

“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA  
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**PhD THESIS SUMMARY**  
**FAITH AND JUSTICE IN THE BOOK**  
**OF PSALMS. HERMENEUTIC**  
**FRAMEWORK**

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The PhD Thesis is placed in the field of Old Testament biblical research and is proposing theologically, in an appropriate methodology, to explore the value of Psalms as a whole in the Old Testament books, and especially the problem of hermeneutics applied to psalms and the relationship between faith and righteousness as is structured in the Book of Psalms. Therefore, what we are interested in presenting is the dimension of faith and righteousness in the profile of the Psalm theology, and how biblical hermeneutics access us to their deep meanings with relevance to the contemporary man.

*The Book of Psalms* is one of the best rendered expressions of the relationship between man and God in the Jewish environment, the human experience with the divine. Practically, the *Psalms* can be considered the theological quintessence of the *Old Testament*, as it encompasses the Old Testament recurrent themes, of which the most important is the affirmation of the Messiah's Son of God. In the *Book of Psalms* is reflected a special way of the relationship of the people chosen with God, how God relates to man. Beyond these two aspects, the *Psalms*, unlike any other *Old Testament* book, comes with a striking approach, exploring and expressing human intimacy before the Almighty and the Right God, bringing to the forefront the change of conscience or, in spiritual terms, the return to God, by repentance.

However, the thematic complexity of *The Book of Psalms*, is not limited to these mentioned aspects. Without any analytical difficulty, the *Psalms* can also be the subject of the socio-psychological research of the Jewish community. The living norms, the moral precepts set forth in the *Psalms* reconfigure the society on the religious vectors and under the empire of divine authority. Basically, after the *Decalogue* received by Moses on Mount Sinai, the *Psalms* are presented as a moral guide in Christian perspective, the moral subject refers to a reference forum governing the universe, namely God.

In consequence of these framework claims, this thesis is meant to be like an update and awareness exercise of the importance of *The Book of Psalms* for the today's man, which is found under the impetus of secularization in a crisis of religious identity. Above all, the *Psalms* are a sublime form of prayer that translates man in an existential way of exploring the divine experience. An authentic Christian spirituality cannot be thought out of the *Psalms*, because the psalm itself translates the poet's dialogue with God. Therefore, through their content focused on the intimate tension of man seeking communion with God,

the psalms have become a paradigm for realizing the existential meaning in perfection. Their reading sought to acquire the biblical word as the essential means by which a person could live the communion with the living God. The dogmatic value of the Psalms is undeniable, because, after the *Torah*, *Psalter* is the book that develops and emphasizes the essential teachings that relate to man's relationship with God.

One of the main reasons for the intense use of the Psalms by the Christians was the variety of content that pertained to the inner living of man. The struggle of the soul, the dilemmas of day-to-day contradictions, pain, sorrow, or exaltations filled with happiness were so well outlined in the *Psalter*, that their assumption by the believer who wants appeasement and approach to God is being realized in the most natural way possible. The variety of soul experiences described in the *Psalms* offered every man the opportunity to get closer to this book and to assume the verses that made their soul to vibrate with God's longing. The *Book of Psalms* helps the believer to heal of the passions in his path to deification, because their moral content offers countless examples of lifting out of sin. Often, the hagiographer begins his prayer from the depths of sin and death, but ends it in the sphere of divine communion. In this regard, through pedagogical teachings and examples, the *Psalter* leads man to the Kingdom of God, giving him the choice between the two ways: the one that leads to dying and the one who deifies. Its accessibility and beneficial effect on the lives of the faithful made this Old Testament text to be assumed by each generation in both Judaism and Christianity.

The motivation of choosing this research subject 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 the doctoral research.

By addressing the issue of faith and righteousness in our work, as reflected in the Psalms, we believe that this research exercise can provide a complement to the literature by highlighting some unparalleled particularities so far. The relevance of the work is also supported by the metamorphosis that faith is going through today under the cultural, social, economic vectors, etc. Contemporary society is under the aegis of a critical cultural dynamism defined as postmodernism, a term that "is not only unusual and strange, but evokes what it wants to overcome or suppress modernism itself." Postmodernism appears

on the stage of human thinking in the continuity of enlightenment, but it is concretized as a stream that has structured its program in the deconstruction of social, cultural, philosophical and theological modernism. In Modernism religious language has lost its meaning, and inherited meanings have been perverted by a long list of modern atrocities (world wars, genocides, the pressure of terrorist acts), all these 21<sup>st</sup> century realities transforming the optimism associated with the modern period in a profound and lasting pessimism.

