

“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA
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THESIS SUMMARY

*THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST
THE SAVIOR -
BASIS FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE*

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The technologized and consumer society configures the religiousness in new reference parameters. From the public field, the religion is extracted for the private field, even some contemporary thinkers and philosophers – like Jacques Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, John D. Caputo etc. – suggesting this optics change in an imperative way. It is more than obvious the fact that today's man is confused by the tragic religious identity crisis. The moral relativism, nihilistic and atheist paradigms, religious pluralism are realities that define the daily social order. Are proposed new alternatives, religious surrogate, pseudo-religiosity amid atheism, fed especially by the spectacular and mysticism of the eastern religions.

In this connection, the Christian identity must be reaffirmed in the spirit of the patristic theological speech, specific to the Orthodox Church; it must be revalued the background of the tradition specifying the continuity of the religious and teaching life with the early Church. But before all, the Christic teaching must be contextualized in the age of reinterpretation, deconstruction, reinvention, and communicated to the contemporary man in his authentic value which it represents for the Eastern Christianity.

The thesis will highlight the providential importance of the Christic teaching in the postmodernist society, through keeping the consciousness and affirmation of the Christian traditional identity. There will be shortly presented the dominant features of the postmodernism that imposes the comeback of the religion in the secularized society, the tragic consequences that this “postmodernist” current generates regarding the presence, statute and efficiency of the Christianity in the contemporary society, announcing a “*postmodernist Christianity*”, capable to answer the structure and today's social tendencies. Also, it will be made an evaluation of the optics change that some directions of postmodernism – deconstruction, exploitation of the Nietzsche proclamation of “God's death”, “end of metaphysics” demonstrated by Heidegger in the Western philosophy plan, “weak thinking” of Gianni Vattimo – operates them at the level of the Christian theological speech, through the devaluation of the dogmatic affirmations and, last but not least, it will be presented the future of the Christian religion in the postmodernist condition. But after all these, it will be specified the significance and essence of Christ's teaching regarding the life of the Christian. A man thought without reporting to God, without assuming the Evangelical norms is a man absent of a religious meaning.

In the dynamics of development of science, technology and industrialization, of economy and commerce, the humanist education was transformed in a way of learning and cultivation of the abilities and performance techniques, limited and centered exclusively on the social confort exploitation. The consumer society's motto is the following: “you live well, if you have a big salary”. Practically, according to the wage level, today's man finds his social and psychological stability. Today's society became a theatre of competition, of the competition to live at an optimal level for the social comfort. The horizon of humanity is shut by these social-economic references, and knowing became the instrument, the technique of learning new more stable methods for the life in society. The reference at the perennial values of the human, as a person, as a conscious being and responsible of his its existence, is today an element that belongs to the shelf of the library. In these conditions, the learning process and reception risks to become

exclusively a mechanical technique of adjusting the man at an optimal level of psycho-social comfort, and not a process of formation of the human in the perspective of an existential finality. The secularized learning and reception process risks to become a perfection in the dexterity of the economic and social performances and not an exploitation of the man in his capacities, which tend to what exceeds the limited condition of its existence.

Understanding the complexity of people's psychology, but especially of the youth, their placement in a confusing society, must be constructed a systematic and complete vision of what defines the Christian religious process and content of learning, process which is required to be applied constantly and which must take into account the intimate universe of the young, completing the existential void in their affirmation as human persons. It is solicited today a rethinking of what means to learn and what means to be learned or formed in a healthy, correct, human way.

Wanting or not, we must accept the fact that the civic society models the people psychologically, religiously and socially. To place again the Christian teaching in their consciousness, we must firstly, to identify the challenges that the modern society brings, a society tempted by relativism and that makes many persons – young and not only – to be skeptical. Especially, the cultural changes and scientific progress seem to overthrow the judgement criteria regarding the moral life. Individualism and subjectivism become the dominant characteristics in reflection and ethical decisions. Thus appear new forms of anguish that can lead to an existential pessimism. Regarding skepticism, the pessimism of the generalized existential act in the actual society under the meaningless form, to this anti-humanism before whom the young search to hide in the supernatural, in forms of pseudo religiosity of the new religious movements, through the fact that they live the painful experience of the exclusion in the characteristic anonymity of the urban culture and are ready to accept anything, only to benefit of a spiritual vision, that can return the lost harmony and to let them live a sensation of physical and spiritual healing.

