

UNIVERSITY OVIDIUS OF CONSTANȚA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL

PhD THESIS SUMMARY

REPENTANCE – WAY OF RESTORING THE HUMAN BEING IN THE CONDITION OF SALVATION. BIBLICAL REFERENCES

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1. Research argument and objectives

This PhD thesis, synthetically entitled *Repentance – Reorganization of the Human in the Condition of Salvation. The New Testament theological arguments* - aim to approach, sequentially and methodologically, the phenomenology of repentance in the Old and New Testament of the biblical theological horizon. Such a theological approach does not seek to rewrite what has already been written so far in the published literature, but proposes an exhaustive analysis of *repentance* in its biblical meaning. For purely practical purposes, I do not intend to reproduce in a dogmatic and liturgical dimension the definition of *repentance*, but my intention is to provide a general framework of biblical experience in *repentance* such as *tesubah* and *metanoia*. Thus, the framework of research is not circumscribed to a general overview of *repentance* in a dogmatic and liturgical dimension, but opens itself in its plurality of valences, valences that lead us to careful conceptual analysis, to the connection of *repentance* with the experience of conversion, and the axiology of faith.

Repentance is an existential act/event that involves the commitment to the removal of sin, the acknowledgment of the sin, and the intention to conform to the divine will of a healthy spiritual life. There is a capital difference between repentance and conversion, since conversion is a way of changing the linearity of the religious life by reporting and adopting a new spectrum of values. Conversion does not necessarily mean awareness of sin, but the intention of embracing new religious, social, group values.

As a result of these frameworks, this doctoral thesis is an exercise to update and to realize the importance of repentance. Repentance transposes you into a certain experience with yourself. Today there is a predilection for protest, to go out in the street to shout in order to change something in this society. I do not think the protest is the right form of response to what we do not like. I myself, am a militant for our inner change. Practically from here begins the true and sure change in the perspective of normality. If we are broken and unorganized per se, our exterior, our social expression will never correspond to the ability to change things. It is precisely for these reasons that the great philosophical-religious traditions of the world are under the sign of the spiritual exercise of interiority redefinition: for example, in Hinduism and Buddhism it is said that spiritual perfection consists in knowing the authentic Self. By this knowledge of the Self we no longer value the universe as a reality that is essentially

nothing but an illusion (*maya*). The transition from ignorance to enlightenment is required, which is nothing more than a retrieval of existential authenticity. The entire phenomenology of religion in its historical application is a quest for self: man seeks for himself and from this need of recovery, he articulated different modes of the religious feeling, different religions.

In Orthodox spirituality, *repentance* is an act of interiority by the change of heart, consciousness, reason. This is the right value of *repentance*, which in my opinion is the deepest existential act: it is how we change our registry of our lives in the presence of God and for God. It is the sacrifice act of gift. We give ourselves to God to live the joy of eternity. Christ, to restore us ontologically, did the same: He gave Himself as the supreme sacrifice to the Father for the sake of mankind. In this dedication we are structurally transfiguring. The most eloquent example of repentance is the prodigal son of the parable of the Savior Jesus: the miserable condition in which he was, caused him to return to himself. Repentance is a process of maturation.

The motivation for choosing this research theme shows the personal interest in studying the New Testament, and shows not only the importance and timeliness of the problem being treated, but also the purpose of carrying out a comprehensive scientific study and meeting the academic demands of doctoral research.

Therefore, as objectives of our research, we mention the following:

1. Highlighting the biblical meanings of repentance as an existential act;
2. Reflection of the repentance *vocabulary*: תשובה and μετάνοια;
3. Exegesis of the parables of *Luke 15* as a way of rediscovery;
4. Highlighting of congruence between *repentance* and *faith*;
5. Specifying the boundaries between *repentance* and *conversion*.

2. The topicality and relevance of the subject in the context of current research

The study of *repentance* has a long history. This has come to the attention of all-time researchers, beginning with the first Christian centuries, and belonging to various, not exclusively theological, fields, each analyzing it from different perspectives. The sphere of the problems that biblical *repentance* raises is wide, as the perspectives of its explanation and interpretation are multiple.

The originality of my work is the novelty of the interpretation, of the ideas emerging from the multidisciplinary research and approach, as well as from the lively and fairly appropriate language to the reality and the use of various references. Another originality factor of this PhD thesis is the clarification of the terminology specific to *repentance, conversion, faith*, a very important aspect in the biblical study. That is why it is extremely important to analyze and tone up some key terms, without which the research would be superficial.

