image of the moral resistance.

“A glass? I haven’t broken any glass... I don’t remember...⁹. The thick crystal glass, broken by Nicu Steinhardt at a party in the home of Strelisker Beatrice (where they had “hostile discussions against the system”), seems an insignificant detail, but it is the material, intangible evidence of a concrete truth. The prosecuted surprises himself becoming aware that if he recognizes that he had broken the glass (actually, a real fact), he would actually say the truth. But once caught the thread of this punctual truth, apparently harmless, the squat will roll by itself and the whole truth about the discussions with anticommunist substrate will be admitted, recognized and confessed. Or, this fact implies treason. The first revelation experienced by Niculăe Steinhardt is the choice between the “mathematical” truth (“I broke the crystal glass”) and the paradoxical truth (“I didn’t break the glass”). “Oil freezes, irrespective of what Aristotle might say”¹⁰ is the formula by which the character contests the axiom, dispels the illusion of reality and the curtain of the “accountable” truth. This second truth is, paradoxically, “the quiet and proper lie”, “the shameless, deliberate, shrewd lie”, “the blessed lie, whispered by Christ (Christ: He is there, he hasn’t forgotten me, all the bells toll... In the tiniest fraction of a second I’ll become His forever)”¹¹. Lie becomes truth beyond nature, because it means solidarity, thus sacrifice. Moreover, it is the first step by which concrete reality is contradicted and walked on, annihilating its omnipotence which was given to it by the modern man. Sacrifice for the others is the key to Christianity and leads to self salvation. “I don’t remember. I don’t remember to have broken any glass. I didn’t hear our tablemate saying anything hateful”¹².

Resistance to the investigation by lying comes from “pragmatic” reasons as well. Alexandru Paleologu, in an interview in early 2000, provides evidence of that pragmatism: “I know how much I owe [to Constantin Noica], tremendously, but he owed me as well. Both Nicu Steinhardt and I knew very well that the proximity of Noica would surely lead us to jail, but we accepted that as an ineludible consequence of our friendship with him. This does not seem that it may be called at all humbug¹³. Characterized by an acute lucidity, Nicu Steinhardt is aware that the decision of “saving” himself from imprisonment, through collaboration, leads, inevitably, to the definitive compromise of social relations and public image. The Diary of Happiness faithfully surprises, in deep psychological angles, the limit situation. The only way to escape the constraints of such an existential knot becomes the embrace of a supraindividual truth with mystical ramifications: the truth of paradoxical freedom, obtained by “physical courage in the face of death”. Such a truth marks also the solution offered by Teoharie Mihadas, in his detention memoirs: “There is voluptuousness, perhaps one of the manliest

⁶ Of which I can mention an excerpt: “During the meetings organized by the group I was part of, which I mentioned above, were discussed the hateful writings of Noica C-tin such as ‘Antigoth’, ‘Stories of Hegel’ and ‘Response to a Distant Friend’, as well as the writings of the country traitor Emil Cioran — ‘Letter to a friend from afar’ and ‘Temptation to Exist’ and Mircea Eliade — ‘The Forbidden Forest’ The last two writings were introduced in the country by Marietta Sadova, fact known by my friend Nicu Steinhardt as well. We discussed these writings, on which occasion we would make hateful comments about the popular democratic regime in R.P. Romania, saying that the freedom of the press, of meetings, expression, etc. lacked in the country. And that everything that has been written and done is dictated by the regime. Also, there were defamed country’s cultural activities, the socialist-realist literature, and some people who worked to build socialism in the R.P.R., whom they slanderously called ‘collaborationists’ (doc. cit., cf. Ardeleanu George, op. cit., pp. 417-418).

ones, that of saying NO, regardless of consequences. This NO is the voice of antimatter in us, and having the courage to say it in limit situations means you agree to what the essence in existence, in the world, in God is\textsuperscript{14}.

“The voice of antimatter in us” is, metaphorically, re-emergence to an early stage of humanity. Giambattista Vico, the author of the “verum esse ipsum factum” principle identifies three stages of a historical cycle: the “poetical” age (divine or of the faith), the heroic or aristocratic age and the age of the people. The latter manifests itself by the “deepening” in reason and by mistaking truth and reality (only) with what can be seen and demonstrated in a concretely scientific manner. In essence, it is the age of modernity, that of moving God in the field of rational analysis and, therefore, unsanctifying Him. Or, through “irrational” decisions like the one of assuming detention, one returns, aware or unaware of that, in the first age, marked by the presence of divinity in the world and by taking it as an attitudinal model.