This analysis suggests the overall condition of postmodernism, in which people lose any reference point, cancelling their positive perspective of life. The young overwhelmed by this skepticism, proclaim as the generation without future (*no future generation*). The skepticism and depression are born from the anxiety and disorientation in front of a world apparently (and sometimes programmatic) indeterminate, chaotic and instable, which increases as the man was attached to some ideals or values that he believed were eternal and immutable. The tragedy of maladjustment is visible everywhere in the world that become the product of a consumer society of which fascination upon the young is stronger than ever. This makes them victims and prisoners of an individualist, materialist and hedonist interpretation of the human existence. The welfare in a material meaning tends to impose as the only ideal of life, a welfare that must be obtained with any condition or price. Or, in this condition, the person is subject to multiple violations that threatens their social-religious dignity, being subject to the social dynamic that dictates the most humiliating and aberrant forms of instrumentalization, reducing it to the limited

statute of robotized individual, dehumanized, as a simple factor of production and consumption, simple statistic figure or listed number in a computer.

In this connection, the exclusive preoccupation to *have* replaces the primacy of *to be*, with the consequence of interpretation and living personal and inter-personal values, according to the logic of the selfish possessing of the other's instrumentalization, leading inevitably not to a harmonious growth of its own personality by opening to the other in giving himself, but to a serious psychological and ethical innovation.

Last but not least, it is clearly observed an increasingly acute tension between tradition and modernity, the traditional being perceived pejoratively, as something obsolete and unacceptable. The youth put in front of the consacrated values of Christianity, they just don't understand them, because it is impossible for them to understand and familiarize with them in a consumer society in which everything is pragmatism, utilitarianism, money, economy, everything is reduced at purely earthly values, in the detrimental of the heavenly, spiritual values. The world lives today a real tragedy. The secularization rips the man from God and makes him the slave of a material world, suffocating him spiritually. The religious indifference tragedy atrophiates in young people the perception towards religion, denaturating the authenticity of the religious experience, of course, in any religious pattern. From here the atheist attitude and the proliferation of the occult, who gained a wide field in cinematography. To the existential questions that, remaining without an answer, expose the modern man – and the young man especially because of his mental immaturity – at the depressed disillusion or at the temptation of eliminating its own human life that poses so many problems. Exalted by the fascinating and innovative gains of a scientific-technical development and by using a limitless freedom, the man cuts the religious roots that are in his heart: forgets about God, he considers Him without meaning for his own existence, refuses him, and from here the consequence of the moral relativism.

In these conditions, the Church teaching, basically a Christic teaching, mustn't be rationalized, but placed again in the human reality. The Savior Jesus Christ, targeted the man in his personal integrality, targeted both the children, youth and the mature or elder. The level of generality of His teaching demonstrates the applicability of his norms exposed in the held sermons, targeting what offered for the eternal and omnipresent human, his ontological existential meaning.

From the mentioned one, it can be observed the topicality and relevance of the researched subject in the actual research horizon. The Christic teaching is not only a normative act for a healthy life from the religious point of view, but also a coordinate towards perfection.

Jesus Christ was the supreme Teacher, integral and complete, the teacher of men. His prophetic or teacher dignity is often highlighted in the pages of the Holy Scripture.

1. Jesus offers, as the prophets, a knowledge of God through interpretation in the human speech, through means, not by apparition, being thus humility of God's Son, at the level of the people.

2. Therefore, He creates faith, certitude, in the people that want to believe, not the sight that anyone can admit. But even through this, the receiving of the divine ones is a step out of pity. Precisely the fact that the human, because of the sin, is not able to “see” the divine ones, thus, someone must bring them near to him by faith, God uses it for the way out of the sin.

But Jesus is beyond all the prophets, being the supreme and last prophet, whereas:

1. Intercedes the bond and interprets God’s will towards the people, not as an unknown subject, but as His.

2. The divine revelation that He realizes, is therefore, not only the fullest possible, through its breadth and clarity, but also of another character, because through Him the people have the experience of me-you with God. When a person speaks to us directly and not through an intermediary, we experience God as one that spoke just now with a peer of ours, but now He has left, turning His back. In Jesus we have God permanently with the face towards us, talking to each one of us, having Him in maximum approach and not distant from us.