On the other hand, whether if we like it or not, we must accept that civic society shapes people psychologically, religiously and socially. In particular, cultural change and scientific progress seem to overthrow the criteria of discernment in terms of moral life. Individualism and subjectivism become dominant characteristics in thinking and ethical decisions. When it is allowed to believe that everything that is legal is moral in itself - this principle leads to an atrophy of the sense of criticism and a revocation of the moral discernment between good and evil - reigns confusion, especially where civic law contradicts the exigencies of morality. Thus, new forms of anxiety arise, which can lead to existential pessimism. With regard to skepticism, the pessimism of the existential act that is generalized in today's society in the form of a lack of any sense, to this anti-humanism in front of which young people seek refuge in the supernatural, in the pseudo-religiosity of the new religious movements, live the painful experience of exclusion in the anonymity characteristic of urban culture, and are ready to accept anything, only to benefit from a spiritual vision that returns their lost harmony and allows them to experience a sense of physical and spiritual healing.

Skepticism and depression are born of anxiety and disorientation in the face of a seemingly (and sometimes programmatic) indeterminate, chaotic, unstable world that grows as man has been more attached to ideals or values that he believed to be eternal and immutable. The tragedy of non-adaptation is everywhere visible in the world, but especially in young people, who become the product of a consumer society whose fascination with young people is stronger than ever. This makes them victims and prisoners of an individualistic, materialistic and hedonistic interpretation of human existence. Or, in this condition, the person is subjected to multiple violations that attack his socio-religious dignity, being subjected to the social dynamics that dictate the most humiliating and aberrant forms of instrumentalization, reducing it to the limited status of a robotic, dehumanized individual as a simple production and consumption element, the simple statistical figure or number listed in a computer.

Christianity can respond to all these challenges. Through *repentance*, man regains his authenticity in communion, a community at the center of which Jesus Christ is.

3. Research methods used

The central objective of this paper is the analysis of the concept of repentance in biblical theology, with direct reference to biblical texts, using an appropriate research methodology. That is why I presented the methods, techniques and procedures used in this scientific approach. Using the biblical scientific approach as a reference point, we used the specific research methods of this kind:

a) *The exegetic-hermeneutical method* by which were interpreted in a biblical and dogmatic way the Old and New Testament texts referring to *repentance* in its semantic variants in the theology of the Old and New Testaments. The interpretation of the various passages of *Luke*, the *Epistle to the Romans*, was made on the basis of the works of the Holy Fathers, the biblical commentaries devoted to the New Testament biblical research, the works of the Romanian theologians, and the works of modern and contemporary theologians belonging to the Western space.

b) *The analytical method* by which I chose to highlight the analysis of every Greek and Hebrew term through which *repentance* and *faith* is presented. The advantage of this method is its ability to highlight the unique peculiarity of the thinking of each Greek philosopher, biblical author and patristic theologian in part, and his specific accents on the issue of *repentance*.

4. Structure of the PhD thesis

INTRODUCTION

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CONCLUSIONS

REFERENCES

- I. Sources
 - A. Editions of The Holy Scripture
 - B. Patristic literature
- II. Dictionaries, encyclopedias
- III. Biblical commentaries
- IV. Books, studies, articles

5. Framework of the PhD thesis

In the Jewish conception it goes so far as to include themselves in the complex process of repentance and the recognition of the nature of evil, but also the reflection upon the gifts we receive from God before committing the sin.

Indeed, even from these few definitions we realize the impact that the concept of teshuva has in the Hebrew mentality.

We first see that the need for repentance occurs immediately after man commits the first sin (Genesis 3, 9). It is at the same time a divine requirement, but also a human ontological necessity. Our injustice places distances between us and God (Isaiah 59, 2, 12), but through repentance we can restore the relationship with Him (Isaiah 44, 22). This requirement-need will increase intensively and extensively as the human factor departs more and more from the will of Yahweh and begins to "not speak the same language" to Him. In the biblical context, the one who is sinning is called to the

circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30, 6; Jeremiah 4, 4), to the washing of the heart (Jeremiah 4, 14, 32, 39; Hosea 10, 12), building new hearts (Ezekiel 18, 31), which is easily modelled by divine precepts. They describe both the active role of man in the realization of the teshuva (Joshua 24, 23), but also the effects of divine participation in this work (Psalm 50, 3, Isaiah 1, 18, 44, 22).

The concept of "teshuva" is a great prophetic concept by which we understand the return from the sinful path, but also the return to good deeds, the Torah and God. The term שׁוּב is the Qal form of the verb, which may mean, in general, "to return to or from" or "to return" and "to return to the facts from the beginning." According to some, the verb would have the same Chaldean origin. Medieval commentators argue that the term is closer to the verb שָׁב which has the general meaning of "living", but also of "returning to the place of residence". This theory does not present a solid foundation to unequivocally affirm the link between the two terms. Considering the common background of Semitic languages, well-known and well-founded biblical, archaeological and historical, we can state on the basis of those studied the approach of שׁוּב more to the older, Protosemitic, tube. It had the same meaning as שׁוּב. His presence in early testimonies (be it inscriptions or older literary works) shows us, aside, the age of the mentioned word as a concept, and on the other hand it shows us its belonging to the common semantic background of the Semitic languages. In support of this idea we bring the research so far that has highlighted the presence of the word tube also in the Amorite language with some influences in the Egyptian or even the Akkadian language.

