

METAPHOR AND PORTRAIT – ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES IN N. STEINHARDT'S SERMONS

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Abstract

The religious discourse being particularly argumentative, the audience's persuasion will be made using certain strategies. Nicolae Steinhardt pleads for an updated, synchronized sermon, so his essays are extremely vivid and charming. The persuasive strategies of Steinhardt's sermon make his essay unique among others of the same kind. The appeal to intertextuality (with arguments of authority taken from literature and art in general), the pronounced dramatization of some texts, metaphor, portrait, paradox, scandal, antithesis, freedom - become just as many ways to attract and convince the audience. In our research we will analyze how the portrait of Christ becomes a persuasive strategy in the researched texts.

Keywords: *portrait, strategy, boiar, incarnation, cross*

Rezumat

Discursul religios fiind deosebit de argumentativ, persuasiunea publicului se va face folosind anumite strategii. Nicolae Steinhardt pledează pentru o predică actualizată, sincronizată, astfel încât eseurile sale sunt extrem de vii și fermecătoare. Strategiile persuasive ale predicii lui Steinhardt fac eseuul său unic printre altele de același fel. Apelul la intertextualitate (cu argumente de autoritate, preluate din literatură și artă în general), dramatizarea pronunțată a unor texte, metafora, portretul, paradoxul, scandalul, antiteza, libertatea devin, la el, modalități de a atrage și de a convinge publicul. În paginile următoare, vom analiza modul în care portretul lui Hristos devine o strategie persuasivă în textele cercetate.

Cuvinte-cheie: *portret, strategie, boier, incarnare, cruce*

N. Steinhardt is an author who fascinates both with his exceptional biographical journey and with his work, impressive in variety and, at the same time, in value. Known especially for the memoir prose "Happiness Diary", the author is close to the essay, being a distinct voice of postwar discourse.

"Giving You Shall Receive" (Steinhardt, 2000) is a volume of 52 speeches that goes beyond the spectrum of an ordinary Sunday sermon, goes beyond the pulpit and fits into the area of the theological essay. The certain literary vocation, supported by an almost extraordinary erudition and the amazing cultural openness make these texts unique, vivid and charming. Preached between 1980 and 1989 in the church of the Rohia monastery, N. Steinhardt's sermons emancipate themselves from the stereotypical language, the used patterns and the dull rhetoric specific to such a discourse, making an

unusual *aggiornamento* especially through cultural inter and trans-disciplinary trajectories. Thus, his essays become both masterpieces of homiletics and Romanian essays.

The monk from Delarohia has another way of "writing" the sermon, explicitly assumed in one of his essays. Obviously, the author pleads precisely against the stereotype, the sterile pattern, the frozen forms of the church language, against the "stylistic platitude", which, in no case, can be confused with orthodoxy: "Let us not be afraid to find original metaphors, to use a picturesque speech, that everybody understands, to replace the dull gray of so many gloomy sermons with the vividness of the strong hues" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 287). This is the recipe of his own sermons: the use of pure tones, distributed in large, sometimes violent spots. His speech is marked by the concept of *aggiornamento* - the policy of the (Catholic) Church to readjust traditional doctrine to the requirements of contemporary society. In order to be communication, with someone, in the true sense of the word, information shared with the other, in order to establish an authentic contact, the sermon is completely opposed to the language stereotypes; it must always be updated, synchronized with the reality of the times, free from "falling into monotony and boredom", and priests must be real guides, "useful teachers", and not "robots and clockwork oranges" (*idem*, p. 288).

Given these things, the persuasive strategies of Steinhardt's sermon make his essay unique among others of the same kind. The appeal to intertextuality (with arguments of authority taken from literature and art in general), the clearly expressed dramatization of some texts, metaphor, portrait, paradox, scandal, antithesis, freedom - become just as many ways to attract and convince the audience. By no means a one-sided rhetorical exercise, preaching is a theandric and synergistic act – communicating secretly with God as he speaks to believers, but simultaneously communicating with himself, to which is added the interaction with the biblical (Gordon, 2015, p. 24) text – the preacher aims to the salvation of himself and of the Christians.