3. The Prophet bounds us to Him through the certitude that it transmits and has in common with Him of God as Master of all. In the last analysis however we all look beyond the prophet, towards God, which is outside and over our human communion. Jesus bounds us to Him as the ultimate center. He doesn’t only give us the certitude of God, but whereas he places us in communion with Him, He places us in communion with God.

4. Thus, the Revelation in Jesus is in the same time salvation, because, while the prophet was a man which God made him talk for Himself, here He Himself speaks. The words, here, form the deck of communion and thus of power from Him to the people. The human words, are not anymore what separates God from the people, but what puts him in direct connection with them.

The Prophet, showing God as the One that searches to make His will known to the people and as the One who through faith wants to take them out of the selfishness of the sin, in communion with love and trust, but not realizing Himself this communion with God, is a start that asks for continuity, a promise that requires fulfillment. The prophet as the forerunner of God’s Himself entrance in communion with the people, in the only possible way, through incarnation. If we admit the prophet, if we acknowledge that God sought to talk to the people through word of mouth, not existing any other way, necessarily we must acknowledge also His descent between the people in the role of a prophet. If we acknowledge everywhere a divine Revelation through the man, we must acknowledge God’s incarnation as it’s fulfillment and meaning; if we deny God’s incarnation, we implicitly deny any Revelation through the mediation of the human subject.

But by this we deny the most profound basis of man’s trust in man, of the reference of one to the other. Without the Revelation through the man, without the prophet, the human community breaks apart and, generally, it disappears from the world the certitude of God’s existence as supporting power of the human society. We deny the necessity and purpose of the prophet, it doesn’t appear as necessary, and not even possible, the incarnation. Here it is one of

the most powerful arguments for the divinity of the Old Testament, which some would want to estrange.

Only the Revelation through man blesses and founds the relationships between the people. Only through the fact that God makes the man the instrument of His discovery of another man, giving the larger coverage to this circulatory coin, which is the face of the man, grants every man high value in the eyes of the peer. And this will of development of the man in front of the peer becomes fully achieved only by the showing of God Himself as a human you, meeting in an unity the human subject with the divine one, as perfection of the prophet's idea.

We will stop now also at the character and content of the teaching it gave to the people as supreme prophet, Jesus Christ. Of course it is not given to be used as an independent doctrine body, but as an always actual manifestation of God's Son who became man. It is not less true that we cannot be indifferent at what Jesus Christ has said and is saying. The overwhelming importance is the fact that God wanted to enter in the direct dialogue communion with the man. But this communion cannot be considered as a framework that could had filled with whatever sharing of words. Between the fact of the direct and permanent dialogue between God and man and the character and content of the communicated "teaching" in its framework there is a strong connection; we could say that the last one is only an explanation, of the main and basis of its purposes. We, however, could not derive the teaching from the simple communion, if this would not have, for example, the necessary time to explain itself.

Therefore, it is of the greatest importance the preoccupation with the teaching, but always depending of the communion which expresses and enlightens and follows, being a teaching that servers thus life, the live relationship between the listener and the one that shares it.

In His teaching, Jesus says who He is, who sent Him between the people, and by this, He discovers the sacrament of the Holy Trinity, Her love towards the fallen man, the purpose for which the Son incarnated, namely the salvation of men, the path on which He will achieve this salvation, the word only forerunning and interpreting the love act and His sacrifice. Further, it contains impulses towards the man not to repent the love of God, calls to the entering in communion with Him By faith and love.

All His teaching may be considered either as supreme discovery – in the permitted limits of the earthly human's capacity – of God, or as a way towards the man's salvation, since the discovery doesn't have any other purpose but the salvation. The Revelation is God's presentation in the work of man's salvation and explanation of this work. The understanding of the teaching, as an understanding of God's saving work, and by this, of all this work's bases, that are in His being and will, has it in a sufficient state only the one that is under the divine work, namely in the saving dialogue, in the act relationship with God, which reveals to us, saving us and saves us by revealing Himself to us. Who remains a simple spectator, engaging only the reason in understanding the teaching, does not get the essential, a lot seem to him absurd, and the ones right to his reason remain dead theories". Only the one that let's himself ravished entirely in a live relationship with God, will understand. That is why the Gospel says: "For they had not understood about the loaves, *because their hearts were hardened*" (Mark 6, 52). And, therefore,

