

**Selections from *The Journal of Joy* by Nicolae Steinhardt
Translated from the Romanian by Paul Boboc**



Today we're excited to share with you selections from the groundbreaking Romanian masterpiece *The Journal of Joy* by Nicolae Steinhardt, one of the most revered dissident names in Romanian literature and philosophy. Born from a Jewish father and a Romanian mother, Nicolae Steinhardt (July 12, 1912 – March 29, 1989) was a Romanian writer, Orthodox hermit and father confessor. He was subject to anti-semitic discrimination during the fascist governments of World War II Romania and, after the war, he was persecuted and imprisoned by the communist regime. He was sentenced to 13 years of forced labor at Jilava Prison for “the crime of conspiracy against the social order.” In prison, on March 15th, 1960, he converted to Christianity under the direction of Mina Dobzeu, a Bessarabian hieromonk. In 1980, Steinhardt became a monk and lived in the Rohia Monastery working as a librarian until his death in March 1989, without getting the chance to see his country free of communism. *The Journal of Joy*, his best known and most celebrated work, was confiscated by the Securitate (the Romanian secret police) in 1972, restituted in 1975, and confiscated again in 1984. In the end, Steinhardt edited several versions, one of which was broadcast in a series of episodes via Radio Free Europe. Due to political reasons, most of Steinhardt's work has been published post-mortem in its uncensored version after the communist regime collapse in 1989.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

Translator's Note

I chose to translate Steinhardt into English because of his representative status: he embodies the spirit of Eastern Europe, much as Dostoevsky and Kazantzakis do, though he has not reached the universal appeal that other Eastern European writers who wrote in more widely translated languages have. I have always seen Steinhardt's work as emblematic of Romania's spiritual heritage: to the surprise of many Westerners, historical Romania has always toward Jerusalem and Rome (or Rome through Vienna), and not toward Lenin's tomb in St. Petersburg. Steinhardt's *Journal* is a rich, powerful story of survival in the midst of oppression, hopelessness and faithlessness, and for this it will always be a beacon to those who have survived catastrophes and chosen to believe against all odds. Its universal value is immeasurable, and it is for this value and impact that I hope my translation touches the hearts and minds of people across the world.

—Paul Boboc, translator

Nicolae Steinhardt: The Life

Nicolae Steinhardt was born in 1912 in Pantelimon, a suburb of Bucharest, as Nicu-Aurelian Steinhardt. His father, Oscar Steinhardt, was the CEO of a furniture company, and had participated in the First World War, for which he was decorated with the order of Military Virtue. The family was Jewish, though non-practicing.

Between 1919 and 1929 Steinhardt attended grade school and high school in Bucharest, first at Clementa, and later at Spiru Haret high school, where his classmates included Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica and Alexander Paleologos. He graduated from the University of Bucharest in 1934 with a license in Law and Letters, where his thesis was titled "Classical Principles and the New Tendencies of the Constitutional Right." The following years were fairly uneventful, punctuated here and there by publications in local journals under the pseudonym of "Antisthius." In 1940 he lost his position as a redactor at the "Regal Foundations Magazine," a right-leaning newspaper, due to his Jewishness (though he had never been a practicing Jew). During this period Steinhardt's favorite writers included Simone Weil, Aldous Huxley, André Gide and Marcel Proust. Their thought had a powerful effect on his journal, much of which betrays their influence.

After his denunciation by George Calinescu in 1947, Steinhardt endured many of the personal privations that were common to writers and intellectuals of the post-war period in Romania. These culminated in Constantin Noica's arrest in 1958, to whose group of right-leaning intellectuals Steinhardt belonged. On December 31st, 1959, Steinhardt was arrested by the Securitate as a *mystical-legionary revolutionary* and a forced confession against Noica and the group was demanded of him, which he refused to submit. He was sentenced to 13 years of forced labor at Jilava Prison; his sentence was read to him as "crima de uneltire contra ordinii sociale" – the crime of conspiracy against the social order. In prison, on March 15th, 1960, he converted to Christianity under the direction of Mina Dobzeu, a Bessarabian hieromonk. For the sake of ecumenism, the

baptism was attended by a Roman Catholic priest, two Unitarian ministers, and a Protestant minister.

Steinhardt achieved success as a writer following his liberation from prison, and in 1980 he relocated to the picturesque Rohia Monastery in Maramureş, where he was the monastery's librarian. He died in 1989 from angina pectoralis, several months before the dissolution of the Communist regime in Romania.

