

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY "ISIDOR TODORAN"**

**JOY – A NATURAL EXPERIENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN**  
Doctoral Thesis  
Summary

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:**  
PR. PROF. DR. ȘTEFAN ILOAIE

**DOCTORAL CANDIDATE:**  
PR.GHEORGHE MOLDOVAN

CLUJ-NAPOCA  
2025

## **CONTENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- I. Motivation for Choosing the Research Topic
- II. Necessity, Purpose, and Limits of the Work
- III. Research Status and Bibliography
- IV. Research Methodology and Structure of the Work

### **PART ONE**

#### **UNDERSTANDING THE TOPIC**

- 1. TERMINOLOGICAL AND SEMANTIC DELIMITATIONS OF THE TERM "JOY" IN HOLY SCRIPTURE
  - 1.1. Introductory Notions
  - 1.2. Hebrew Terms for "Joy"
  - 1.3. Greek Terms for "Joy"
  - 1.4. Conclusions
- 2. THE MEANING OF THE CONCEPTS OF HAPPINESS AND JOY IN PHILOSOPHY
  - 2.1. Happiness in Greco-Roman Philosophy
  - 2.2. Joy
  - 2.3. Conclusions
- 3. THE MEANING OF THE CONCEPTS OF HAPPINESS AND JOY IN CHRISTIANITY
  - 3.1. Happiness
  - 3.2. Joy
  - 3.3. The Word "Joy" in the New Testament
  - 3.4. The Significance of the Terms "Happiness" and "Joy" in the Nine Beatitudes
  - 3.5. Conclusions

