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**FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

**ABSTRACT**  
**PHD THESIS**

**THE CHRISTOLOGY OF SAINT APOSTLE PAUL'S EPISTLES**

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# Summary

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Many have and are still writing about the Holy Apostle Paul. No matter how many other studies will still be written, we owe so much to this titan of the Gospel, so that on one side, we feel obliged to continuously return to his apostolic message, and on the other side, we keep discovering new valences and new sources of inspiration in the work of the great apostle, so that his work remains, without doubt, inexhaustible. No matter how we try to think theology nowadays, we cannot do so without relating it to the person who proves himself to be a true wellspring of theological wisdom.

From the very beginning we have to mention that the choice of this PhD topic was motivated by its actuality and importance for the Church life, but also for the contemporary society. The Christological issue along with the Antropological one represent the center of interest for the theologians of our days, but also for the philosophers who study the theological and philosophical thinking of Apostle Paul. Because Christology is one of the fundamental basic chapters in Orthodox Dogmatics, its study could not have been centered nowhere else except its Pauline side.

By choosing this topic, we wanted to discover the Christological teachings through Apostle Paul's eyes, thus seeing like him, feeling together with him, thinking alike in order to help others discover his Christological genius and clairvoyance. The important fact is that in order to fully understand his thinking, we have to center our attention towards his personal, theological and philosophical becoming. There has never been and maybe there will never be another Paul, who could offer Christianity the magnificent view of a man with vocation totally dedicated to Christian conversion and spiritual education.

Huge personality, full of potencies and virtues, this Pharisee transformed himself from persecutor to apostle, whose spiritual powers were tenfolded and sublimated in the service of Christ, Paul is no longer himself, a weak and sinful man, a lonely man, disarmed before a whole world. The Apostle of the Gentiles is a true carrier of Christ; more than that, he is a man that lives through Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2,20)<sup>1</sup>. The merits of the holy apostle, as an apostle, are exceptional, likewise his vocation and his personality. He delivered Christianity from the Law of the Old Testament, which was being kept by the judaizing current, he understood and best expressed its character of a new, independent, sovereign, redeeming religion through Christ's sacrifice. The holy apostle Paul gave this religion a theological frame, in which the Christian faith could evolve. Being the first theologian, and a great philosophical and Christian thinker,

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<sup>1</sup> Pr. Cristian Bolos si Diac. Gabriel Gorgan, Dictionar teologic-ortodox, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p.112.

Paul put at the base of the dictatorial edifice of christianity a cornerstone and which is Christ himself, fact explained by him in the speech of his true faith.<sup>2</sup>

The slavery of the sin began when Adam sinned and did not repent, distancing himself more and more from God. Through this sin man also decreased in his powers, so that being slave of the sin, of death, the Devil, he could redeem himself neither through his own powers, nor by an unwritten natural law (planted in his human heart), nor by the laws of Moses, but only by Messiah-Christ.<sup>3</sup>

So, the doctrinal development of the Christology becomes remarkable since the apostolic era. The center of the doctrinal concentration is within the Messiahship and divinity of our Savior, confessed by Himself, and by the Holy Apostles. The confession of our Lord Jesus Christ culminates before the great priest Caiaphas, who asked: <<„I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” “You have said so,” Jesus replied. >> (Matthew 26,63-64)

This divine messianic fact is organically bound to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and is certified throughout his entire activity. Jesus Christ, before the great priest, confesses with his own mouth what the holy Apostles, the disciples and his followers thought about him.<sup>4</sup> Through Him come to reality all the prophecies of the Old Testament, and for three and a half years the witnesses of his activity had enough time to clarify themselves about His person, so that when Jesus asked: “Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16, 15-16)

The Holy Gospels contain many other opportunities of expression of the faith in the messiahship and divinity of our Savior, but the two above-mentioned examples synthesize the general atmosphere that was created around the person of Jesus Christ during his lifetime. After his Ascension, the christological concerns are predominant in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Epistles and in the Apocalypse.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Saint Apostle Paul brings precious testimonies about the Son, “who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power” (Romans 1,3-4), about Jesus Christ, as being „in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2,6-7); „For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

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<sup>2</sup> Pr. Grigorie Marcu, *Originea si originalitatea teologiei pauline*, in “R.T.”, year XXX, 1940, nb. 11-12, pg. 800.