The *Journal of Joy* was finished by the late 1960s and edited in the early 1970s. Read on the radio post *România Libera (Free Romania)* and studied by Romanian intellectuals in Romania and abroad throughout the '70s and '80s, the text was confiscated several times by the Communist authorities, and further edited until its publication in 1991. It had been read on national radio before the Revolution of '89, with considerable success. In 1992 it won the Best Book of the Year award in Romania, the Romanian equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize, and it is now considered a canonical classic of Romanian literature and the central literary statement of the Romanian anti-communist canon. The book is regularly taught in Romanian high schools and has been translated into seven languages.

The Journal of Joy

By Nicolae Steinhardt

Translated from the Romanian by Paul Boboc

Lucerne, 1938

The commemoration of Wagner's opera *Siegfried*, at the villa in Tribschen, on the shore of the Lake of the Four Cantons. Here the composer wrote the hero's *Voyage on the Rhine*, after whose name he had baptized his recently born son.

Conductor: Arturo Toscanini.

On one of the evenings, in the concert hall, Brahms' First Symphony, likewise conducted by Toscanini.

Not much time passes since the symphony began and the ceiling opens up; cohorts of angels descend from the heavens and fill up the hall. Waves of joy spill everywhere. One feels that both the piece and the execution lie under the grace of the saints.

I imagine Brahms' First Symphony conceived at night, in Vienna, toward the end of spring: the composer leaves *Kafeehaus* late and heads home, walking. The way is long and he stops by *Votivkirche*. It's cool. It has rained. Here and there one can still hear, farther and farther, the rumbling of thunder. The last trams pass by in a rush. All the melancholy of life gathers around the composer, all the callings, passing joys, permanent beauties, nostalgias. The human soul is conquered by such evanescence, and the world around it seems to it so solid, especially because it knows that it will die. He who paces the almost empty streets with the heavy gait of a stocky body is not ignorant of life in all its aspects, nor is he ignorant of the past; he knows he treads where Haydn and Mozart had been, Schubert and Johann Strauss. But the present is his: the present with its

exigencies and deceptions, and sought by something imperishable. I wonder whether Mateiu Caragiale was thinking about Brahms' First Symphony when he described the waltz played at the bar in Covaci (*More and more shrouded, more low-pitched, confessing affections and disappointments, wanderings and torments, regrets and contrition, the singing, drowned by longing...*)

I place the First Symphony alongside Wagner's tetralogy (Paul Morand prefers *Tristan und Isolde*) and *Don Giovanni*, music's supreme success according to Kierkegaard.

Nowhere else, I think, was the townsman, wandering the city profanely, closer to God in music. (In literature: *Gaspard de la nuit* by Aloysius Bertrand and – naturally – all of Chesterton.)

1971

An entire stereophonic audition of the rock-pop opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

Mary Magdalene's character – text, role, voce, interpretation – is extraordinary. The authors concentrated all their powers of creation and love here.

The most mysterious passage in the Gospel – harder to understand than even Luke 16 or John 17 – seems to me the anointing at Bethany.

When Judas says: what a waste! all that money, what a loss! such an expensive bowl and so many poor people could have been helped! Judas speaks for us all. We all think as he does: yes, it's too bad, such a waste of chrism and there are so many poor people! ... Human logic speaks, scrupulous and spiteful. (For ourselves nothing can be too expensive, for others everything is too much. And we don't even dare spoil ourselves!) Pettiness speaks, concerned about restricting the impulse toward liberality or toward sacrifice.

And Christ's answer, a bit sharp: screw the poor, because there'll keep on being poor people so long as the world will be, and you'll keep on having them, but you won't have me; and this woman pitied me – this answer is the kind that would rouse the most justified (*righteous*) indignation in the Pharisee who smolders inside each of us. We're tempted to say: it's unfair and scandalous, more thoughtful than ever about husbandry and management.

Could it be pride from the anointed? (May it not be!) Or indifference to others? (May it not be!) Too much self-conceit and need for pampering? (May it not be!) Disdain for the poor? (May it not be!)

The anointing at Bethany is something else. Actually, it's a lesson – like everything that happens and is said in the Gospel. Everything that is said for us is said to be a lesson to us.

And we're taught a hard lesson, painstaking to fulfill: our duty when we see suffering, a person in pain, our kindred on a certain cross, or someone close to us, around us, in prospect of a cross – our duty isn't to seek refuge in abstractions and generalizations, in the love of humanity and the issuance of the desire to modify social laws and systems, but to *help* and *comfort* and *immediately* to *overwhelm* that person and that particular suffering with our goodness.

Nothing is too good, nothing is enough, nothing is too expensive for our smitten, afflicted, suffering, unfortunate neighbor, God's image.