The first page of the Diary illustrates the spiritual journey of the prosecuted to the clarification of his relationship with truth and reality. During the investigation, the first Christian paradox is revealed to Nicu Steinhardt: “the holy and well weaved lie”. The questioning of the canons of truth ("it’s a good thing that sometimes two and two make five\textsuperscript{15}) comes from becoming aware of the fact that punctual truth serves sorting a trial in which all actual values of the human being are annihilated. Complementarily with the two ideas — the pragmatic truth and the “holy lie” — is the understanding of a double reality: concrete reality and spiritual reality (subject to the Christian paradoxes).

“Well, it is possible in this way as well”. Now, yes, a woman is a kettle, a stove is an elephant... Max Ernst, Dalí, Duchamp... Munch’s Cry as well, I feel like screaming, to wake up from this nightmare, to get back to our old country, good and gentle, where good things are what we know they are and respond to the meaning that we have always assigned to them... I would like to get out of this restive city of Delvaux, of this Tanguy’s field, with soft, broken and reunified limbs after bizarre affinities, after mating other than those sanctified by us...

\textit{At our place}, on Earth. This might not be Earth. That’s not her. This Dostoievskian and expressionist setting cannot exist in reality... I am fooling myself, I am acting bravely: I put on airs, I certainly imagine this delirious scene for the sake of a role which I would like to play”.

The world of distilled fear, of terror in pure state expressed by Edvard Munch in \textit{The Cry}, the abstract, petrified “landscape” of Yves Tanguy or the hypnotized town of Paul Delvaux, invoked for the representation of his state during the investigation are signs of a lucid recognition of non-reality. The room and the investigators make a huge world that surrounds the man pulled out from his meaningful reality and thrown in a hallucinating supra-reality. Lucidly, the defendant “acts bravely” in an effort to overcome, through sense, the supra-reality, sensing the size of a new form of freedom. Playing a role, as well as the mental inventory of the expressionist or surrealist painters represents, in essence, forms of (illusory) liberation in the context of the investigation. The defendant detaches from the absurd-surrealist scene to anticipate, evaluate and decide, being helped by rational judgments, cultural knowledge, and erudition.

When the concrete reality of the limit situation defeats the attempt to a cultural game, the first reaction is de-individualization. The pride of the identity temporarily deletes itself as a form of defeat. “I give myself prey to the sweet delirium of evanescence and then I recognize again, I recognize because everything is equal to me now, because everything is grey and real, because nothing has meaning and precision. (...) Personality (what is that?) is sprinkling, is breaking into pieces, and passes entirely through a sieve. Whatever I do, I am lost\textsuperscript{16}. Confusion, volitional detachment towards his destiny and surrender are symptoms lucidly accepted, as the characters of Camil Petrescu do: “this restful job of resignation and submission, of \textit{confirmation} of the true truth, isn’t it the logic end of a long purulence? (...) Either on the path of truth or on that of decay, I’m still lost, I’ll still have to recognize”\textsuperscript{17}.

The defendant identifies two ways to quicken (even temporarily) the escape from the surrealist setting of the Security room: to recognize what investigators already know or adopt a careless confusion. The moment which follows, crucial, reminds of Leiba Zibal’s reaction, when he gets rid of the paralyzing horror and methodically carries out the plan for the annihilation of evil. “Lost? Oh, no. Here’s that from the neighborhood of Pantelimon and Cluceresti — of the slum and the village — suddenly comes

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\textsuperscript{15} Nicolae Steinhardt, \textit{The Diary of Happiness}, ed. cit., p. 66.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p. 54.
another thought, *a third solution*. The tonality changes diametrically, clearly adopting shades of a suburb in Bucharest. Interesting is that the investigated Jew finds the solution of getting out from the surrealism of the situation in the essence of the Romanian slum: realism. I selected a longer excerpt from the *Diary* to illustrate the way in which, including through stylistic valences (phonetic and semantic) of the language, it is gradually created the certainty of the “de-sacred” reality.