The Akkadian term šabu means "to swing", probably because of the drink, but also "to consider a thing or an idea". This, along with the equivalent of the Hebrew שׁוּב - which is tarou - could highlight the common provenance and ancient theological substrate that the word had acquired early. The difference occurs when we see the meaning, the direction indicated by the Akkadian and Hebrew term. Thus, the Akkadian one rarely refers to a return to a deity, and even more has a physical sense, even if it also refers to the return of a deity to its creatures. The meaning is therefore unique indicating a direction that departs from the god to man. The god is the only one who, in a gesture of profound pity for creatures, can restore them, and they prove to be powerless to do something for themselves once they have come out of the creator's graces.

The Hebrew term shows us, as we will further explain in detail, the fact that in the process of repentance, the meaning of the return is a double one, man returning to

God, first abandoning the sin, and then God returning to the man so prepared to help him work (Psalm 50, 14; Isaiah 63, 17). Interesting and worthy of note is that the term first appears as an Amorite name at the beginning of the second millennium BC. From a biblical perspective, the נָשָׁב root is encountered in some names, but this happens more often in the pre- and post-exilic period (Isaiah 7, 3). This could be theologically enlightening, indicating an intense concern and special care for returning to the place of origin (Deuteronomy 30, 3), to a deity (Psalm 77, 38), or a way of expressing the longing after one of these hypostases.

As we have already noted, the main Greek term translated "repentance" in the Romanian translations of the New Testament - *metanoia* - is found 24 times, and its verbal form of "repent" (*metanoeo*) is used for another 34 times. Besides, another important word that is sometimes translated "repentance" (*metamelomai*) is found 6 times. The basic idea of these generally recognized words is "mind change", although *metamelomai* may also mean "regret" or "remorse." The Romanian translation was probably nuanced by the foundation of some Latin concepts such as repentance and penance.

In the Septuagint, both *metanoia/metanoeo* and *metamelomai* translate the Hebrew word *naham* 35 times, highlighting the elements of change of thought and regret. Many times, we have mentioned here, and we hold to this opinion, that in the New Testament, the concept of "repentance" follows the meaning of the Hebrew verb *swb*. However, such a perspective cannot be sustained in connection with the use in the Septuagint, because *swb*, which is used over 1050 times, is always translated with *epistrepho* ("to return, to convert") and the related terminology. Thus, any possible change of meaning took place in the intertestamental period, probably under Hellenic influence, although such a conclusion is inadequate in irrefutable evidence.

The *metanoia* noun and the *metanoeo* verb are found 26 times in the Gospels, although they are not encountered at all in John. They are found 11 times in Acts, 5 times in Pauline Epistles, 3 times in Hebrews and once in 2 Peter and 12 times in Revelation. The minority term *metamelomai* is found 3 times in Matthew, 2 times in 2 Corinthians, and once in Hebrews.

The subject of repentance is most often found in Acts, especially as the expected answer to the speeches of Peter and Paul. In his first sermons, Peter calls the Jewish people and the masters to repentance for the sin of refusing and killing the Messiah, the Chosen One, Jesus (Acts 2, 36-39; 3, 17-21; 5, 29-32), and to trust fully in Him. The

Jews in the diaspora are not involved: the benefits of Jesus' death and ascension are presented to them as "deliverance" from the sins committed under the Law of Moses (Acts 13, 27-39). The peoples are called to repentance for the ignorance they have previously shown to God (despite the self-revelation of God in creation, Acts 17, 26-27; according to Romans 1), and for worshiping idols, since God's true knowledge is now accessible through the Christian mission (Acts 14, 15; 17, 24-31; according to 1 Thessalonians 1, 9-10). J. Bailey rightly observes that for both peoples and Jews in Acts, repentance means commitment to ethical behavior (Acts 26, 20), as well as the assimilation of the new people God creates (Acts 2, 38-42), something symbolized by Baptism. The result for both groups, which are found in the same people of God, is "life" (Acts 11, 18) and "forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5, 19), so that the new chosen people of God can receive the promised blessings of the "new times" (Acts 3, 19).

In the Gospels, John the Baptist broke out on the scene of Israel "preaching the baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1, 4; Luke 3, 3). His urgent message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3, 2). Those who came to be baptized were warned, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3, 8). Here, the basic element of intellectual change in metanoia is evident. It is also obvious that the behavioral "fruit" (i.e. the renewed life) is expected to grow in the boundaries of repentance.