In the following pages we will analyze how the portrait is constituted as a persuasive strategy in the researched texts. It is well known that the author read fabulously. From literature to cinema, through painting and music, no art form is foreign to him. It is easy for him to theorize about the author-character relationship, Steinhardt proving to be a master of the portrait (Morar, 2004, p. 174).

A good portraitist also has the qualities of a director. He must be familiar with the model, master the techniques and know all the rules of (photo) composition, and, in addition, be a good psychologist, who will notice the moods of the "model". The Delarohia Monk has all these qualities. His portraits stand out from photography, far beyond photographic technique. Steinhardt does not "nail" the character, but, on the contrary, we notice,

amazed, the fact that he gives him total freedom of movement. Thus, his portraits acquire cinematic features. Reading the words of faith of the confessor monk seems to unfold on the retina of the mind real portrait films. A true stage composer, the monk manages to capture and energetically express reality, managing to transpose both individual external qualities and emotional fluctuations. Thus, we become spectators of real portrait films that go beyond the discursive type as a process limited to literature, and that use, syncretically, all the other arts: word, image, music (Fotescu, 2016).

The researched sermons create particularly vibrant portraits - of Jesus Christ, of the Christian, of the various saints mentioned in the Gospels. Also, by using the thick ink and the antithesis, we also have the antimodel examples, as if there is a column with "not so"!

The image of Jesus Christ is highlighted throughout the volume. The movie-portrait that has Him as the protagonist unfolds during the texts, outlining, with firm features, a true character. The scandal - this is a defining notion in the Christ portrait in the Steinhardtian vision. He himself is a paradoxical spirit, with a life begun under the sign of Judaism and ended under that of Orthodoxy, with a dramatic experience of imprisonment seen in the end as a happiness, with an exceptional monastic existence, the author shows an obvious appetite for scandal. Absurdity, paradox, become key concepts in receiving the divine message. Or, the greatest scandal of the Gospels can be none other, in the author's opinion, than the very act of the incarnation of God. Epiphany becomes a case of communication theory. In order to enter into communication with His creatures, God found it proper to become an Infant, to be born of a woman, and then to ascend to the cross and die as a last sinner. God does not work with half measures, distant; he did not choose mathematical formulas or other means. On the contrary, he chose a seemingly absurd option: he became a man. Thus, the human condition is experienced from within, to the end. Monk Delarohia attributes thoughts, attitudes and remarks. Negation highlights the opposite effect. Love is the mystery of the Christian epiphany: "I do not approach man, I do not listen to him with attention, with solicitude, I do not resemble him, I do not take the appearance of man, but I become man. I'm becoming a slave too. I'm also in chains" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 159).

In fact, going concentrically from the individual to the general, the whole life of the Savior turns out to be "a huge scandal" (*idem*, p. 172) that astonishes. Again, we have the feeling that the monk is a true stage composer. It seems as if in front of the camera there are fragments of Christ's earthly life: the birth "in an insignificant and defeated country", in an ordinary family, one of the simplest; the fact that he spends his time among people of all kinds (fishermen, small servants, pagans, demonized, debauched etc.); the continual claim to the quality of the Son of God; the story of some shocking

parables - of the workers in the vineyard; the crucifixion and the Eucharist; violation of the law; the fact that he admits of being "a man who eats and drinks wine"; indifference to worldly things etc. Thus, scandalization becomes, for Steinhardt, a fundamental principle of Christianity. Christ is portrayed in a powerful lighting configuration. Christ wanted to cause real scandals "not for perdition, but for building" (*idem*, p. 178). And the scandal is for the Christian a guide on the right path. Christ "came to scare us, to trouble us, to bring us out of worry, out of easy certainties [...]. To wake us up, [...], to take us out of our mates [...], to snatch us from the small things [...]. To wake us up, to shake us, to joggle us, to toss us, to subject us to a series of shocks" (*idem*, p. 177).