Mary Magdalene thinks so – and that is why her conduct will be related so long as people will read the Gospel. That's what she thinks and that's what she does: she sees Christ, suspects his immense pain, foresees his tragic fate, understands that it has to do with a sacrifice. And she only knows one other thing: to solace the persecuted innocent. In the text of the rock-pop opera, paraphrases of the gospel text, she says to him: don't think about us, don't think any more, rest in peace, all shall be well, let the earth spin by itself tonight.

She dares lead him on with warm words and lie to Christ.

The mother's love for her child: all shall be well, sleep, don't worry, don't you bother yourself with us. The totally disinterested love because she sets the ego aside: *don't think about us*. (The exact contrary of the supreme example of egotism: the widow which in front of the grave cries: *who will you leave me to?*) And because – as opposed to Judas – it does away with that subtle transfer of egotism which consists of passing over the imprecise entity of the poor the offense brought to our person, and our sense of economy and pettiness, which would not have allowed us to do something so useless and spectacular for anything in the world, removing us, if only for a moment, from our bitter reasonableness.

Mary Magdalene's example – and how the rock-pop opera brings it to life! – means for us that we don't have to dodge ourselves in abstractions and generalization, thinking of the poor who aren't present and who constitute a simple mental category (or, put another way, an alibi); that it becomes us to comfort Christ, meaning *the present one*, who suffers before us and waits, now, here, for our compassion (co-passion). Ah! It's not bad to want the good of humankind and of the poor and of the working class, but it's easy; it's harder to carry the paralyzed detainee (who might be pretending) on your shoulder to the bucket; to hand the bedpan to this operated man who can't get out of bed (and who might be exaggerating slightly), to endure the general Constantinescu-Țăranu's snores without waking him from his sleep and summoning him threateningly to lie on his side (it wouldn't be impossible for him, really), to care for this jerk who pisses in the canteen, to listen to the ruthless man who can't find peace in anything except in clattering on and on about his misfortunes, hatreds, bitterness.

This is Mary Magdalene's lesson: a lesson in modesty, like everything Christian. We're called not to lose ourselves in the haze and grand plans and desiderata, but to give practical help (unpleasant, as needed; disgusting, as needed; annoying, if need be) to those close to us. To have mercy on the actual and real pain of our neighbor. In Mary Magdalene's example, as the rock-pop opera sees it – and the example will be read so long as the Gospel will be heard – Christ is not just God for whom any sacrifice we might give is too small – he's also the symbol of the suffering person in front of us. We should help this person through deeds, now, as we can, if only with a kind word, a consolation, an attentive ear, a gift, by rubbing against them, a walk to the drugstore, this person, not those who aren't present, not clean abstractions and categories, faraway, discreet and full of qualities, which don't snore loudly and don't piss in the canteen. To help our neighbor full of wounds and sins, of ugly and reeking wounds, of dirty and petty sins, a fault finder and full of manias, insolent, thankless, ungrateful, filthy, stubborn, pretentious, for whom nothing is good and who answers to the good done him, if not with swear-words, at least with jeers, ironies and resentments.

Mary Magdalene has a single thing on her mind: to show Christ that she's not indifferent; she wants to sweeten his suffering, console him, sweeten his terrible burden. And because she can't *help* him in fact, she does what she can: she brings him a useless and costly offering, she sketches a sort of ritual, a gesture whose meaning is: if I'm not able to do anything else, may I at least weep and harm myself for You. The bridegroom, of course, doesn't do away with the cross, but he wets it with a little dew, one of the deciding factors which prove that the offering on the cross itself was not in vain.

I think three creatures wet the cross of Christ with a little dew: Mary Magdalene, the good thief and, before, Nicodemus, who showed the Lord that He would be able to yield good fruit even in the compact ranks of cant. (Three creatures – and Mary's tears.)

Just before, Veronica's headkerchief had been the only gracious station on the Via Dolorosa; and if the Holy Face was imprinted on the tissue of the material, it was to show us that all suffering is imperishable and all injustice will cry forevermore.

At Bethany unfolded – out of everything that ever happened for the hearts of the petty bourgeois – the most *anarchic*, most *defiantly aristocratic* and most *scandalous show*. Gide in *Les Thibault*: “Vivent les courants d'air,” and he opens all the doors and windows. Nowhere are grownups more defied by children and non-conformists: dishes are shattered, goods are wasted, bounties of oil are lost, loose women go into the room, the prophets allow themselves to be touched by them, the windows will break! and it'll be so dirty on the floor, this grease leaves stains, it'll need to be cleaned, ugh... and the funniest thing is that at Bethany even grownups, fully grown people, represented by Martha, act totally weird: they break their backs to cook for all the youths and their deceivers...

St. Therese of Lisieux: “It is love, indeed, to sacrifice everything, to give heedlessly, to be prodigal, to dispel even the hope for fruits, to act madly, to waste beyond measure, never to take account.”