Jesus foretells that His teaching, the disciples will fully understand only when the Holy Spirit will descend (*John* 14, 26). Jesus didn't come just to give the mind a new doctrine, nor to answer to all kinds of intellectual questions. To only one question He came to give the answer, but to the greatest, fundamental, most excruciating, question that kneads not only the mind, but the man entirely, rising permanently from his depth, not from the mental periphery, is the question of the man: What should I do to redeem myself? And the answer of Jesus, that wasn't a theoretical answer, but a divine work, namely God's revelation, interpreted by teaching, wasn't an impulse to assimilate the doctrine, but for entering in the love relation with God, at placing the man in a live relation with His saving work. Jesus didn't say to the young man that asked Him what to do to inherit the eternal life: "Memorize well My doctrine", but: "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul and breath, and your neighbor as thyself."

This entering in relation with the Savior God, doesn't exclude the knowledge, but rather means the true knowledge of God: And the eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, which You sent" (*John* 17, 2).

Life in Christ meaning the re-rooting and our growth in the divine love, is in the same time apprenticeship in knowing the supreme meanings of existence. With every page of the Holy Gospel, recited so many times in His Spirit That inspired the Apostles and which leads the Church to the entire truth, it enlightens more fully our natural spiritual horizon beyond our being. And the words of Jesus Christ are suddenly revelation and call. In them you can hear the voice of the One that reveals himself: "*I am the way, truth and life*", but as an endless call that awakens and invites the spirit to "search", to "ask", to "knock" at the door of the infinite life which He discovers. As a call not only to an abstract idea, but to a live experience in which was shown, through the incarnation of God – the Word, through Cross and Resurrection, once and for all: the divine plenitude in the human plenitude.

The Holy Apostles called first to this experience, are answering and offering exemplary, during their life (not without stumbling, one actually fatal), a radical, irreversible conversion. Confronted in His face, with the questions fundamental to our vocations, they engage from the intimate resorts of the being. Peter's answer in a hesitation moment of the disciples, is revealing: "...*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (*John* VI, 68). And Paul finds in Christ "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (*Colossians* II, 3). – His words therefore bear for them the endorsement of eternity, of the entire truth, of life's essential. In it, it speaks the creating Word of the Logos full of "power" (*Mark* 1, 22) unruly to obsolescence, deterioration and "transition" (*Matthew* XXIV, 35).

The predicate from the mountain is the title that is given usually to the teachings of Jesus Christ that are written in *Matthew* 5-7. If the name can be used or not for some passages somehow parallel from *Luke* (6, 20-49), depend of the way in which each one interprets the literary relation from the two gospels. The portion from Luke is often called the Preach from the field, because it is said that the place from where it was spoken was a "plateau" (*Luke* 6, 17) not

a “mountain” (Matthew 5, 1). It is yet possible that each one of the specifications to refer to the same place, seen actually from different directions.¹

Canon Liddon refers to this preach saying that it is “the first sip of Christianity’s essence”.² If it were to interpret that this affirmation would hit the fact that the preach is obviously a teaching (*didache*), not a *kerygma* proclamation. However far we would go with the imagination, this preach cannot be considered “the good news” for one that the entrance in the Kingdom depends of its fulfillment. It is rather a short presentation of those who already entered in the Kingdom and a description of the quality of the moral life that is expected from their part. It is true, in this extent, this preach contains “the essence of Christianity”.³

In the biblical research of the 20th century, it was considered that the Preach from the mountain was a single speech which Jesus Christ gave with a certain occasion. Certainly that, by the way it was presented in Matthew’s Gospel, things seems to be precisely. The disciples arrived down (v. 1), Jesus Christ took the word and taught them His teaching (v. 2), and when his speech ended, the crowds were amazed by His teaching (7, 28). Many theologians, however, think that the Preach from the mountain is a compilation of more speeches which the Lord gave – “some sort of resume of all the preaches which Jesus Christ gave”.⁴ The arguments are the following, (1) it is too much material contained here for one preach. The disciples that did not stand out because of some spiritual special perception could not assimilate ever an ethical teaching so pretentious. (2) The great number of presented subjects (description of the Kingdom’s blessings, advice regarding the divorce, advices regarding the concern) it is not compatible with the thematic unit of a speech. (3) The sudden passing to certain subjects (i.e. the teaching about prayer in Matthew 6, 1-11) it can be observed clearly. (4) In Luke appear 34 verses from this preach and, more still spread passages throughout the Gospel after Luke (i.e. Lord’s Prayer from Luke is presented at the demand of His disciples to teach how to pray, Luke 11, 1; the speech about the narrow gate is an answer for the question “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” Luke 13, 23). It is more plausible that Matthew would have borrowed these speeches from Luke and compile them in a preach instead of Luke finding them in a preach and dispersing them after throughout the whole gospel which he wrote. (5) It is a characteristic thing for Matthew to gather the material that contains teachings, to compile them under certain titles and to introduce in narration the life of Jesus Christ, and therefore, the Preach from the mountain is the first of these didactical sections. (The others handle the subjects as apprenticeship (9, 35 – 10, 42), Kingdom of Heaven (13), what means to be great (18) and the end of all times (24-25).)⁵