Jesus Christ is constantly defined throughout the volume metaphorically, as noble, boyar, knight, aristocrat, and the arguments brought in support are particularly tonic. N. Steinhardt proposes Christ as an existential model, and paradox as a Christian law.

Metaphor is essential for rhetoric and argumentation. A fundamental topos to knowledge and consubstantial to language (Rovența-Frumușani, 2000, p. 117), it becomes a persuasive strategy through finality. Far from being a rhetorical ornament, it functions as a means of education, being used in religious discourse for didactic purposes, in order to create images (Guia, 2014, p. 104). The image thus becomes an important tool of knowledge in this type of writing, because, through its power of representation, the relationship between the phenomenal world and the essential, unseen world is made possible. The metaphor explains, makes the information accessible, being a main tool for understanding and, at the same time, for catching the audience. So imagination plays a key role in decoding the depth meanings. Jesus is often defined, as a boyar, which evokes in our minds both a certain face and, above all, a certain moral portrait. The latter has the author in mind when he creates this plastic image of divinity. The need for clarity and precision sometimes required by the explanatory nature of the sermon makes Steinhardt repeatedly resort to the appearance of the Lord as an aristocrat.

Thus, in the essay "A Drop of Blood", the Delarohia monk starts from the words that Blaise Pascal says that Christ said to him on a night of mystical ecstasy - namely, that from His shed blood on the cross, a drop was shed for him. Along with Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, who also comments on this situation, Steinhardt is of the opinion that in no case could Pascal have heard well, because Christ would not be parsimonious: "When He gives, He gives like a boyar, like an emperor; to the one worthy of his mercy and love, he does not throw a tip, a string, a well-considered penny, with his trembling fingers out of his bag; he gives staggered and crammed, thickened and softened, disproportionately, to those of the eleventh hour as to those of the first hour, grace upon grace, he does not reward

thoughtfully and calculatedly, at least, but enthusiastically and exalted, with the lust for a royal dinner or with Holy Trinity in the house of mercy" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 180)!

We note the frequent use of the enumeration, included in the previous quote. This is a very common rhetorical figure because it serves as a semantic intensifier, it becomes a source of emphasis and sometimes even redundancy, but with a precise purpose: convincing the audience. In the description above we are dealing with a wide, cumulative enumeration, which seems to put Jesus in the spotlight; the divine portrait, humanized by metaphor, is made mainly by the verb, which gives a rhythm and dynamism that go far beyond the word-based discourse and creates the sensation of a moving portrait, of a cinematic portrait. The statements are simply juxtaposed, the copulative conjunction is missing, resulting in a very lively rhythm, full of strength, as if the images burst on a screen of the mind. Moreover, the enumeration in question is an antonymic one. The antithesis structures the discourse and has argumentative and pragmatic value, ensuring the moralizing didactic aspect of the religious discourse, revealing extremely plastic and expressive constructions. So, in addition to the image of the boyar, the opposite, that of the chalice, is outlined at the same time. In fact, throughout the volume, the generosity, the nobility of the Lord are contrasted with the image of ... the accountant, another metaphor that fulfills its role - to bring information closer to the parishioner: "Accounting, the other name of demonism, the favourite weapon and steadfast enemy" (*idem*, p. 35)! Or, elsewhere, relying on the same rhetorical figure: "Mercy is the opposite of accounting, which is the business of the devil. He always counts, counts, saves, does not forgive, does not erase, does not forget anything. Merciful Christ - with one word and suddenly cancels the sins of your whole life [...]. Accounting, the true calculating machine, is mechanical, unyielding, frightening: since not a single digit can be changed in an accounting register: everything is frozen forever, its opposite pity, it is always ready to forgive, to absolve, to overlook" (*idem*, p. 200). So, in the universe of Steinhardtian writing, the image of the aristocrat is contrasted with that of the accountant - the first is embodied by Jesus Christ, the second by Satan.