“Oh, no, the humiliation of surrender comes from the devil. There’s no fog outside and no delirium in me: it’s the full reality, what I see is true. Pantelimon and Clucereasa are whispering to me — like some trustworthy companions who *whisper* precisely: what, are you going to get caught by a phantasmagoria? Come to your sense. Yes, her. Yes, everything is true. Be calm and cynical and clever. I repeat, clever. Yes, sense. Yes, her. Yes, everything is true. Be calm and cynical and clever. I repeat, clever. Yes, there is still an unthought-of third solution. Your job now is to be vulgarly calm, ingenuous, and shameful, deliberate, and clever lie. *The son of Uncle Tache*, the turnpike man. Dad before leaving: *don’t be a faint-hearted Jew, don’t shit in your trousers*19.

Nicu Steinhardt gets over what Simone Weil called “the intellectual fear of illusion” and passes from the area of spiritual uncertainties in that of the final bet, irreversibly, on faith in God the Savior. The threshold is difficult to define and is connected to the ineffable of the Christian revelation. However, in *The Diary of Happiness*, the author insists on the realistic character of the process of clarification. Lie is converted into truth and resizes itself as a manifestation of the good when it saves the spiritual identity and the conscience, when leads to conservation of the respect for the fundamental human values (among which the belief in spiritual freedom). Paradoxically, the lie saves the spirit of the one who lies, but leads to the sacrifice of physical freedom.

The existential impasse forces the clarification of identity and its framing between very clear coordinates. By the very choice to lie, Nicu Steinhardt, as a prosecuted, initiates this framing. Identity discards cultural utopias, returns to the origins of the Romanian realism and makes up with the national and historical context. The style adopts the same “realistic” shades and voices alternate in the same serious game of duality. “Surrealism is from Paris, delirium might be good in Zurich, at the coffee shop. This is not there. This is where trains stop at stations, not the stations at the trains. This is the country of Ion, of the fanariots and Soarbe-Zeama, this is where Vlad Țepeș impaled the Turkish emissaries instead of saying ‘you shoot first, English gentlemen’, and Petrache Carp showed Vodă Carol that maize is meant to be eaten with your hands, this is life and death, this is not a sophisticated and supremely crazy setting, this is not curtains and delicacies, it’s neither Paradise nor artificial Hell, this is like a hole in a wall, like behind a counter, like in a marketplace (...). This is Vitezda Baths: you throw yourself or not. Here, now, now, now. *Here is where you declare everything*, boy, here, on the spot, you must choose. Now I have to recollect myself, to project myself. Shall I do

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that? Can I? Do I want that? Do I know how? What a curious thing: I notice that if I want to become a Christian, I must lie.20

It is worth invoking here, to tone the relation truth-lie, the same Nikolai Berdiaev who noticed that the Marxist ideology puts the understanding of this report to catastrophic mutations and to the “questioning of the very idea of truth”21. "Lack of love for truth is expressed not only by a nihilistic or skeptical attitude, but by replacing truth with one faith or another, with one or other of the dogmatic teachings in whose name lie is accepted and regarded not as evil, but as good."22

Truth based on religious faith and on traditional values is, in the revolutionary totalitarian world, replaced by dogmatic, artificial truth which argues the functioning and institutionalization of a political system based on utopian "values". The underlying of a utopian truth requires the cancellation of the traditional (religious) one. The construction of utopian freedom is achieved through the physical annihilation of those who understand freedom in a conservative way. The utopian welfare of the spiritually leveled community justifies the evil means involved in its substantiation. "Marx proclaims the historical relativism of truth as an instrument of class struggle, from a dialectics borrowed from Hegel. The dialectical lie, widely used by Marxists in practice, is justified by the dialectical materialism. And, in perfect contrast with its philosophical foundations, the latter is recognized as the absolute truth, finally discovered."23

In such a context (dealing with a “group” trial, based on political criteria), the precise truth, asked by investigators, serves the ideological “truth” and loses its beneficial consistency. From this reason, the decency of the precise truth is abandoned and the lie as a solution is adopted. "I have to lie, just like in mathematics when sometimes the solution cannot be found unless by firstly complicating the data, bypassing the core of the problem. I have to lie. That means that things are not so simple. The world is not simple (...) Christianity, boy, is not the same thing as ignorance."24 "The prosecuted doesn't recognize anything that might help convicting the already arrested people. I don't remember. I don't remember to have broken any glass. I didn't hear our tablemate saying anything hateful. It's the lie through which the supra-reality of the inquiry room is dismantled, revealing the reality. "The kettle is a kettle. The stove is not an elephant."