These considerations, however, do not force us to see in the preach an arbitrary composition. The historical context from Matthew 4, 23 – 5,1 makes us to expect an important

¹ H.K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount*, 1960, p. 23.

² *Ibidem*, p. 24.

³ H. Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1951, p. 4.

⁴ W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1994, p. 79

⁵ J. W. Bowman și R.W. Tapp, *The Gospel from the Mount*, 1960, p. 17.

speech, spoken in a certain surrounding. In the Preach from the mountain there are more fragments that may seem to be shorter preaches of Jesus Christ, not thematic collections of some separate speeches (*logia*). The comparison of this preach with Luke's preach shows us that between the two preaches there are more similar points (both begin with happiness, end with the Parable of the house built on the rock and the material that interposes in Luke's passage – referring the love of enemies (6, 27-36) and judgements (6, 37-42) – follow in the same order as of Matthew), which tells us that at the basis of the two narrations there is a common source. It is possible that before any of the two evangelist started to write, it existed a content more schematically of a spoken preach with a certain occasion. Questions that try to find out what of the two narrations is more close to the original version or whether *Matthew* inspired from an old source, still are subject of some disputes between the Bible researchers. Given the purpose of this article, it is sufficient to conclude that Matthew used an older source and amplified the content according to the purpose which he followed, by introducing an additional relevant material.⁶

In the preach from the mountain, Jesus Christ operates a radical redefining of the Jewish religious norms. Indifferently how the Preach is seen from the mountain, as a resume of a speech that took place or as a compilation of ethical lectures wrote by Matthew, we cannot be in doubt of the fact that Mattew 5-7 is an unitary fragment marked by a logical development of the theme base. This theme is presented in *Blessings* and can be entitled “Quality and way of life in the Kingdom”.⁷ Next, we have a descriptive analysis of the content of the preach.

The mountain preach was during the centuries, the subject of different interpretations. For Augustin, that wrote a commentary regarding this preach, even since from the time when Hippo was bishop (393-396 AC), it was “the reshape or perfect model of the Christian life” – a new law, in contrast with the old one. The monastic orders thought of it as being “an advice for perfection”, expected not for the large crowd, but for the few that are chosen.⁸ The reformers stated that this preach is the “uncompromising expression of the divine righteousness which is for all”. Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and social reformer (in the last part of his life) made a resume of the Preach from the mountain and this contains five commandments (anger temperance, chastity, ban on oaths, un-resistance unreservedly love towards enemies), which, if strictly respected, will destroy the river and will establish a utopian kingdom. Weiss and Schweitzer stated that the requirements are too radical for any historical period and declared these commandments as being “interim ethical principles” for the early Christians that believed that the end of all things is near. Others, considering that is very probably that this to be a figuratively language, interpreted the Preach from the mountain as being the expression of a noble thinking – a teaching that is rather dealing with what the human must be, instead of what he has to do.⁹

⁶ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1976, p. 54.

⁷ W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1964, p. 113.

⁸ M. Dibelius, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1940, pp. 17, 19.

⁹ J.R.W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture*, 1978, p. 156.

Then how should we interpret the preach? In the following, are given to us at least some guidelines¹⁰: *a*. Although it is dressed in poetry and symbols, the preach pretends though, an ethical behavior with a high level of exigency. *b*. Jesus Christ does not prescribe a new code of rules, but enounces some high ethical principles and shows the way in which these affect the life of those who are part of the Kingdom. “The people would gain more if they would take into account the fact that this was a preach and that was preached; that it wasn’t an article of law that was approved” *c*. The preach wasn’t a direct program for the world to change in good, but is addressed to those that already gave up to the world, to enter the Kingdom. *d*. It isn’t an unpractical idea, but nor a thing that can be realized fully. In the words of S.M. Gilmour, it is the “transcendental order ethic that penetrated the history of Jesus Christ, that implemented in the history of the Church, but of which full achievement sits beyond the land of history, when God will be “all in all”¹¹.