<sup>3</sup> Pr. Ioan Mircea, *Rascumpararea in Noul Testament dupa invatatura Sf. Parinti*, in “S.T.”, nr. 1-2, 1972, p.31

<sup>4</sup> C.Chiricescu, *Sf.Ap.Pavel dupa Sf. Scriptura*, in “B.O.R.”, nr.8, 1996, p.85.

<sup>5</sup> I.Mihalcescu, *Comparatie intre invatatura Mantuitorului si cea Sf.Ap.Pavel*, in “B.O.R.”, nr. 8, 1955, p.96

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him".( Colssians 1, 13-19). Saint Apostle Paul, for his period, can be regarded as pioneer of Christianity, and about his christological teachings we can say that it reaches its culmination, or its maximum point of evolution in his Epistle towards the Philipians, where we also meet the text that brought so many questions and controversies along time, more exactly the kenotic text, about the humility of our Savior, who took human form: „taking the very nature of a servant"( Philipians 2,7).

The Pauline Christology becomes more important for its subsequent development, because it also includes other truths of faith, which will become part of the Symbols of Faith and will be the foundations of other dogmas, of which, we first remember stoeriology, and then ecclisiology. Christology becomes in this way the doctrinal center of Christianity since apostolic times, so that the christocentrism is implicit and organic for the new religion since its birth and remains the same through patristic age.<sup>6</sup>

It's an indubitable fact that the Apostle can be considered the one who, based on the reunion in a proper form, profoundly original of the tradition and the primitive hebrew revelation with the economy of salvation initiated by Christ, elaborated a first theory of salvation, the pauline steoriology being the creator of a mystic of perfection in which the risen and full of glory Savior is the central point, the key element.<sup>7</sup>

Based on this christological pauline foundation, the present thesis carries out its entire exposure. Starting from the imperious need to highlight as much as possible Saint Apostle Paul's contribution in the systematization and organization of the christian evangelical call , the current topic is structured in three parts, based on an evolution and an internal argumentation of each message.

Therefore, in the first part is being highlighted the personality of the greatest theoretician of Christianity, who succeeded to offer a role model of Christ's follower through an authentical way of living:"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"( Galatians 2,20). The real union with Christ means to think with the mind of Christ and to feel the same feelings, and that is why Paul was blessed with a profound inspiration of theology and anthropology, which cannot be understood except in the christological manner.

In the first chapter of this part we shall rebuild the portrait of this immense apostle. We shall concentrate our attention upon him, but also upon the political and philosophical context of his time.It is also highlighted the huge role that the jewish theological preparation

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<sup>6</sup> Pr. Grigorie Marcu, *"Omul cel nou in conceptia antropologica a Sf. Ap. Pavel"*, in "S.T.", nr. 7-8, 1951, p. 103

<sup>7</sup> Idem, *"Indreptarea si indumnezeirea omului in Hristos dupa Sf.Ap. Pavel"*, in "O", an XL, 1988, nr.4, p.99

and the continuous interest towards the sciences of the ancient world played in the perfection of his huge personality, which we discover by inspecting the reconstructed portrait of the great apostle. In the chapter dedicated to the speech held in Areopagus we find one of the most beautiful pages of the Holy Gospel and maybe one of the most interesting of the entire universal literature. Questions and unbelief disappear in front of a speech of such intelligence, clarity and why not, farsightedness. Afterwards in chapter 3, Jesus Christ „the new Adam” - a christological pauline perspective -, it is highlighted the two poles of the history of salvation starting from Adam the old, the ancestor of mankind enslaved by the ancestral sin, and reaching to the new Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

In the second part of the present thesis we shall focus upon the preoccupation of the Holy Apostle Paul for the central role that Christ plays in economy of salvation. It is also highlighted the importance of the Church, of its constitution and also its role and its redeeming character. The Holy Apostle uses this word, Church, for 60 times in his epistles. We shall also discuss about the perfect and indissoluble unity of Christ with mankind in the Church. Otherwise, the whole work of salvation happened so that we, through living faith and true love, could assume the fruitage of His sacrifice and become sons through the Son.

The third part of the present theological study concentrates itself upon the importance of receiving Christ's redemption through the Holy Spirit in the Church, through the holy sacraments. If Christ would have realised only the objective salvation, man could not have reached communion with the Father as son, because only recapitulated and gathered in the Son can we reach the Father. In this context Christ's central place is highlighted through soteriology, because salvation in Saint Apostle Paul's conception means assumption of Christ, unity with Him, so that we shall no longer live, but Christ shall live through us. This is the key to salvation and eternal life, to live the life of Christ and to follow the same path that Christ took for our redemption.



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