## **PART TWO**

### **MISUNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH TEACHINGS CAN CONSTITUTE OBSTACLES TO JOY**

#### **1. GOD'S PUNISHMENT IS ADMINISTERED ACCORDING TO LAW, JUSTICE, BUT MOST OF ALL OUT OF LOVE**

##### **1.1. God's Law**

##### **1.1.1. The Law Maintains Order in Creation**

##### **1.1.2. The Superiority of the New Law over the Old Law**

##### **1.2. God's Justice**

##### **1.3. God's Punishment**

##### **1.3.1. Punishment Comes as a Result of Sin**

##### **1.3.2. Punishment Seeks the Return of the Sinner or the Cessation of Lawlessness**

##### **1.3.3. Punishment as a Revelation of God**

##### **1.4. Love**

##### **1.5. Conclusions**

#### **2. JUDGING OTHERS BETWEEN SIN AND CHRISTIAN DUTY**

##### **2.1. It is a Sin to Judge One's Neighbor**

##### **2.2. Through "Do Not Judge, So That You Will Not Be Judged" the Savior Teaches Us Not to Judge with Malice**

##### **2.3. Calls to Reproof**

##### **2.4. The One Who Rebukes Must Not Be Full of Sins and Must Judge with Wisdom**

##### **2.5. Conclusions**

#### **3. JOY AND SADNESS**

##### **3.1. General Aspects**

##### **3.2. Harmful Sadness**

##### **3.2.1. Sadness is a Passion**

##### **3.2.2. Sadness is Harmful**

##### **3.2.3. Effects of Joy and Depression**

##### **3.2.4. Healing from Sadness**

##### **3.3. Good Sadness**

##### **3.3.1. Godly Mourning**

##### **3.3.2. Troubles Are Not Reasons for Sadness**

3.3.3. How to Use Mourning?

3.4. Conclusions

## **PART THREE**

### **ACQUIRING JOY**

#### **1. LOVE – SOURCE OF JOY**

1.1. Introductory Notions

1.2. God Created Man and Cares for Him out of Love and with Love

1.3. Love Leads Man to Perfection

1.4. Man Has the Power to Live or Reject Love and the Relationship of Love with God

1.5. Love Brings Joy into Man's Life

1.6. The Joy Born from Love Is a Source of Strength for Man

1.7. Christ, a Model of Liberation from Egoism That Hinders Joy and Love

1.8. Ways to Experience the Loving Presence of God

1.9. Conclusions

#### **2. PRAYER – SOURCE OF JOY**

2.1. Prayer Brings the Joy of Freedom

2.2. Prayer Illuminates the Mind

2.3. Prayer Addressed to the Virgin Mary and the Saints

2.4. Prayer Puts and Maintains Man in Relationship with God

2.5. Prayer Perfects Man and Sanctifies Those Around Him

2.6. Conclusions

#### **3. COURAGE, AN ESSENTIAL VIRTUE FOR PEOPLE IN GENERAL AND FOR CHRISTIANS IN PARTICULAR, IN THE CONCEPTION OF FATHER NICOLAE STEINHARDT**

3.1. Courage as an Essential Virtue for Any Person

3.1.1. Courage Is a Necessary Quality for a Person to Be Himself

3.1.2. Major Contributions to Steinhardt's Opinion on Courage

3.1.3. Steinhardt's Conception of Courage in Artists and People in General

3.2. Courage as an Essential Virtue for Any Christian

3.2.1. The Founder of the Church Offers Us the Supreme Example of Courage

3.2.2. Fear Is a Serious Sin

3.2.3. The Savior Teaches Us Not to Be Fearful but to Be Courageous

3.2.4. Courage Must Be an Essential Virtue in the Christian Life

3.2.5. Christ Appreciates and Rewards the Courageous

3.2.6. Conclusions

## **FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

I. Results Obtained

II. Original Contributions

III. New Research Directions

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

This doctoral thesis is structured into three parts. Each part contains three chapters, which are further divided into subchapters. Some subchapters also include sections. Each chapter concludes with its own set of conclusions. The three main parts are preceded by an Introduction and followed by the Final Conclusions, Bibliography, and Table of Contents.

The introduction highlights key aspects regarding the motivation behind choosing the topic, the necessity, purpose, and limitations of the work. The primary motivation for choosing this subject is to emphasize that joy is a natural experience for Christians. The necessity lies in the importance and natural place of joy in human life, especially in the life of a believer. The aim of the thesis is to understand the truth about joy, to explain why it is not perceived (at least by some) as a natural Christian experience, and finally, to identify ways to correct this misperception. The research is limited to demonstrating that joy is a natural Christian experience, identifying how a misunderstanding of certain Church teachings may become an obstacle to joy, and presenting important ways to attain joy in Christianity.

The introduction also outlines the current state of research and relevant bibliography, continuing with the research methodology and thesis structure. The current research is primarily theological in nature, with minimal philosophical references used for a clearer understanding of the terms "joy" and "happiness", as well as brief insights from fields such as medicine and psychology, which show that the presence or absence of joy affects a person's quality of life.

In the first part of the thesis, exegetical and analytical methods are mainly used. Their combination and alternation helped provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of the word "joy". Descriptive and analytical methods are then predominantly used to document, present, and correlate three of the Church's teachings and three essential virtues.

There are three main objectives pursued. The first is a clear understanding of the term "joy", which is why it was deemed relevant to also analyze how happiness and joy are perceived in philosophy. The second objective is to highlight how an incomplete or even incorrect understanding of Church doctrine can become a major obstacle to joy. The third objective is to show that living an authentic faith is not a restriction of freedom or a barrier to joy; on the contrary, it leads to the most complete form of joy.

The first part of the thesis, entitled “Understanding the Theme,” aims, through its three chapters, to achieve a correct understanding of the experience of joy. The first chapter, “Terminological and Semantic Delimitations of the Term Joy in Holy Scripture,” focuses on biblical passages where the term joy appears. It highlights reasons for joy, how it is expressed, its foundation in one’s relationship with God, its growth as one draws closer to Him, and how it persists despite life’s challenges, as it also relates to the hope of eternal life. The meanings of several key terms for joy in Scripture are explored, including four Hebrew and three Greek terms.

The second chapter, in order to clarify the theme, refers to the philosophical understanding of happiness and joy, given their significance in philosophy since the time of Socrates.