God’s Kingdom is literary translated in the Greek language of the New Testament through the phrase *hē basileia tou theou*, which we find at Mark, Luke and Acts.¹² Matthew’s favorite version is the Kingdom of Heaven - *hē basileia ton ouranou*, phrase that corresponds to the Hebrew construction *malekut samayim*.¹³ According to the synoptic gospels, the Kingdom of heaven or Kingdom of God is the central subject of the preaching of Jesus. While Matthew that addresses to the Hebrews, speaks mostly about the “Kingdom of heaven”, Mark and Luke speak about the “Kingdom of God”, that has the same meaning as “Kingdom of heaven”, but that has an expression easier to understand by the non-Hebrews. The use of the term “Kingdom of heaven” in *Matthew’s Gospel* is due of course to the Judaism tendency of avoiding the direct use of God’s name. In any case, between the two expressions there isn’t any difference of meaning (*Matthew 5, 3 and Luke 6, 20*).¹⁴

John the Baptist came first with the news that the Kingdom of heaven is near (*Matthew 3, 2*), and Jesus took this message from him (*Matthew 4, 17*). The expression

¹⁰ Check C.F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 1957, p. 278-326

¹¹ S.M. Gilmour, *Journal of Religion* 21, 1941, p. 263

¹² *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 4: K-N, David Noel Freedman (Ed.), Doubleday, London, 1992, p. 144.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Check A. M. Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom*, Washington, 1972; B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, London, 1930; J. A. Baird, *Rediscovering the Power of the Gospel. Jesus’ Theology of the Kingdom*, Wooster, 1982; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. Grand Rapids, 1986; H. D., Betz, *The Kingdom of God in Mark*, 1987; Brandon, S. G. F. 1967. *Jesus and the Zealots*. New York; J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, New York, 1953; G. W. Buchanon, *Jesus: The King and His Kingdom*, Macon, 1983; B. Chilton, *The Kingdom of God*, Philadelphia, 1984; B. Chilton, *Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom*, Grand Rapids, 1987; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, New York, 1961; K. P. Donfried, *The Kingdom of God in Paul*, 1987; E. Ferguson, *The Kingdom of God in Early Patristic Literature*, 1987; J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community*, Englewood Cliffs, 1975; R. H. Hiers, *The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Tradition*. Gainesville, 1970; D. Hill, *Towards an Understanding of the Kingdom of God*, 1981; R. Hodgson, *The Kingdom of God in the School of St. John*, 1987; G. Johnson, *Kingdom of God. Sayings in Paul’s Letters*, 1984; W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark*, Philadelphia, 1974; J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, Philadelphia, 1975; G. Lundström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Trans. J. Bulman. Edinburgh, 1963; G. W. H. Lampe, „Some Notes on the Significance of *Basileia tou Theou*, *Basileia Christou* in the Greek Fathers”, in *JTS* 49, 1948, pp. 58–73.

“Kingdom of heaven” (*malekut samayim*) has its origin in the Late Hebrew thinking that awaits a future in which God would intervene decisively, this event was awaited with ardor by Israel, to restore the welfare of the people and to free them from the power of their enemies. The arrival of the Kingdom is the great hope from the future, prepared through the arrival of Messiah that smoothens the path for God’s Kingdom.¹⁵

On the time of Jesus, the development of this eschatological hope in Judaism took a diversity of forms in which was prevailing the national element or the cosmic and apocalyptic one. This hope can be linked in the past with the proclamation of the Old Testament prophets regarding the restoration of David’s throne and the arrival of God to renew the world. Although the Old Testament doesn’t say anything about the eschatological Kingdom of the heaven as such, in the Psalms and in the prophetic writings the future manifestation of the future royal sovereignty of God is one of those central concepts of faith and hope of the Old Testament. And here it exists different elements that occupy a prominent place, as it can be clearly seen from a comparison of the older prophecies with the prophecies of the universal sovereignty and appearance of man’s Son in *The book of Daniel*.¹⁶

