

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL "ISIDOR TODORAN"
SPECIALIZATION: HOMILETICS

**THE HOMILETICAL AND CATECHETICAL
DIMENSION OF THE MINISTRY OF THE MONK
AND WRITER NICOLAE STEINHARD**

TABLE OF CONTENTS – KEYWORDS - ABSTRACT

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR:

Rev. Prof. Dr. GORDON Vasile

PHD CANDIDATE:

BOCA Antonie-Ioan

CLUJ-NAPOCA,

2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
STATE OF CURRENT RESEARCH	5
CHAPTER I: THE LIFE OF FATHER NICOLAE STEINHARDT	11
I.1. Biobibliographical Landmarks	11
I.2. Nicolae Steinhardt as a Model of Assuming Orthodoxy and Building Romanian National Identity	23
I.3. Rohia as a Monastic Hearth and Space of Christ's Confession	28
CHAPTER II: THE PATH TO TRUTH AND THE CONVERSION OF NICOLAE STEINHARDT	38
II.1. Prisoner for Christ. The Meaning of Suffering in the Life of Father Nicolae Steinhardt	38
II.2. Conversion	41
II.3. Baptism and Tonsure into Monasticism	44
II.4. The Mystico-Legionary Group: Noica-Pillat-Steinhardt	53
II.5. Nicolae Steinhardt and Other Martyrs of Recent History – Spiritual Parallels, Similarities, and Distinctive Elements	59
II.5.1. Nichifor Crainic	59
II.5.2. Rev. Prof. Ioan Bunea	61
II.5.3. Richard Wurmbrand	62
II.6. Ecumenism from a Steinhardtian Perspective	65
CHAPTER III: THE HOMILETIC, CATECHETICAL, AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK OF FATHER NICOLAE STEINHARDT	71
III.1. General Presentation	71
III.2. The Homiletic Work	76
III.2.1. Exegetical Homily: The Living Water (The Samaritan Woman)	77
III.2.2. Thematic Homily: Courage	84
III.2.3. Panegyric Homily: Two Devotions That Should Not Be Abandoned – The Veneration of the Cross and of the Mother of God	92
III.2.4. Catechetical Homily: Monastic Reflections	100
III.3. A Concise Analysis of the Main Ideas Highlighted in Father N. Steinhardt's Sermons	114

III.4. Catechetical and Pedagogical Aspects in the Life and Writings of Father N. Steinhardt	209
CHAPTER IV: THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF THE MONK OF ROHIA	216
IV.1. Particular Elements in the Work of Nicolae Steinhardt	216
IV.2. Preferred Themes in Steinhardt’s Theological Essay	221
IV.3. Style and Language of the Homiletic Work	234
IV.4. The Reception of Steinhardt’s Theological Essays and Work	242
CHAPTER V: INTERVIEWS ON THE PERSONALITY AND WORK OF FATHER NICOLAE STEINHARDT	252
V.1. Interview with His Eminence Archbishop Andrei Andreicuț, Metropolitan of Cluj, Maramureș and Sălaj	252
V.2. Interview with His Grace Bishop Iustin Hodea of Sighet	255
V.3. Interview with Rev. Ioan Pinteă, Director of the “George Coșbuc” County Library in Bistrița	264
V.4. Interview with Rev. Prof. Ștefan Iloaie, Faculty Member at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca	276
V.5. Interview with Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă, Director of the Romanian Academy Library (Cluj Branch) and Faculty Member at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca	291
V.6. Interview with Rev. Prof. Vasile Stanciu, Faculty Member at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca	300
CONCLUSIONS	304
ANNEXES	308
BIBLIOGRAPHY	328

Keywords: Nicolae Steinhardt, conversion, confession, courage, freedom, Orthodox homiletics, lived experience, intertextuality, anti-formalism, contemporary relevance.

Introduction

Nicolae Steinhardt (1912–1989), known in monasticism as Brother Nicolae of Rohia, stands as one of the most complex, original, and fascinating figures of Romanian Orthodox spirituality in the 20th century. An intellectual with an encyclopedic formation, a refined writer, a martyr of the communist prisons, a profound essayist, and a discreet monk, he succeeded in uniting, through a vivid and compelling synthesis, high Western culture, the extreme experience of suffering in the Romanian Gulag, and authentic spiritual life.