As for Judas:

Judas gets lost because he reasons too subtly, too ingeniously; he's sophisticated. In hard cases the best thing is to apply the simple solution, the simplistic common sense solution, the solution of stubborn common sense. If you think: since Jesus came to redeem us, since to be able to redeem us he has to be crucified, since to be crucified someone has to betray him, I'll offer myself and betray him myself – you think too subtly and sophisticatedly. And too abstractly. No! The best thing is to think simplistically, peasant-like, and apply the popular rule; no matter what, I won't betray my friend and teacher!

I don't know exactly what the possibilities are, it's not certain that priests and scribes will find other means, I don't want to know anything, I don't rush into clever rationalizations and terrible deductions, I know only this, left us by our ancestors: I for one won't betray my friend and teacher. Let the salvation of the world happen as God sees to it, I'm just a worm and my poor man's duty is to apply the general lesson. There are many reasons; even more excuses; it rains arguments. I don't want to hear about them.

Judas also lost himself because he wanted to undertake a divine mission; he found it fit – proof of unimaginable conceit – to substitute himself for God.

He should have been more reserved: I don't know. I won't interfere. I won't stick my nose into it. I won't sell him.

Because no matter what Judas might say, no matter how refined or even impersonal, detached or grandiloquent his reasons might have been, the general common sense will always be able to translate its beautiful reflections through the odious and long-since muddied word of *traitor* (and words have their own powers of desecration and demystification, proceeding maybe from long use). Ordinary common sense will always be able to throw questions at Judas – *and will finish him off in no time*:

“Hey, did you go to the priests?”

“Yes, but to...”

“Hey, did you sell him?”

“Well, you see that...”

“Hey, did you take thirty pieces of silver?”

(The devil catches us in the act, however he can; as the federal police catch gangsters, if not for their great transgressions, then for tax evasions.)

“I didn't want to take them at first and then I returned them...”

“But you took them. Thirty?”

“Yes, thirty, but...”

“Hey, did you kiss him?”

“Yes, but I did it to...”

“Hey, you realized it too, since you hanged yourself.”

“But this exactly proves that...”

“No excuse, you rascal, you're a traitor.”

During difficulties and dilemmas, the only good path you can take is to hold on to the brute rule, the popular rule. Why wasn't I a prosecution witness? (It would have suited me, with the others having gotten out not five years since and go ahead, get your hands on sleeping pill recipes!) Because God came to my rescue, to find in the cross-examination my escape from subtleties and rationalizations and to re-shape that thinking of a Pantelimon suburbanite and of a Muscel peasant.

Simple! The simpler, the more elementary. No complications. No matter what happens and no matter what might happen and no matter how much logic might tempt us, we remain under the naïve law, the most soldierly and undifferentiated; there safety lies. And a good one: I don't sell (or: I don't betray, as the case might be). The rest, as Simone Weil says, devolve upon God; whatever they do is not my business. I'm not God. I'm a poor sinner who doesn't know much, but I know I won't betray my master. I don't raise myself to the rank of *coredemptor* with my own strength.

That's how Judas should think, and not lose sight of the soiling capacity of words, which are sort of gossips that don't know much either. And I'll make, not a subtle hero, but a vulgar seller out of the man who took thirty pieces of silver and gave a false kiss for the sake of the police.

Yes, feelings can be honest and complicated; words are terribly exact and carry in them the entire ancestral load of evil. Judas' internal drama will have been great and his reasons more complex perhaps than they play out in the Gospel of John. But once they've

passed from the *psyché* to the light of deeds and to the level of spoken things, any enveloping and blurring fog will have vanished: the halo of confusion disappearing, nothing remains but the pressing boulders of labels, of enclosure in people's scantily nuanced talk.

Beware of words! Avoid subtleties! Don't sign contracts without reading them carefully!

The reason why the priests insisted on returning Judas' money and not taking it back in the end, not allowing Judas to proceed "idealistically and disinterested," seems to be the desire to give the whole scrape a sordid character, to clog the entire new movement (Jesus, the head: a madman! Judas, the accomplice: a seller!) with the morass of abjectness.

The new movement had to lack all nobility and heroism from the very beginning, as much in regard to the "chief culprit" as to the informing agent.

The Securitate inherited this way of proceeding; the prosecution witness always accuses himself as well (if only because he was at the scene of the crime when the "sacrilege" was committed). He thinks that, by serving the interrogatory, he guarantees himself their good will. As little as Judas guaranteed himself the elders' and priests' good will! *All must be compromised*: the accused, the witnesses and the agents, all of them must be soiled, and after they will have accused one another reciprocally and will have been brought to a condition of dizziness in which they no longer know what they've done or what to do, after they've been denied the possibility of rehabilitation and of any comfort (*What do we care? You will see*), they'll all be hurled into the fourth dimension of moral matter, into the same stinking magma of disdain and forgetfulness.