When John the Baptist and, later, Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom is near, this proclamation implies a cry of awakening with a sensational universal meaning. The turning point becomes long-awaited, the great restoration – however it was conceived in that time – it was proclaimed as being close.¹⁷

In the proclamation of John the Baptist, the most important place was given for the divine judgement proclamation as an imminent reality. The ax was stuck already at the roots of the trees. The arrival of God as King has as supreme purpose the purification, sieving and judgement. Nobody cannot escape it. No privilege can buy an exemption from the judgement, not even the claim of Abraham as father. In the same time John the Baptist straightens the looks towards the One that was to come after him, whose forerunner was him. The One that was to come had in His hand the fanning. As preparation for His arrival, the people must repent and submit to baptize for the washing away of sins, so that they can escape from the future anger and to participate at the salvation of the Kingdom and baptize with the Holy Spirit that will be cast when He will come (*Matthew 3, 1-12*).¹⁸

In the preach of the Savior Jesus Christ, we discover two aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven: a present aspect and a future aspect.¹⁹

The proclamation of the Kingdom of Jesus follows word by word John’s proclamation, but nevertheless it has a more comprehensive character. After John the Baptist observed for more time the work of Jesus, he started to have doubts if Jesus is truly the One that had to come and which he proclaimed (*Matthew 11, 2* and the following). The proclamation of Jesus regarding the

¹⁵ M. Pamment, „The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel”, in *NTS* 27, 1981, p. 211.

¹⁶ B. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, Wilmington, 1987, p. 82.

¹⁷ D. Patrick, *The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament*, 1987, p. 119.

¹⁸ M. Pamment, „The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel”, p. 214.

¹⁹ Cf. N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Philadelphia, 1963, p. 66.

Kingdom differs in two aspects of John's preaching. First, while it retains unaltered the proclamation of judgement and calling to repentance, in the foreground it is looming the saving meaning of the kingdom. Secondly – and here is the core of the problem – he announced the Kingdom not only as a reality that was near, something that was about to appear in the nearest future, but a reality that was already present, being manifested in His person and work. Although the places in which Jesus speaks explicitly about the Kingdom are not numerous (check especially in *Matthew* 12, 28 and the parallel texts), his entire preaching and work are marked by this dominant reality. In Him, the great future already become a "present time".²⁰

This present aspect of the Kingdom is manifested in different ways in the person and acts of Christ. It appears palpably and visibly in the expulsion of the demons (accord to *Luke* 11, 20) and generally in the miraculous power of Jesus. In healing the possessed ones by the demons becomes evidently that Jesus has invaded the house of "the great one" and tied him good, so it can plunder his goods (*Matthew* 12, 29). The Kingdom of heaven penetrates in the field of the evil. The power of Satan is defeated. Jesus sees him falling as a lightning bolt from the sky. He has power and may grant also to others power to trample the enemy's field. Nothing is impossible for the ones that go into the world invested with the power of Jesus, as witnesses of the Kingdom (*Luke* 10, 18 and the following). The entire miraculous activity of Jesus is the proof of the Kingdom's arrival.²¹ What have wanted in vain to see many prophets and many unrighteous people - the dawn of the great era of salvation – can be seen and heard now by the disciples (*Matthew* 13, 16; *Luke* 10, 23). When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask: "You are the One that must come, or should we wait for another?", there were shown to them the wonderful things done by Jesus and in which, according to the promise of the prophecy, the Kingdom was already manifested: the blind were able to see, the lame to walk, the deaf gained their hearing; lepers were clean and the dead were raised and the gospel was preached to the poor (*Matthew* 11, 2 and the following; *Luke* 7, 18 and the following). In the last of these – the preaching of the Gospel – is seen the penetration of the Kingdom, whereas the salvation is proclaimed and offered as an accessible gift to the ones poor in spirit, to the ones hungry and the ones who mourn – the Kingdom is theirs. It is proclaimed also the forgiveness of the sins, not only as a future reality to be fulfilled in heaven, nor just as a present possibility, but as a dispensation offered today, on earth, through Jesus Himself: "Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven; because the Son of man has the power on earth to forgive the sins" (*Matthew* 2, 1-12).²²

As it turns out from the last cited word about power, all these are based on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, Son of God. The Kingdom has come in Him and with Him; He is *auto-basileia*. The Self-Revelation of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of man and Servant of the Lord, is both a mystery and a development of the entire Gospel.²³

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 67-69.