His conversion in Jilava Prison, the baptism received in Cell 18 in the spring of 1960, and his subsequent entry into monasticism at Rohia Monastery do not constitute mere important biographical moments, but genuine spiritual events with profound resonance for both post-war and contemporary Romanian Orthodoxy. Steinhardt was not simply a convert, but a confessor who transformed suffering into light, prison into a school of prayer, and the monastic experience into a platform for a living, free, and profoundly human preaching.

Although his work has been intensively studied from literary, memorialistic, biographical, and spiritual perspectives (George Ardeleanu, Virgil Bulat, Florian Roatiș, Adrian Mureșan, Ioan Pinteă, Ștefan Iloaie, and others), the homiletic and catechetical dimension of his ministry has not yet benefited from a rigorous analysis. The present doctoral thesis aims precisely to fill this scientific gap, demonstrating that Monk Nicolae Steinhardt was not merely a spiritual writer or a martyr of the faith, but a true preacher and pedagogue of the heart, whose sermons and writings possess a formative and converting power and reveal a remarkable contemporary relevance even in the context of the spiritual challenges of the 21st century.

The motivation for choosing this topic is multiple and profound. Firstly, it is of a personal nature: the discovery of Monk Nicolae Steinhardt's work during my university studies represented a transformative intellectual and spiritual encounter, which awakened in me a vivid and constant interest in the field of experiential theology. His texts exerted a special fascination upon me, revealing the power of a living, authentic, and profoundly human preaching. Secondly, from a scientific perspective, although the literature dedicated to Nicolae Steinhardt is already substantial, few studies systematically and interdisciplinarily approach his homiletic

corpus, particularly the sermons and theological essays gathered in the volume *Dăruind vei dobândi: cuvinte de credință*.

These sermons represent the most authentic and mature expression of his lived theology, successfully combining, with rare mastery, rigorous scriptural exegesis, refined spiritual irony, and an insistent call to an authentic Christian life, free from formalism, bigotry, and religious rigidity. Through the originality of their narrative construction, their dramatic force, and the emphasis placed on existential conversion, these texts can serve as valuable sources of inspiration for contemporary preachers, offering them a model of living, profoundly human, and effective preaching, capable of responding to the spiritual challenges of today's world.

The thesis aims to demonstrate that Father Nicolae Steinhardt's homiletics represents an original synthesis between patristic tradition, the martyric experience of the 20th century, and modern cultural sensibility. His preaching is not didactic or moralizing in the classical sense, but invitational, dialogical, and existential, employing irony, paradox, cultural intertextuality, and dramatic narrative as spiritual instruments for awakening the conscience. In this way, the monk of Rohia renews the homiletic genre, adapting it to modern man, who is engaged in a process of spiritual seeking.

The fundamental objective of this research consists in highlighting, analyzing, and valorizing the homiletic work contained in the volume *Dăruind vei dobândi: cuvinte de credință*, through a detailed examination of four distinct homiletic genres (exegetical homily, thematic homily, panegyric homily, and catechetical homily). The secondary objective aims at outlining the catechetical and pedagogical profile of the monk of Rohia, emphasizing the way in which his preaching becomes a tool for profound spiritual formation that goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and seeks the inner transformation of the human person.

The methodology employed in this research combines the analysis of primary sources (various editions of the volume *Dăruind vei dobândi: cuvinte de credință*) with the analytical-synthetic method (for the rhetorical, theological, and stylistic exegesis of the sermons) and the structured interview method (for the chapter dedicated to oral testimonies from personalities who knew Monk Nicolae of Rohia directly). In addition, essential secondary sources were consulted, such as monographs, critical studies, scientific articles, and international translations of N. Steinhardt's work.

Structure of the Thesis and Main Results

Chapter I. The Life of Father Nicolae Steinhardt

This chapter provides a rigorous biobibliographical synthesis and offers the essential framework for understanding Steinhardt's entire oeuvre. Structured around three main directions, the chapter follows the existential trajectory of the author, highlighting the formative stages of his complex personality.