The main obstacle which appears before the “rescuing lie” becomes loneliness. In the search and confirmation of the truth, man is alone. The mission has a personal value. "Finding out the truth makes the man a lonely person."25 This is most probably the origin of the use of the voice of alterity. "Come on, understand and realize why you cannot believe: you are not too easy to scare and you are not sophisticated (...). Come on, you know what you have to do, don't fool yourself anymore, you have already chosen; you can resist and you are fully awake, come on, understand — no matter how much that would astonish or scare you — realize that you won, hold NO in your arms, it is yours."26 The character is, at this moment, Iona inside the fish, dealing with the harsh reality of death. What gives meaning to death, in the case of such a revelation? It is a different reality, secondary, manifested by the definitive belief in salvation, and independent from the historical reality.

Christianity (as a religion of salvation) is granted a fully realistic foundation. Truth, good, beauty, are paradoxical, requiring sacrifice and “de-sacralization”. The clarification of the problem of Christian truth, however, is a stake exceeding the limits of this study. But I will deal with some considerations of a paper which scandalized the Christian dogmatic rigor in recent years. It's the extensive essay of Michel Henry, C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme (Seuil, 1996). After underlining the real danger of the monopoly of language and historical discourse about the truth of facts, Michel Henry establishes the coordinates of the Christian Truth as follows:

"Is the truth of Christianity going to let itself reduced to the truth of history? Is there a sense in the fact of looking at Christianity from a historical point of view? Let's assume that the requirements, criteria and methodologies that define historical truth were fully satisfactory, at least as far as can be done when we deal with a truth of this kind. Let's assume that the original Gospels were accessible to us, their authors were known, that these, contemporary with the facts that they reported, were faithful witnesses

20 Ibid, pp. 56-57.
22 Ibid, p. 5.
23 Ibid, p. 7.
and their testimonies collected in the best conditions of truthfulness were checked, etc. — should there be established through this, at least a bit, the truth of Christianity itself?

Not at all. Because the truth of Christianity is not the fact that a certain Jesus had wandered from village to village, drawing crowds as he wanted, making them admire his teaching and his miracles, gathering around more and more disciples — until being arrested by bishops and crucified on Golgotha. The truth of Christianity is not that Jesus would have claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God and therefore God Himself either — statement or rather blasphemy which was in fact the cause of his arrest and suffering.

The truth of Christianity is that the one who calls Himself the Messiah was truly the Messiah, Christ, the Son of God born before Abraham and before the ages, bearer of eternal life, which He communicates to anyone He wants, thereby making what is not to be, or what is dead to be alive. [s.n., I.C.]

The Christian truth presupposes, in essence, faith beyond rational arguments and factual evidence, and belief generates meaning and directs life towards the certainty of salvation. The truth about the existence of Christ is not subject to scientific demonstration and rational constraints. The reality of faith establishes by fully overtaking this Truth and the Christian includes in it all the other truths about their reports with themselves and the world. To a similar understanding leads Nikolai Berdiaev as well, with whose ideas Nicolae Steinhardt is aware, at the end of the ‘60s. The Russian thinker increases the ramifications of the Truth by associating it with the creative freedom of man.

“There is a profound truth in the idea that the world is not devoid of meaning and absurd that it is in a state of non-sense. This world, the world shown to us, is a corrupt world in which the absurd and meaningless death triumphs. Another world of meaning and freedom cannot be revealed but in the spiritual experience... We need to see the absurdity and nonsense of the world we live in, to believe in spirit, which freedom is connected with, and in meaning, which will defeat nonsense and will transfigure the world. This will be the triumph of the kingdom of Spirit on the kingdom of the Caesar, the triumph of Truth not only over lies but also over partial, fragmentary truths, which seek to play a dominant role.

