

The Church of Christ in the New Testament. Its Nature, Ministry and Mission

Conf. Univ. Dr. Ciprian-Flavius Terinte
Institutul Teologic Penticostal din București

HABILITATION THESIS

Abstract

The habilitation thesis entitled **“The Church of Christ in the New Testament. Its Nature, Ministry and Mission”** has been elaborated as part of requirement for the process of habilitation in the field of theology and is done in conformity to the Romanian law of higher education and the subsequent academic regulations. As such it presents: 1) the academic, scientific and professional achievements of the author following his doctoral studies as they bring forward the evolution and main directions of development in his research in the international and global context of research in the author’s field of specialization; 2) plans for development of the author’s professional, scientific and academic career; 3) the main bibliographical references used in the writing of the present thesis.

In my doctoral thesis, *Saint Paul’s Idea of Church according to His Ecclesiological Metaphors*, I investigated Saint Paul’s ecclesiological mind concerning primarily not the beliefs and the organization of the early church, but the nature of the Church. Being known that biblical writers have expressed spiritual notions especially by means of metaphorical language, I attempted to emphasize Saint Paul’s ecclesiology by analyzing his ecclesiological images and argued that in his perspective the Church is the community of those justified and sanctified in Christ, which participates in the life of the Holy Trinity through the Holy Spirit. The Church is thus continually transfigured in Christ in order to spread around the new life of God’s Kingdom, fulfilling in this way the divine plan – the restoration of all Creation. The Church is the nucleus of God’s New Creation which will be established at the second coming of the Son of God.

Following my doctoral work, I continued to explore various aspects of the life of the Church, such as the nature of the Church according to non-pauline writings of the New Testament, church leadership in the New Testament, Christian ministry in the New Testament and the mission of the Church in post-Communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe. As a biblical scholar I have engaged mostly with the biblical, and more narrowly New Testament, contributions for the life of the Church and its mission in the public arena. The various avenues of inquiry and research converge towards discovering a larger biblical foundation for contoured a clear vision for the Church today and for creating an effective Church leadership and ministry – anchored in the teachings of the New Testament and relevant in a post-Communist Christian Eastern-European community.

This habilitation thesis brings together all these various facets of research on the nature, leadership and mission of the Church and presents them as coherent, biblical contributions to

the theological reflection in the Eastern-European context. The thesis itself is structured in three main chapters. The first, larger chapter, ***“Old Testament Roots of the doctrine of the Church”***, establishes the Old Testament basis for understanding the New Testament teachings on the nature of the Church. The creation of the world is not only a work of God’s omnipotence. It is also a self-revelation of God who is Love. The Bible does not begin with the election of the people of God, but with the creation of the world. By falling into sin, instead of governing nature as God’s coregent, man himself became the slave of nature and a prisoner to its necessity. And he will be slave until the new Adam returns to humankind the kingship that it has lost and the natural world becomes a new heaven and a new earth.

Despite the meandering of its ways, we recognize that our salvation was being built in the sacred history of the Jewish nation, in its historical destiny. Genesis 12 marks a new beginning in the Bible. It suddenly ceases to focus on humanity as a whole and commences the history of Abraham – a man who relies entirely on God’s promise – and his descendants. God elected Abraham’s descendants to continue His plan in history. Israel’s being chosen is not a privilege or a preference over others, but existence for others – the heaviest burden in history. But the chosen people failed repeatedly in carrying out their noble mission of spreading the knowledge of God among nations. Time after time idols were erected in the land. Israel rejected the prophets who ceaselessly sought to prevent them from idolatry and rebellion against God. The people of God are not prepared to regard its history as something directed by God and leading to salvation. They do not trust God. In such conditions God announces through his prophets the establishment of a new covenant, by means of which he will renew his people by changing their heart and transforming their life.

The second chapter, ***“The nature of the Church according to the New Testament”***, brings to light the author’s contributions concerning the study of the New Testament metaphors for the Church and their theological implications for the crystallization of a sound and relevant ecclesiology. In his books and academic articles, the author analyzed biblical images like “sons of God”, “the heavenly Jerusalem”, “God’s people”, “God’s Temple”, “the body of Christ”, “sons of light”, “the unleavened bread”, “a letter from Christ”, “Gods’ field”, “the bride of Christ”, “one new man” “fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household”, “a dwelling in which God lives”, “light in the Lord and children of light”, “Christ’s soldiers”, “God's household”, “the pillar and foundation of the truth”, “a royal priesthood”, “living stones”, “a spiritual house” and many others. Most of these metaphors are meant to emphasize the idea of God’s dwelling in his church through the Holy Spirit. This makes the Church a community in which and through which God is manifesting his renewing power.

The third chapter of this thesis, ***“Church leadership in the New Testament”***, investigates not so much leaderships paradigms that one can find in the Early Church but rather the theological mentalities that generated those paradigms. The essence of leadership in the early Church was the ministry of the word of God. Whether we are talking about lists of ministers in earlier epistles — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers — or about the more clearly outlined offices in pastoral epistles — elders / bishops and deacons (and deaconesses) — it becomes clear that all the bearers of these titles are required to be servants of the Word: preaching, teaching, counseling, and even rebuking people.

The second chapter, ***“The mission of the Church according to the New Testament”***, contains a synthesis of the author’s contributions concerning some God-given tasks of the Church, such as interpreting God’s Word, proclaiming the Gospel, promoting the values of God’s Kingdom in the contemporary society and bearing witness for the kingdom of God in its relationship with the secular authority.

The last section of the thesis, ***“Scientific, Professional and Academic Career – Plans for Development”***, points to the author’s plans for the development of a responsible, contextual interpretation of the Bible in Eastern Europe. Thus, this part elaborates in greater detail three specific research projects in which the author participates, namely *The Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary Project*, *The Biblical Doctrines of the Romanian Pentecostal Church*, and *The Romanian Exegetical Commentary on the Bible Series*.