Subchapter I.1. Biobibliographical Landmarks

This subchapter presents the main coordinates of Nicolae Steinhardt's life, from his birth on 12 July 1912 in Pantelimon commune (near Bucharest), into a family of Jewish intellectuals, to his cultural and academic formation. It analyzes his studies at the prestigious Spiru Haret High School, where he was a classmate of Constantin Noica, Mircea Eliade, Dinu Pillat, and other future prominent Romanian intellectuals, as well as his university studies in constitutional law, culminating in the defense of his doctoral thesis. The chapter emphasizes his early literary debut under the pseudonym Antisthius (the volume *În genul... tinerilor*, 1934), his interwar journalistic activity, and his collaboration with the journal *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*. Particular attention is given to the years of persecution (1940–1944 and 1947–1964), the dramatic experience of imprisonment (1959–1964), and his release in 1964. The monastic period at Rohia (1969–1989) is also highlighted, where Steinhardt lived a discreet but spiritually and culturally highly fruitful life.

Subchapter I.2. Nicolae Steinhardt as a Model of Assuming Orthodoxy and Building Romanian National Identity

This subchapter explores the profound way in which Steinhardt assumed his Orthodox identity, achieving an authentic synthesis between his Jewish heritage and Christian-Orthodox spirituality. His conversion is analyzed not as a renunciation of his Jewish identity, but as its fulfillment in Christ. The chapter highlights how Steinhardt lived an authentic, profoundly spiritual patriotism, manifested through his refusal to compromise with the atheist-communist regime, his fidelity to Romanian national values, and his willingness to suffer in the name of friendship and truth. Thus, he becomes a model of creative assimilation of Orthodoxy, demonstrating that authentic national identity is not reduced to ethnicity but is fulfilled through the living of Christian values.

Subchapter I.3. Rohia – Monastic Hearth and Space of Christ's Confession

This subchapter analyzes the essential role played by Rohia Monastery in the life and work of Monk Nicolae Steinhardt. Rohia was not merely a place of refuge, but a true space of confession and the fulfillment of his monastic vocation. Here, Steinhardt lived a life of prayer,

study, and discreet ministry, becoming a sought-after spiritual father for intellectuals, students, and ordinary people alike. The chapter emphasizes how the monastic environment at Rohia provided him with the ideal framework for writing his most important works (*The Journal of Happiness*, *Dăruind vei dobânda*, *The Danger of Confession*, etc.) and for exercising a living pastoral ministry.

Through this first chapter, the portrait of an exceptional man emerges — one whose life represents an organic unity between suffering, conversion, confession, and spiritual creation, thus constituting the necessary foundation for the subsequent analysis of his homiletic and catechetical work.

Chapter II – The Path to Truth and the Conversion of Nicolae Steinhardt

This chapter is dedicated to one of the most dramatic and profound stages in the life of Monk Nicolae Steinhardt: his inner journey toward Christ, marked by suffering, searching, and radical transformation.

Subchapter II.1. Prisoner for Christ. The Meaning of Suffering in the Life of Father Nicolae Steinhardt

This section analyzes the way in which Father Nicolae experienced political imprisonment between 1959 and 1964. The chapter explores the profound spiritual meaning of his suffering, which was not perceived merely as political punishment, but as a spiritual path of purification and drawing closer to God. His refusal to betray his friends in the Noica-Pillat group, his acceptance of the sentence, and his moral resistance under extremely harsh conditions represented, for the author of *The Journal of Happiness*, a genuine participation in the Passion of Christ. Suffering thus becomes a space of encounter with God — a space that consumed his intellectual pride and opened his heart to faith.