There is nothing finer than seeking the Truth and love of Truth. Only the Truth, in its integrity, is God, and knowing the Truth is penetration into the divine life. The fact of substituting the unique, integral, liberating Truth with small particular truths that claim to have universal significance, leads to idolatry and slavery. This is the basis on which scientism is born, which is not science at all. All partial truths involve participation, even unconsciously, in the unique, supreme Truth. Knowing the Truth cannot be an exclusively human knowledge; but it cannot be an exclusively divine knowledge either, like in the monistic idealism of Hegel. It can only be divine-human knowledge. Knowing the Truth is a creative activity of man, who bears the likeness of God, i.e. a divine element. This divine element is God’s Altery. Knowing the Truth which philosophy aspires to is impossible by means of abstract reason, which operates with concepts; it is possible only through full spiritual reason, through spirit and spiritual existence.

I preferred citing the broader considerations of Michel Henry and Nikolai Berdiaev in order to anticipate (justifiably) the landmarks between which the understanding of The Diary of Happiness takes place. Nicolae Steinhardt states, essentially, the belief in Christ as Truth. His confession does not slide towards philosophy and idealism, but points out the facts which, trans-historically, reveal Christ as the Truth, portraying the people who actually put into practice the Christian values. The Diary of Happiness does not explain the Christian Truth (a difficult initiative for philosophers and theologians as well), but describes human existence in the light of unconditional faith in this Truth. In addition, Nicolae Steinhardt subordinates the other truths (political, historic, and intimate) to the Christian understanding.

The political truth (historical) is updated in the context of postwar Romania: “tyrannies do not prohibit uttering the truths, except some, rather said a particular one, that one that bothers the tyranny”; “Every time the general algebraic equation needs to be figured, namely incarnated in that truth hidden and doomed by the tyrant in power. (...) The burning issues in the agenda were prisons, trials accompanied by recognitions and self-accuses of the defendants, those were the administrative penalties; denouncing them would have meant to say that two and two make four. (...) This apparent numerical formula is actually abstract and algebraic, always asking for translation, exemplified, captured in time; namely every time
in accordance with the truth prohibited at that time”.

In essence, *The Diary of Happiness* proposes truth as foundation of identity. The fact that Nicolae Steinhardt sets out in his becoming a Christian by questioning the concept of truth is not mere chance, but is connected with intentions of a spiritual-intimate type. The crucial moment in his becoming is his conversion, and that had to be placed in the context of the truth and of a reality other than that scientifically or ideologically stated, typical to the perception of the 20th century. From the first pages, the *Diary* forces its reader to recognize the functional limits of a reality in which God is missing. The belief in the Christian Truth and in meaning manifests itself as “the voice of antimatter”, as the unique way of giving a sense to his own life. As upward reference in the act of conversion, St. Paul considers Christianization and baptism occasions to build, on the ethereal foundation of faith, the identity of a man again: “In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (*Ephesians* 4, 22-25). On the very idea of becoming through salvation, by deed, insists Michel Henry: “Christian ethics has therefore, as aim to allow the man to forget his condition of Son in order to find through this the absolute Life he was born into. The decisive pre-assumption of the Christian ethics is that the possibility of this second birth doesn’t consist in knowledge, but in a making [s.n., I.P.]. But this process of salvation is not based on a “to make” as far as to identify with it, unless there is a complete mutation of that concept. The essence of his “to make”, “to act out”, that is what has to be thought in a completely different manner. Where? How? In life and as a fundamental determination of it, moreover, like an absolute way of Life”.

The truth said by the “character” in *The Diary of Happiness* is the same as that uttered by Nicolae Steinhardt, creating this “character” in antagonist historical conditions, facing the omnipotence authority of the totalitarian state: “When beside you people are cut with a saw, if you want to state that two and two make four, that means that you have to shout as loudly as you can: it is a crying injustice that people are cut in two with a saw”. This truth is infinitely more “real” than the breakage of a crystal glass. *The Diary of Happiness* is built around the uttering of the essential truth, selected from the infinite amount of coexistent truths at a certain time.

Moreover, *The Diary of Happiness* is the most natural form of stating two “truths”: that of becoming a Christian being (individual truth) and that of the political oppression (historical truth). This attitude generates freedom through the “physical courage in front of death” and facing the sin of obedient or indifferent silence. “We could quote a later author, Brice Parain, according to which to speak or to keep silent is the same as to live or to die”.

**References**


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