German psychology and pedagogy – Bruder Harald Sigmund tells me – distinguish between two attitudes in the presence of everyday life: *Ichhaftigkeit*, the point of view of the individuals who relate everything to themselves, judge everything in relation to their own interests, preferences and tastes; their capacity for feeling offended is huge, the world for them is a circle whose center is within themselves; they find only misfortune, defiance, personal stumbling-blocks in the chain of reactions between *n* elements. Egocentric imperialism far surpasses Ptolemaic geocentrism, imagining a harmony of the spheres and of the heavenly planes, while the human ego sees others only as rivals and hindrances. *Sachlichkeit*, on the other hand, represents those who are willing to consider what's right in front of them: the interlocutor, the work, the circumstances, the matter. These types can understand that realities exist before them – subjectivism doesn't listen to Hume and Berkeley – and sometimes they can conceive of another's point of view or the objectivity of a situation.

The difference is not just aesthetic but also ethical. The egocentric type is far more predisposed to suffering and can always fall into the abyss that opens at every step to the right and left of their wounded vanity. Christianity, which paradoxically raises the person and then subjects him to objective reality, can heal us of the atrocious wounds of susceptibility, reducing the problem of the place we take up in the queue at the grocer's or at the ticket booth to balanced proportions. The heroine in Nathalie Sarraute's *Planétarium* endures horrible torments in regard to the style of a latch: she's unhappy because she's not Christian.

The truth makes us free, and at the same time it unshackles us not only from the slavery of sin but also from the yoke (which is not easy) and load (which is not good) of trifles, susceptibilities, the jabs of self-love. Beyond *Sachlichkeit* we can find the quiet necessary for putting ourselves into the service of another, worthier cause: *die Sache Jesu*.¹⁹⁴

This expression: “the unseen war,” referring to the condition of the Christian in relation to a powerful and merciless adversary, is not a metaphorical story; it’s serious business. The Christian fights a war that he must absolutely win, there’s no place for “honorable surrender” and that’s why he can’t see war as something superficial. He concentrates his entire life around the sought-after victory, he appropriates Field Marshal Rommel’s words completely: once war’s been declared, nothing matters but winning, the rest is cabbage soup.

The imprisoned person can understand Chesterton’s observation better than others: “The situation of people in misery worsens thanks to the fact that, in order to meditate upon the irrevocability of their fate, they have endless moments of leisure. For the oppressed the worst moments – out of ten – are those nine days when they’re not oppressed.”

1963

In cell 88 (if I don’t fool myself) at Gherla, large and crowded, there are many priests of all denominations. Ecumenism is put into practice. Every morning, thanks to the initiative of a steadfast priest and some hearty laypeople, an interdenominational service is organized. Roman Catholic, Unitarian, and Orthodox priests, Lutheran and Calvinist pastors all stand next to each other. One of the Lutherans is a partisan in the Protestant liturgical movement *Berneuchner Bewegung*. Several of the sectarian preachers stand aside at first. Then some of them (and the tolerant Traian Crăcea, an excellent boy) associate with us.

Nothing can render the splendor of this service without an altar, canonicals, icons, myrrh, organ and objects of worship. The silhouettes scarcely-dressed in the *zeghe*, the trimmed heads, the pale faces, the murmured words and songs (so the police don’t hear) forge an atmosphere which, through its intensity and its enthusiasm-provoking energy, rivals the fanciest ceremonies in the most grandiose cathedrals in the world. The magical places of Christianity – the Sistine Chapel, Chartres Cathedral, Hagia Sophia, Athos, Wartburg, Zagorsk and Optino monasteries –all seem to be here, in spirit and *in principio*. We feel as in the catacombs; if dangerous and terrible things were to come over us I’m sure that we would all face them. The words of the Lord, *where there are two or three gathered in My name, I will be there*, apply. No, nothing can render, explain, communicate the incomparable beauty of these services of ecumenical fellowship. Talleyrand’s words can be applied to these at least as well as to society before the French Revolution: whoever hasn’t seen them doesn’t know what *la douceur de vivre*¹⁹⁵ is. Christ’s presence is blindingly obvious, and whatever might happen later on – we haven’t turned into angels – the sense of heavenly rapture that the improvised pseudo-liturgy makes us feel will not be able to be swept away. We also feel a sense of deep gratefulness

to those who made it possible for us to share such inimitable and incomparable moments, which take us out of time more than Proust's madeleines.