Subchapter II.2. Conversion

A central moment in the life of Father Nicolae Steinhardt is his inner conversion. The monk of Rohia describes this transformation as a prolonged process, marked by intense searching, inner crises, and a personal encounter with Christ. His conversion was not an impulsive act, but the fruit of a profound spiritual maturation. In it, the refined intellectual and passionate reader of literature discovered that the truth he had been seeking was not to be found in abstract systems, but in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Subchapter II.3. Baptism and Tonsure into Monasticism

The culminating point in the life of Monk Nicolae of Rohia was the baptism he received in Cell 18 of Jilava Prison in the spring of 1960, administered by Hieromonk Mina Dobzeu.

This secret act, performed under conditions of maximum discretion and risk, marked Steinhardt's "second birth." After a period of maturation in the faith, by divine providence, his tonsure into monasticism followed. In this moment, he definitively assumed his monastic identity, becoming "Brother Nicolae."

This subchapter highlights how these Holy Mysteries (Baptism and Tonsure into Monasticism) represented not merely formal acts, but a profound ontological transformation of the writer N. Steinhardt, which radically changed the course of his entire existence.

Subchapter II.4. The "Mystico-Legionary" Group: Noica-Pillat

A distinct subchapter is dedicated to the Noica-Pillat group, of which Steinhardt was a member. This section aims to highlight the moral solidarity that existed within this group of intellectuals and the price they paid for refusing to compromise with the communist regime. It is clearly emphasized that N. Steinhardt was not a "legionary" in the political sense, but a man who chose fidelity to his friends and to his conscience.

Subchapter II.5. Nicolae Steinhardt and Other Martyrs of Recent History – Spiritual Parallels, Similarities, and Distinctive Elements

This subchapter offers a comparative approach to other major confessors of the period: Nichifor Crainic, Fr. Prof. Ioan Bunea, and Richard Wurmbrand. This parallel allows for the highlighting of the particularities of Steinhardt's conversion. Unlike Crainic (a nationalist and traditionalist theologian), Bunea (a priest and institutional educator), or Wurmbrand (a Protestant convert with international impact), Steinhardt proposes an original Orthodox model — a spiritual discourse born from the experience of suffering, marked by courage, profound inner freedom, and the rejection of any ideological or confessional extremism.

Subchapter II.6. Ecumenism from a Steinhardtian Perspective

This subchapter illustrates that N. Steinhardt advocates an ecumenism of the heart and of shared suffering, rather than one of doctrinal negotiations. For him, Christian unity does not arise from theological compromises, but from a real encounter in Christ, experienced especially under conditions of persecution. His experience in prison, where he shared suffering with believers of various confessions, convinced him that true closeness among Christians is achieved through the common confession of Christ Crucified and Risen, transcending confessional barriers, without renouncing Orthodox identity.

Through this chapter, it is demonstrated that Nicolae Steinhardt's path toward Christ was not linear or romantic, but an itinerary marked by intense searching, assumed suffering, and radical conversion — an experience that later profoundly shaped his entire work.

Chapter III. The Homiletic, Catechetical, and Pedagogical Work of Father Nicolae Steinhardt

This chapter constitutes the core of the thesis. It offers a detailed homiletic analysis of four representative sermons from the volume *Dăruind vei dobândi: cuvinte de credință*, each illustrating a distinct homiletic genre:

- **Exegetical Homily:** “The Living Water (The Samaritan Woman)” – analyzed as a spiritual duel and a conversion through dialogue;
- **Thematic Homily:** “Courage” – a virtue rarely addressed in Orthodox preaching and presented as an essential element for confession of faith;
- **Panegyric Homily:** “Two Devotions That Should Not Be Abandoned: The Veneration of the Cross and of the Mother of God” – a theological defense and glorification of these two central devotions;
- **Catechetical Homily:** “Monastic Reflections” – a monastic guidance against formalism, bigotry, and spiritual dryness.

In addition to the detailed analysis of these four sermons, the chapter also provides a concise examination of the other homilies in Father Nicolae Steinhardt’s homiletic volume. Each sermon is analyzed according to the following pattern: presentation of the title, presentation of the motto, analysis of the relationship between the incipit and the final part, presentation of the main ideas, and a selective presentation of stylistic figures and linguistic features.