²¹ Idem, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, Philadelphia, 1976, p. 77.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 78.

²³ A. Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, Trans. W. Lowrie, New York, 1950, p. 112.

It is impossible to explain these statements of Jesus about Himself in a future meaning, as some wanted to do, as if He referred to Himself only as a future Messiah, the Son of man that was expected to come in future on the clouds of the heaven. Indifferently of the measure in which this future revelation of the Kingdom remains an essential element of the Gospel, we can't see the fact that in the gospels the Messiahship of Jesus is a present reality, here and now. Not only that he is proclaimed so at His baptism also on the Mount of Transfiguration – The All-Beloved and Chosen of God (clear Messiahship names) – but He is filled also with Holy Spirit (*Matthew 3, 16*) and is invested with full divine authority (*Matthew 21, 27*); The Gospel is full of declarations of His absolute authority, He is presented as the Messenger of the Father, the One that was to come and fulfill what the prophets foretold. Through His arrival and teaching, the Scripture is fulfilled in the hearing of those who listen Him (*Luke 4, 21*). He didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill (*Matthew 5, 17* and the following), to proclaim the Kingdom (*Mark 1, 38*), to search and to save the lost ones (*Luke 19, 10*), to serve others and to give His life as redemption for many (*Mark 10, 45*). The secret of the allegiance to the Kingdom is in the allegiance to Jesus (*Matthew 7, 23; 25, 41*). Shortly, the person of Jesus as Messiah is in the center of all the announced things in the Gospel regarding the Kingdom. The Kingdom concentrates in Him both in its presented aspects, and the future ones.²⁴

There is a future aspect of the Kingdom. Although in the gospels it is clearly stated that the Kingdom is manifested here and now, it is shown also the fact that in this world it is manifested only temporary. This is the reason for which the proclamation of its present activity, in the words: “The blind receive sight, the dead are raised and to the poor the Gospel is preached”, is followed by the warning: “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of Me” (*Matthew 11, 5; Luke 7, 23*). “Stumble on account of Me” is in the hidden character of the Kingdom in this era. The miracles continue to be signs of some other reality than of the present one; still it has not come the time that the demons to be thrown in the eternal darkness (*Matthew 8, 29*).²⁵

The Gospel of the Kingdom is revealed only as a seed that is sown. In the parables about the sower, about the seed that grows in secret, about the tares that grows in wheat, about the mustard seed, about the dough, Jesus teaches the apostles regarding this aspect of Kingdom. The Son of man Himself, with all the Godly power, the One that will come on the heavenly clouds, is the Sower that sows the Word of God. He is described as a man that depends of the others: the birds, thorns, the people can impede in part His work. He must wait and see what will come out of the planted seed. Actually, the hidden character of the Kingdom is more profound: the King Himself comes as a servant. The birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of man (*Daniel 7, 13*) doesn't have a place where to lay His head. To receive all, He must first give up to all. He must give His life as a price of redemption; as a Servant of God that suffers (*Isaiah 53*), He must be placed in the number of the misdeed. The Kingdom has come; The Kingdom will come. But it comes on the path of the cross and before the Son of man would exercise His authority upon all

²⁴ N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, p. 73.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

earth's kingdoms (*Matthew* 4, 8; 28, 18), He must walk on the path of listening to His Father, to fulfill in this way all the justice (unrighteousness) (*Matthew* 3, 15).²⁶

Thus, the manifestation of the Kingdom has a history in this world. It must be proclaimed to every being. The same as the wonderful seed, it must germinate and grow and no man knows how (*Mark* 4, 27). It has an inner power through which is creating its road through all kinds of obstacles and forwards everywhere; the field in which is sowed the seed is the world (*Matthew* 13, 38). The Gospel of Kingdom goes to all nations (*Matthew* 28, 19), because the King of this Kingdom is also the Lord of the Spirit. His Resurrection brings a new era; the preaching of the Kingdom and the King reach the ends of the earth. The decision has been already taken; but it's fulfillment is still in the future. What at the beginning seems to be the same arrival of the Kingdom, which is announced as an indivisible reality, close, at the door, extends and contains new periods of time and great distances. The borders of these Kingdom are not mistaken with the borders of Israel or with the ones of the history: The Kingdom contains all the nations and eras, until the end of the world.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

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