At the beginning of his activity, Jesus' message itself was expressed in similar ways. As John the Baptist said, "Repent, for the kingdom [...] is near" (Matthew 4, 17). His mission was based on calling "sinners to repentance" (Luke 5, 32). Its meaning is clarified in Mark 1, 15, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Any meaning of repentance (metaneo) unrelated to faith in the Gospel is far from the full message of the Gospel.

On the other hand, the claims of Jesus and His Apostles sometimes use the idea of metanoia to include faith (Mark 6, 12). In the real sense, "Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin." The problem could be simplified to the possibility of "repenting" or "perishing" (Luke 13, 3, 5), "repenting" or going "to hell" and "tormenting" after death (Luke 16, 23, 28, 30). For sinners who will repent, however, there is "joy in heaven" (Luke 15, 7, 10). Thus, it can be concluded that in the Gospels, metanoia is used for the entire answer to eternal life, including faith, when not specified. Also, the great answer from the end of the Gospel of Luke reads, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all peoples" (24, 47).

On the human level, sincere repentance (metanoeo) for interpersonal sin requires forgiveness, after the teachings of Christ (Luke 17, 3-4). Surprisingly, the Gospel of John contains no reference to repentance in any dimension, the idea seems to be included in John's concept of faith.

The three uses of his *metamelomai* in the Gospels are instructive. In Matthew 21, 29, 32, its meaning is similar, though not equivalent to *metanoeo*. At Matthew 27, 3 "the remorse" of Judas has no "power to overcome the destructive operation of sin". This example "clarifies that *metamelomai* and *metanoeo* do not have identical meanings in the New Testament."

In assent with Saint John the Baptist, Peter's sermon at Pentecost in the Acts urges, "Repent and baptize [...] that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2, 28). Other uses of the word link repentance not only to forgiveness (5, 31), but also to "faith in our Lord Jesus" (20, 21) and "life" as a result of repentance (11, 18). In Acts 17, 30 - 31, Paul in the Areopagus reminds God's command that "all men should repent" or to be rightfully judged. In parallel, to the phenomena of the Gospels, repentance to Acts can be complementary to faith (17, 30) and lead to forgiveness of sins (2, 28; 5, 31) and to eternal life (11, 18).

Two other passages present the *epistrepho* verb as similar to *metanoeo*. At Acts 3, 19, Peter's offering to Israel is recorded, "Repent [...] and return to God to forgive your sins." Paul's explanation for his apostolic mission to Agrippa in Acts 26, 18 clarifies this return (*epistrepho*), "from darkness to light," from the power of Satan to God to receive forgiveness of sins. The obedience of the apostles to this command means that he preached to those who obey him "to repent and to return to God, proving their repentance by acts" (Acts 26, 20). Here, also, we deal with the expectation that the one who changes his thinking about the gospel and returns (*epistrepho*) to the Lord will present a "converted" lifestyle (according to Luke 3, 8).

Pauline literature rarely uses terms for repentance, and John's Epistles, none at all. For Paul, just as for John, repentance is included in the faith (IDB 4, 34). In addition to many ordinary uses (Romans 2, 4; 2 Corinthians 12, 21; 2 Timothy 2, 25), Paul strongly contrasts with *metanoeo* and *metamelomai* in 2 Corinthians 7, 8-10.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to God "who will not change His mind" (7, 21) and Esau, who cannot repent (12, 17). He also speaks of the initial fundamental repentance (6, 1) and the absolute impossibility of returning to the point of the first repentance (6, 6). Peter describes God as patient, who wants "that all men

should be saved" (2 Peter 3, 9), including apparently forgiveness and salvation (1 Timothy 2, 4). Again, the basic idea of changing the mind is demonstrated in the epistles.

The Epistles to the Churches in the Roman Province of Asia in the book of Revelation contain eight uses of the verb "repent" (2, 5, 22; 3, 3, 19). The glorious command of Christ of repentance is directed to the Church of Laodicea (3, 19), but also to the great Church of the Ephesus (2, 5) who "left the first love" (2, 4). All these sinful Churches need to change their way of thinking and bringing forth the fruits of repentance (Luke 3, 8; Acts 26, 20), turning back to Christ.

Unfortunately, the last mentions of "repent" (metanoeo) in the New Testament present a mass of unruly men while the wrath of God is poured out over the earth (Acts 9, 20, 21; 16, 9, 11). Instead of returning to the Lord, in repenting faith through his perfect patience (2 Peter 3, 9), or being saved of His righteous judgment, these sinners continued their deeds of condemnation (9, 20, 21) and have cursed God instead of glorifying Him (16, 9, 11).

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