Chapter IV. The Pastoral Ministry of the Monk of Rohia

This chapter examines the pastoral dimension of Monk Nicolae Steinhardt’s ministry and highlights the way in which he exercised a “discreet yet highly effective pastoral care,” both within the monastic community of Rohia Monastery and in the lay world through his writings. Unlike classical institutional pastoral ministry, Steinhardt practiced a **pastoral ministry of the heart**, based on dialogue, spiritual discernment, and personal example.

Subchapter IV.1. Particular Elements in the Work of Nicolae Steinhardt

This section highlights the distinctive features of his pastoral thought and ministry. Steinhardt stands out through his refusal of any religious formalism, his opposition to bigotry and rigid ritualism, and his promotion of an authentic Christian life centered on inner freedom and a living relationship with Christ. A particular emphasis is placed on confession and the idea that true preaching is achieved not so much through words, but through good deeds poured out upon others (the concept of *boierie* – noble generosity).

Subchapter IV.2. Preferred Themes in Steinhardt's Theological Essay

This subchapter analyzes the main thematic directions that run through the pastoral work of the monk of Rohia: Christian freedom, self-giving as the fundamental law of spiritual life, the courage of confession, authentic humility, the struggle against religious formalism, holy boldness (*buna-îndrăzneală*), propriety (*buna-cuviință*), Christian happiness, and others. Steinhardt insists on the idea that sacrificial love and concrete charity are far more important than the rigid observance of external rules.

Subchapter IV.3. Style and Language of the Homiletic Work

This section explores the rhetorical and stylistic particularities of Steinhardt's pastoral writings. N. Steinhardt employs an accessible, natural, and profoundly human language, avoiding arid theological jargon. Among the defining features are: spiritual irony (used as an instrument of spiritual awakening), narrative-dramatic structure, rich intertextuality (biblical, patristic, literary, and philosophical), and a fraternal, humble tone. His style is a **hybrid one** (theological essay), through which he successfully combines dogmatic depth with persuasive power and accessibility.

Subchapter IV.4. The Reception of Steinhardt's Theological Essays and Work

This subchapter analyzes the impact of N. Steinhardt's work in both the Romanian and international contexts. Although his writings circulated clandestinely during his lifetime, after 1990 they enjoyed an enthusiastic reception in both theological and cultural circles. Works such as *The Journal of Happiness* and *Dăruind vei dobândi: cuvinte de credință* have influenced generations of intellectuals, priests, and believers. The chapter highlights the manner in which the author N. Steinhardt has been received over time.

Chapter V. Interviews on the Personality and Work of Father Nicolae Steinhardt

This chapter comprises six original interviews conducted by the author of the present thesis with prominent personalities who knew N. Steinhardt personally: His Eminence Archbishop Andrei Andreicuț, His Grace Bishop Iustin Hodea of Sighet, Fr. Ioan Pinteă, Rev. Prof. Ștefan Iloaie, Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă, and Rev. Prof. Vasile Stanciu. These testimonies offer a vivid perspective, complementary to written sources, outlining a complex and authentic portrait of the monk and writer.

Conclusions

The present research demonstrates that Monk Nicolae Steinhardt occupies a singular and unmistakable place in the history of Romanian Orthodox homiletics. Through his sermons,

he created an atypical, highly original, and extremely effective model of preaching, which skillfully combines rigorous biblical exegesis with patristic apologetics, as well as with profound literary discourse and philological exemplification.

The thesis highlights the fact that the monk of Rohia did not merely preach *about* Christ, but made Him present through his word and, above all, through the example of his own life. The research also demonstrates the contemporary relevance and significance of the Steinhardtian model for the Church today. In an age marked by accelerated secularization, a crisis of trust in religious institutions, spiritual fragmentation, and a diffuse search for meaning, Steinhardt's preaching offers an authentic and compelling response: what is needed is a living, free, and deeply human confession — one that draws near to people and addresses modern man without diluting the evangelical message and without falling into the clichés of a religiously empty discourse.

In conclusion, Monk Nicolae Steinhardt remains a living model of a **preacher of the heart** — a man who knew how to unite cultural genius with monastic humility, assumed suffering with spiritual joy, and word with deed. Through his work, he continues to call us to authentic conversion and courageous confession