The sermon "The Lord's Goodness" is a fully portrait, a characterization of Christ. In the beginning he briefly expounds the evangelical pericope of the prodigal son, then the essay is a commentary on the features of the Son of God starting from this, based on the antiphorus: "What results from this" (*idem*, p. 184)? The first property of the Lord is enunciated in a synonymous enumeration - "His gentility, His nobility, his appearance as a knight, gentleman (say the English), *gentilom* (say the French) and great aristocrat (in the etymological sense), noble (in the spiritual sense). How else than these of the superior, generous and knightly man, as of the boyar (with heart and mind)

can these certain, striking attributes of Jesus Christ be considered" (*idem*, p. 184)? Coordinated by juxtaposition, the accumulated synonymous nouns amplify the created image; they also involve a special emotional involvement of both the sender and the receiver (*idem*, p. 94). The portrait is by no means a sketch! It is a realistic one, dressed in significant and nuanced details, it is a portrait that captures the person's mood swings, emotions, tensions and disorders.

Another very expressive metaphor, which has a special role in shaping the Christ portrait, is the commensuality. Starting from the concrete and worldly aspect, the Delarohia monk notices that it seems, in the Gospels, that Jesus Christ was always looking to dine with someone. There is always a reason for a feast in the Gospel: "Meals and feasts, references to food and drink, at dinner and weddings they are so common in the Gospels that, without fear of blasphemy, we are entitled to say that they do not miss an opportunity to feast and that the old saying 'lay the table, clear the table' is not - in its non-profane sense - unsuitable to characterize the worldly-community face of the conduct of the Lord and His disciples in relation to their fellows and their need for commendation and human warmth" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 216). On the other hand, he always proves to be careful with this seemingly materialistic aspect, He takes care that the others eat, He multiplies the amount of fish and bread, He makes the nets thrown into the sea contain a large crowd of fish, He does not consider it a sin that his apostles plucked the ears of wheat on the Sabbath, or that they ate the bread from the altar. The first miracle of the Lord is the multiplication of the wine quantity, being invited at a wedding at Cana of Galilee. What the Delarohia monk wants to prove is that Christ is a Lord of feasts, of abundance, and of good manners – an aristocratic trait, of course. A descriptive enumeration in roughly synonymous terms brings to mind the Christ's conception of life: "to the one who has it is given, to those who bring ten talents instead of the intrusted five gains are given, the good servant is warmed and ruled by the good master, the one who is good not with crumbs or tips will be rewarded, but with an invitation at the royal dinner" (*idem*, p. 215)! Developing the same image of the aristocrat and based on antiphrasis and metaphor, the erudite monk directly characterizes the Son of God: "Oh, no! But to the one who opened the door for him, he said, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him and he with me' " (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 186). So, the one who loves him and obeys his commandments will make him a commissar of the Holy Trinity, the repetition removing any trace of condescension. This commensuality presupposes the idea of fellowship, intimacy and, paradoxically, noble equality. Dinner becomes a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven, often resembling a great supper.

Immediately after this portrait that accentuates this side of the joy and fullness of the Lord, follows, as it were, the column "not so". Marked by antithesis, the enumeration describes, in the same synonymous register, how the Lord is not and how the Christian should not be. Plastically and expressively, through syntactic and compositional symmetry, the antimodel is also presented to us, the negation being this time the core of the communication: "No, of course not, the Lord does not love and preach the wilderness, the wilde, the tundra, the thorns, the prickles, the weeds, the serpent, the stone, the scorpion, the dry land; but grapes, figs, bread, egg, fish, honey, old and good wine" (*idem*, p. 215). Furthermore, Christianity itself is "quite different from a kind of gloomy and sulky Puritanism, amateurish and glorifying of want, poverty, scarcity, intransigence and acidity, extinguished hearths and harsh faces" and the opposite, drawn in thick, expressive ink: "The Lord blesses the multiplication of fruits, the abundance of wine, the joy of his creatures" (*ibidem*)! We notice the presence of rhetorical figures that have an effect on rhythm - alliteration, anadiplosis, paronomase. We always notice a certain rhythmicity in Steinhardt's discursive construction, this being substantial to the individual manifestation in the space of orality, thus constituting into a persuasive strategy.