1970

The priests who make haste with fiery words of praise in approving the moral measures taken by some totalitarian governments (the abolishing of prostitution, the prohibition of abortion, complicating divorce) think, I believe, more about their letter and drastic nature than the spirit that lies at the basis of these measures. For the spirit can't breathe except where freedom is and where virtue issues through its own free will. (Everything is permitted me, but not everything is useful to me.) If the terrible problem of temptation wouldn't come up, we might imagine the city in whose central square, in front of the cathedral, a brothel, tavern and casino would all line up. *Only they'd be empty.*

In a subsequent phase, the situation, in fact, would be as in the mentioned example: the brothel, tavern and casino would not just be empty, but also *closed*, since there'd be no one to maintain them.

(And I like to imagine the devil, behind closed shades, running to and fro, *roaring like a lion and seeking whom to devour*. Or, in a version different from St. Peter's: leaning on the shutters, running from the darkness of the empty building and the green gaming tables with the bitter smile of offended hopelessness.)

And in any case I can't agree with the priests (even though the very devout and admirable Sofian B. is among them) who glorify the edicts of the militias in regard to haircuts, girls' skirts etc. Because they empower vanities, forgetting that they come from certain servants of the One who lets fall on us the Terror and the Lie. We forget these. So we can grow ecstatic before some trifles? So we can squeeze the mosquito and lose sight of the camel? See the straw and conceal the beam? Give a tithe with cumin and dill? Do I hear?

In welcoming us to Him, Christ puts forth no prerequisite conditions, absolutely none. *But* when we become His *we* relinquish our uncleanness not out of duty but out of unspeakable shame and elementary seemliness.

As the headquarters of our intellectual ego, the brain, lies in the skull, so hard that only the electric drill can perforate it in the case of surgical intervention, everything happens *als ob*¹⁹⁶ and the headquarters of our mental and moral activity would languish in an impenetrable carapace of egotism, aggression, stubbornness and pride, which not even cosmic rays could surmount.

Christ's words alone have the gift of being able to sometimes melt this formidable carapace. Then, instantaneously, the irresistible, unseen laser dissolves everything in its path and stirs the kernel in the carapace, harder than the matter in imploding stars where a cubic millimeter has the weight of a billion tons.

Balance – the secret of life – is not the same as eclecticism, mediocrity and compromise. It's not situated on the middle line between extremes, but beyond them, synthesizing them, adding them, surpassing them, dogmatizing them (Blaga). It's not a

transaction but a more acute extremism, an exit from the apparently irreducible dilemma, an exit that leads to the only realm where truth can dawn: that of contradiction and paradox.

(For example, Goethe's claim "better an injustice than disorder" and the saying *pereat mundus fiat justitia*¹⁹⁷ balance one another thus: let there be righteousness so that the world may not perish from disorder.)

The elegance and discretion of Christianity.

Proofs: Whoever doesn't acknowledge the good done him commits a great sin. But the sin of whoever waits for gratitude from another for a good done to that other is greater.

Those that fast, it becomes them to anoint their hair and to wash their faces.

Those that pray must confine themselves to their room and lock the door.

Whoever gives alms, his left arm shouldn't know what the right one does.

Whoever is welcomed to the feast must sit at the lower end of the table.

No one can force his neighbor, not even to do him a good. Not even the Lord enters uncalled for.

Whoever is in the service of Mammon, may he at least be faithful to him (Luke 16:11).

Longfellow's celebrated verses: *Life is real, life is earnest.*

Of course life is real and serious, since it is from God, since Christ descended into it and it is decided here whether we will be saved or damned eternally.

But it's just as true that life is unreal and light, illusion and vanity. (Hinduism says this, too.)

If we listen only to Longfellow we reach a "petty bourgeois" conception, narrow, dull, accounting for life.

If we follow only Hinduism we come across grime, want, aversion and heedlessness.

We must therefore simultaneously follow two diametrically opposed ideas. We must believe two truths that exclude one another. It can't be! It can be: the proof is the saints, heroes and countless good people.

(It may also be that the two points of view aren't contradictory and irreconcilable – as God and Mammon are – but represent two facets of a single complex reality which simple minds divide categorically, but which the balanced harmonize with blessed skill.)

Why does the terrorized person sometimes give more information than is asked him? (This question obsesses me). Why does he attribute to his inquisitor (executioner) thoughts that are subtler, pretensions that are greater, thirst for savagery more horrifying than they really are? Because, being terrorized, his panic is more inventive, his imagination more exacerbated, his whole neurological activity more intense. The inquisitor not being terrorized (or less and in another way), he's somewhat calmer; the truth is that the terrorized person is *worse and more dangerous* than his oppressor.

I say that the existentialists are right in regard to the *descriptive* part, as Fr. W. Foerster used to say about Schopenhauer that he's not antichristian and that everything he *describes* is true.