The third chapter, “The Meaning of Joy and Happiness in Christianity,” continues this conceptual analysis, focusing on how happiness and joy are understood in Christian thought. The first part addresses happiness, while the second focuses on joy in Christianity, also using resources from linguistics and literature. The third subchapter emphasizes the meaning joy gains in the New Testament with the coming of Christ. The fourth subchapter, referring to the Beatitudes, underlines the idea that, although we have yet to fully experience them, we are called to rejoice in anticipation—by contemplating or knowing what we are to receive.

The second part of the thesis, “Misunderstanding Church Teachings as an Obstacle to Joy,” analyzes three key teachings, focusing on the correct understanding of God’s punishment, judgment of others, and both joy and sorrow.

The first chapter, “God’s Punishment is Administered Through Law, Justice, and Love,” addresses each element of the title. It explains that law is necessary to maintain balance in creation, and that its violation has consequences. In the New Testament, this law is fulfilled by Christ’s commandment of love. God rewards and punishes according to one’s actions, aiming to keep the person on the right path. However, His justice is not applied vindictively, but with mercy. Punishment is shown to be a consequence of sin, intended to correct the sinner or stop wrongdoing. Only in rare, hopeless cases is it meant to destroy; otherwise, it aims to redirect the person.

The second chapter, “Judging Others—Between Sin and Christian Duty,” clarifies the commandment not to judge. Judging with malice is forbidden, but it is allowed—and even

necessary—if it comes from love and aims to correct the sinner or stop evil. Those who judge must do so with great care and love, always seeking God’s help.

The third chapter focuses on sorrow, showing that it did not exist from the beginning of creation, is widespread among people, and affects quality of life. Sorrow can be either harmful or beneficial. Harmful sorrow destabilizes life, but healing is possible. Beneficial sorrow can be of great help if it brings one closer to God.

The final part of the thesis, “Attaining Joy,” presents three main ways to live in joy. The first, addressed in Chapter One, is love. This virtue lies at the heart of human existence. Out of love, God created and sustains humanity; and it is love that leads to spiritual fulfillment. Humans are free to accept or reject a relationship with God; however, rejection deprives them of true joy. Love is essential in spiritual ascent, as the joy it brings becomes a source of strength. The final subchapters present ways to live in love. First, Christ is shown as “The Model Who Frees Us from the Egoism that Blocks Joy and Love,” followed by practical approaches to experiencing God’s loving presence.

The second chapter, “Prayer—A Source of Joy,” consists of five subchapters highlighting the benefits of prayer. It shows that prayer brings the joy of freedom, unites the person more deeply with God, liberates from passions, and enlightens the mind. Brief mention is made of the benefits of praying to the Mother of God and the saints, without detailed focus. The last subchapters emphasize that prayer both initiates and sustains a relationship with God, while also perfecting the individual and sanctifying everything around.

The final chapter presents “Courage: An Essential Virtue for People in General and Especially for Christians, According to Father Nicolae Steinhardt.” It has two parts. The first discusses courage as essential for self-realization, presenting Father Steinhardt’s major contributions to the concept and its significance in people’s and artists’ lives. The second part focuses on courage in the Christian life, stating that “The Founder of the Church is the supreme example of courage.” Fear is considered a serious sin, and Christ teaches us to be courageous. The chapter ends with an exhortation for every Christian to cultivate this virtue, as the courageous are praised and rewarded by Christ.

In the final conclusions, the key findings of the thesis are summarized: in Christianity, joy is not restricted; rather, it is the path to the fullest experience of life.



The main contribution of the thesis lies in reviving an approach that has existed in the Church since the beginning of Christianity but seems to be underused and little-known today: presenting and living the truths of faith as the pathway that brings the much-desired joy to every person. If one does not understand that joy comes from a relationship with God, they will seek it elsewhere—especially in pleasures—which brings the opposite of what they truly desire. Another important contribution is the emphasis on the danger of fragmented knowledge and the necessity of a correct understanding of Church teachings.

At the end of the conclusions, three new directions for future research are proposed, only briefly touched upon in this thesis: presenting practical teachings for attaining joy, liberation from passions as a condition for a joyful life, and the joy found in everything God provides.