Commensuality and communion are a fundamental law in the spiritual community of Christians. At a higher level, Christ himself gives himself up for consumption in the sacrament of Holy Communion, not in the ideal and abstract way, but concretely, materially. The supreme mystery of Christianity is established by the Son of God at a supper, consisting of food (bread and wine). Christ gives Himself to be eaten and drunk in order to give the right to enter the royal, heavenly supper.

The spiritual portrait of the "boyar" Christ is always configured and completed as we read the volume of sermons "Giving You Shall Receive". With a force of the word that has its origin in the love of the monk (of God and of people), the Lord is better and better portrayed. An entire arsenal of rhetorical techniques is put into this service. The arguments are always valid. Christ is "a generous nobleman, discreet, modest, courageous, elegant, dignified, spontaneous and generous" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 188), "a great and fearless strategist, [...] a good and unfailing physician. [...], a man of common sense" (*idem*, p. 192), gentle, calm, polite, kind. All the senior attributes are transferred to Christ through a convincing and firm discourse. Christ restores man, restores him to the old distinction of aristocrat (in the etymological sense) by his own chivalrous example. This "magic" - "the restoration of man to the former paradisiacal state, by the noblest of beings" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 189) makes the author invoke Cervantes' wandering knight. The transfiguration of reality, the ennobling by the will of spiritual beauty are specific to Don Quixote - nicknamed by the Spaniards "El nuestro Senor Do Quijote,

El Cristo Espanol" - who sees the peasants and merchants of the pub as true seniors gathered in the great hall of their castle (*ibidem*). Moreover, any compassionate, according to Steinhardt (so also Jesus) is, to a certain extent, a Don Quixote, arousing laughter and astonishment. Cervantes' character embodies the naive, pure and lofty part of the human soul. The idealist is a fighter eager to change the world, along with dostoevskyan Prince Mishkin.

But one of the most admired qualities of Christ is courage, the courage with which He ascended the cross: "For Christ, who willingly ascends the cross, is first and foremost a brave man" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 187). Christ, the second hypostasis of the Trinity, life from the life of the Father, is the Savior of man, the Messenger of the Father for the restoration of human nature (Morar, 2004, p. 216). First, the incarnation of the sure Son is a measure of God's love for his creation. Jesus, belonging to the metaphysical sphere, does not remain an unseen and unknowable reality, like the principle - incommunicable, detached, cold (in the ancients). On the contrary, He incarnates and enters the order of the created world, thus minimizing the distance between the signifier and the signified (*idem*, p. 217) - causing a real scandal. The learned scholar was deeply moved by the depth of the incarnation act. Crucifixion, death, and resurrection are the end of the divine life on earth. Christic theandry, this simultaneity of the two natures, leaves the place of the pure human in the act of crucifixion. Steinhardt was fascinated by the authenticity with which the Lord assumed his human destiny. The human condition has lived and experienced it to the end. The integrity and seriousness of the incarnation are proved by His human despair. Human nature is evident in the act of crucifixion. The naturalistic realism of the crucifixion is captured by the preacher in a masterful cinematic description: "Christ is on the cross, naked; on his head, a crown of thorns; nails piercing his ankles and wrists, clinch him to the wood; the body is full of blood, bruises, secretes only sweat and the dull moan of enslaved flesh. He was slapped, spit on, pushed, beaten, mocked, climbed to ordeal, and once fell under the burden of the tool of torment. Now he awaits agony and shameful, slow, atrocious death, under the double sign of mockery and curse. He is surrounded, on the stinking square on the outskirts of the city, by only hostile people and a certain number of indifferent curious people, accustomed to capital executions and public cruelty. To his right and left were two other crosses, each with its prey, two robbers, two murderers – two common law criminals, to make it even more stinging. It's noon, the sun is burning, the thirst - the essence of this mode of destruction - has begun to fade and everything is nothing but naughtiness, defeat, despair, pain, exhaustion" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 58).