1966

Discussions with Jews at my cousin Vally's house.

I eventually acknowledge the conversion from one faith to another. (Especially if it was constrained. Some ask me whether I was forced to do it in prison.) But how could I pass from the spirit to matter? They'd get it if I kneeled in the spirit elsewhere, but how can I partake of the bread and wine (with "victuals" and out of the same cup as everyone), how can I kiss wooden icons, carved images?

And they smile at me subtly.

I also smile at them. They may be knowers, I know something too: that people aren't spirit only but matter also. The Lord is spirit; but He enfleshed, He became flesh.

Behold how such a rational and sober-minded religion invokes the intangible supremacy of the spirit. Behold how a *Weltanschauung*,¹⁹⁸ so anchored in the worldly and in success, is intimidated when it comes across the species or images of matter. What curious fear and repulsion toward the materiality of the bread, wine and icons in people who speak infinitely more respectfully and appreciatively of the world than Christ's adepts! And I feel like there's also a troubled, virgin maiden's fear of coming closer to God, of demanding from and giving Him too much, of establishing too-intimate links with Him. And how much Freudian pride: how could I descend, a man created by the Creator, into matter?

But they're willing to understand me: I did what I did in a moment of great and explicable unhappiness and hopelessness.

When I try to say that, quite the contrary, I did what I did in a moment of inexpressible happiness, the subtle, compassionate smiles re-appear.

I have no more to say. I smile, shyly now.

We don't proselytize; this is the superiority of our religion. That's how they end the discussion. They don't give me enough time to tell them that they boast, to speak the truth. This lack of proselytism (conversion to Judaism: not just very rare but very hard, the Pallière case) is actually racism.

Discussion with Al. Pal.

Sinners who speak of nothing but righteousness, tirelessness and cleanness inspire distrust in us. They all believe – verbally – in monophysitism and Manichaeism, they conceive the religious life only in the form of the etheric and the absolute. They *conceive* it, literally, because in fact they take their life of sin further because, the sin being irresistible, and Christianity being the same as the absolute ether, they can't escape the dilemma in which they find themselves. They consecrate their sinful lives to Satan and to Christ, their words and their writings glorifying the most refined purity.

They're so far from theandric Christianity, and from the One who preached metanoia on the streets, in the villages, on the roads, at the feasts, everywhere, to all.

And how easy is the solution they've found!

But Christianity isn't easy and Christ is hard to fool; He asks us to behave like Christians here – according to our strengths. Here in the world, striving in the fullness of uncleanness. And – as Kierkegaard put it – He's not so *weak* as to remove us from the world. And not – it's understood – so naïve as to not know why righteousness is talked about with such intransigence and exclusivism: he knows the whole vocabulary of psychoanalysis, and so *compensations* and *transfers* too.

1967

Claude Tresmontant's book *Comment se pose aujourd'hui le problem de l'existence de Dieu*.

I ask myself questions: if the world is no more than the result of chance, why are there diseases and cyclical phenomena? Why does menstruation exist as a periodic phenomenon? Why is there a corresponding remedy for each disease in the vegetable, organic and inorganic worlds? Whence comes the perfect coordination of the parts making up organs and the perfect functional coordination of the creature's organs? What's the explanation for the phenomenon of "rejection" (in other words, how do the cells of a body find that the new, absolutely identical cells belonged to another *unity*, how do they smell them out as *alien*?) Why do periods of accelerated evolution exist? From whence the capacity for selectivity of cells and groups of cells? And those "punctuation signals" in the genetic code, which biologists know well, are they the exploits too of randomness? How about mechanical relationships based on and expressed mathematically by the square of certain sizes (distance etc.)? Not for anything can I imagine that simple chance explains all this.

The infinite complexity of every organism and the dizzying details and architectural "refinements" no longer allow us – given our knowledge – to regard the hypothesis of chance as likely. The hypothesis of intelligent design is far more plausible.

We're compelled to presuppose a creator, an agent, a motor, a programmer.

As for the soul, there's no further need to prove it. Tresmontant (pg. 367): What's a person without a soul, a person who's "given away their soul"? A corpse. The person necessarily has a soul, since without one it is no more than a corpse.

Einstein: "It's surprising that the universe is intelligible" and "A science that no longer wonders and venerates is a dead science."

The hypothesis of chance seems more and more childish, more "primary" (the word isn't used here in its administrative capacity).

The terrible problem is different: who's the Programmer and what is He pursuing?

(The Redeemer, infinitely good and merciful, tackles this question, giving us – alone – the ability to find its answer.)