Death-show seems to be screened. Delarohia Monk is a master of editing. The focus is on Jesus Christ, so that later the perspective can grow. The camera is tilted back to capture an ampler space. The movement is in slow mo-

tion, so that every significant detail is captured with the eye. The death on the cross of the divinity is not all cosmeticised. Most likely, N. Steinhardt would have appreciated the film "The Passion of Christ" directed by Mel Gibson. Crucifixion is only pain, suffering, body secretions and ordeal. The deictic "now" brings the scene of Jesus' sacrifice in the present of the audience. It relies on the senses: sight, hearing, smell. The death of the Son of Man is entirely human. In contrast, for example, with that of the philosopher Socrates. The cross on which Jesus dies involves prolonged agony, dehydration, and exposure of the naked body. Crucifixion was also a shameful form of execution, usually for thieves and slaves. The veracity of the torment is beyond any discussion: "vertical and exasperated - the human condition" (*idem*, p. 272). He, God, dies as the last man. Socrates' death is on the opposite side, antagonistic. The antithesis is, again, the one that clearly demarcates the two situations: "Christ dies as an iniquitous and wicked man, Socrates as a demigod. Christ-God dies as a man, as the last of men. Socrates is a senior and a transcendental being. The death of Christ is Kafkaesque and belongs to the black literature; of Socrates [...] as if it were taken from the Lives of the Saints" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 92). And yet, according to Steinhardt, "Christ is truly human, his human tragedy is ridiculous, filthy, heartbreaking" (*idem*, p. 94). The crucifixion is real. There were no symbols or allegories on the cross, the crucifixion was not a play directed by God. Christ did not cease to be God in spite of torment. But the converse is also perfectly valid: although God, human tortures were real. So real that everything seemed like an end to everyone. The crucifixion, death and defeat of Jesus seemed final and irreversible.

The reality of the resurrection and the doubt of the apostles are two dimensions on which the author insists in his essays. Not only did the apostle Thomas not believe in the possibility of resurrection, as it appears in the Gospel of St. John, but so did the others. All the apostles were skeptical of the resurrection of their Master. And, says the learned monk, "they did not believe because it was unbelievable" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 96)! So real was the sacrifice. Moreover, Steinhardt considers the crucial proof of the freedom left to man in faith to be Christ's refusal to descend from the cross: "The descent from the cross would have been an act of authority, of coercion, of violation of will and freedom" (*idem*, p. 126). Freedom of the spirit is manifested by the possibility left to the person to believe what is "unbelievable", in what contradicts the evidence (Ciobotaru, 2016, p. 84). Christ gave man the freedom to believe and did not compel him to convert. In the sermon "The Verb to Believe" the author makes, nuanced, the distinction between verbs *to state* and *to believe*. The latter is not part of the synonymous series of *prove*, *demonstrate*. On the contrary, its meaning is justified precisely by the lack of evidence and proof. Paradoxically, "believing means not seeing" (Steinhardt, 2000, p. 125).

To believe because it must actually be replaced with *to believe despite of* the fact. And this is due to the “work style” of the Lord, the respect for man and the total freedom with which he invested his creation: "Lord, what does he ask of us? Let us believe, an absurd, illogical, causal and inexplicable act in concrete language, folly and madness [...]. Sons of freedom, not of slavery, we are treated with deference: nothing is imposed on us, we are not constrained by absolute events" (*idem*, p. 127).

Concluding, in the researched volume, Jesus Christ is outlined in a particularly vivid and energetic way. The portrait is cinematic, filmic, always on the move, with details that create authenticity and highlight aspects that amaze. Everything in the Christ's portrait is movement, light, shape, color, space, time. An extremely dynamic and attractive portrait, proposed as a model for those who listen or read.

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