(1971 – in the newspaper "România Liberă," in the obituary column, the word "church" can no longer be used. The place where the funeral service will be performed is mentioned as any address: the street and the number. But one's allowed to say: "the soulless body," which is a far more serious violation of materialism.)

An observation by the well-known painter and art-theorist André Lothe, and the claims of linguists in regard to the role of the writer and poet toward words, agree wonderfully with faith's works in the graced soul.

André Lothe: "There's no progress but the delightful discovery of certain procedures as old as the world... The essential thing is for this discovery to indeed be a discovery, and a wonderstruck one at that, not a dull inheritance springing from resignation."

Words, in everyday speech, become routine, banal, automatic. What does the poet do? He singularizes the word to give it the strength to produce a sensation, *renews* the blasé *perception* and refreshes the word's capacity to rouse it from numbness.

Faith works the same way. It rediscovers the world, people and life for us and pulls us out of bitterness, boredom, cheerlessness. It renews and invigorates, just as the poet's art or the painter's does. Our capacity to perceive the beautiful and the good suddenly becomes empowered. Now, love crumbles the fences of indifference and doubt, crushes the walls and ceilings of seclusion within indifference eternally wounded and upset. Suddenly, both moral and physical perceptions grow vertiginously. The world is something else to the believer overcome by happiness – rich, new, intoxicating, captivating, euphoric – as it is for the artist during moments of inspiration. After all, the same power works in both: the grace of the saints. (People on drugs also arrange access to euphoria, but as everything is paid for, the artifice to which such people resort conditions the obtainment of that state of delight and re-discovery based on material products and on the contest with other people who compromise their peace and happiness the rest of the time; dialectics don't forgive, and the drugged person's ataraxia serves agitation and obsession, hell's supporting pillars.)

The believer is not necessarily and constantly in an ecstatic state of being; but regardless he abides, at least a little, master of himself, freed from the anguish and terrors produced by the earnest concreteness of day-to-day life.

Language, for Brice Parain, is the way through which we express our capacity to transform ideas into facts, promises into realities.

The Securitate's cross-examinations and the relationships engendered between people by terrorist regimes draw my attention to some other aspects of language, sharp in some social and even moral categories.

For those whom I'd include under the title of "sly folks," speaking is something totally different than for Brice Parain: it's a ceremony, a trap and a ritual. Instead of being an expression of the real, of thoughts and feelings, a medium for the transmission of knowledge, thought and emotion, it is mainly a system of lies, a network of traps and background noise.

Words come to mean what in Roman law was a "formula," wanting the exact use without which all acts became null. The letter replaces the spirit entirely; intentions don't matter at all any more. So words become a magical incantation and a means of torture, and a race where you can reach your foe. (In this sense, naturally, everyone is just your foe and relationships can only be adverse relationships produced by the triptych *doubt, fear, ambush* – the threefold electrostatic barrier.)

When sly folks find out that speaking can also be something other than a ceremony and a trap, starting to sniff out the meanings that a Brice Parain intuits in it, their surprise is boundless.

Out of mercy for the afflicted we must not fall, here in this world, into other errors. Scripture foresaw this danger and advises us not to defend the weak against the righteous.

The idea of certain writers like Jacob Wasserman, for whom anyone who holds a morsel of authority (the magistrate, the father, the professor) is guilty. This unfair and wrongheaded idea needs to be revised. (Manole proclaims himself the novelist's implacable enemy.)

J. Madaule on *Besi*:

“The real theme of the book is the absence of God. And, at the same time, the need for God. The aching for God. Aching that isn’t just Russian but human. There’s no image on which to re-build the world without God, there’s no image for living humanly without God, since he made himself a man to deliver us.”

Courage.

Dostoevsky: “Fear is humankind’s curse.”

Not just in Constitutional Law; it’s the same in every subject. Courage is the final mystery; whoever is willing to die conquers. The party about which it is known and about which it can be seen that it isn’t ready to face death is, from the first, and most surely, as one conquered. History belongs to those who knew how to die and not to fear – physically – the prospect of death. (I think this is the truth behind the saying - especially Asian – that death is the door to life.)

About the translator



Paul Boboc was born in 1993 in Baia Mare, a picturesque town in Romania about 30 miles from the Ukrainian border, and, after finishing first grade, he moved with his family to Queens, NY, and later to Dumont, NJ. His BA and MA in English were completed at Boston College and Brandeis University, respectively. As a student, he discovered his passion for writing, publishing a couple of articles in BC’s research journal, as well as short stories and poetry in the college’s literary magazine. Translating the *Journal* during his MA was the largest task he had undertaken to that point, a tribute to his beautiful home country. He enjoys reading, writing, translating (especially poetry), and learning new languages. More at <https://brandeis.academia.edu/PaulBoboc>