Postmodernism reveals the failure of the enlightenment program of modernism of the ideal society in which man finds his existential value. In this sense, as Hunter Baker points out, "postmodernism may have emerged from the Western rationalism which overestimated its value and efficiency and that promised too much. But perhaps it is more correct to say that the expansion of postmodern thinking is due to what some might call the long-term disappointment of modernity." The main line of postmodernism focuses on doubling the principles of modernism under an obvious note of deconstruction.

Postmodern theology, defined as the "theology of the secularized society", conjoined by the challenging directions of modernism, stood and stands under the sign of the "death of God", followed by Heidegger's dissolution of metaphysics: "God's death" means not only the extinction of onto-theology and classical metaphysical theology, but also the notion of mystical unity. The "God's death" brings with it the deconstruction not only of ousia, of the classical metaphysics but also of hyperousios of the neo-platonic mysticism", as John D. Caputo points out. "God's death" refers to an ongoing, never-ending project of "the deconstruction of the onto-theological God (...) the God of sovereign power (...) the death of ens supremum et deus omnipotens."

These statements about the religious character of contemporary postmodernist experience and culture derive from the development of the fundamental deconstruction of language, extended to religious language, specifying its conceptual boundaries with reference to Transcendence; religious language is a symbolic, conventional language, and dogmatic teachings - implicitly the articles of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol - do not reflect the possibility of expressing the Transcendent. In the postmodern condition, the current language of Western philosophy and culture is so alienated from authentic theological discourse that it sees its own incapacity to refer to God. For Western

philosophy, theology reinvents itself, but advances a God which is beyond any metaphysical assertion and construction, a God presented and sustained imprecisely and confusingly; a God alien to the act of self-discovery, to His own revelation. Because of this the philosophy of religion focuses on negative theology, beyond dogmatic literalism. It is omitted that Christian dogmas as defined points of faith (...) are not a system of teachings, finite in its perspective and dependent on man in its realization but the interpretation of the reality of Christ in the course of expansion into men. They express the most obvious Revelation (...). Although defined in form, they have infinite content.

The main objective of the present work is the analysis of the place of the *Book of Psalms* in the Orthodox spirituality, of the concepts, their own dogmatic and moral teachings, of the ascetic and moral fundamentals, using appropriate methodology for its research. That is why I presented the methods, techniques and procedures used in this scientific approach. Using the biblical scientific approach as a reference point, I will use the specific research methods of this kind.

a) The *Exegetic-hermeneutical method* through which there have been interpreted in a biblical, missionary, dogmatic and pastoral perspective the text of the psalms, as works expressing a profound religious sense according to the Jewish mentality, a mentality that was configured under the *influence* of *Yahweh's* presence in the lives of the chosen people. The authenticity and the theological value of the Psalms is argued in terms of internal (stylistic, grammatical and literary problems) and external testimonies (quoting, commenting and using them by Church Fathers and Writers). The interpretation of the various passages in the Psalms was made on the basis of the works of the Holy Fathers, the Romanian theologians, but also on the works of modern and contemporary theologians belonging to the Western space. Especially the diachronic exegesis was emphasized by the orientation of my thesis towards the author / authors of the biblical texts and the context in which they appeared, but also the synchronous one by focusing on the text of the psalms as a world in itself and to recipients as their receivers. Thus, attention was paid both to the intention of the Bible writers as well as to the intent of the text among its recipients, with great relevance to the contextualization of spirituality in today's human condition.

b) The *historical method*, tries to outline the theology of the five biblical authors and then look at it from a historical perspective. The purpose of using this method in my



work was to observe the characteristics of the relationship between man and God expressed through a deep religious feeling. Thus, a complex historical picture of Jewish thought from a religious point of view can be drawn.

c) The *analytical method* by which I aimed to highlight the distinctive theology of each author or writing, in order to answer a series of fundamental questions for the present study, what the author wanted to say, what was the context, what the author understands, what effect does its message have on its recipients? The advantage of this method is its ability to emphasize the unique message of each *Psalms* and its specific accents.

d) The *Christological method*, a substantial section of my work has dealt with the problem of the Christological Messianic Psalms. In fact, the Jewish thought stood in the expectation of the Messiah and, in this logic, the entire Old Testament is centered on the messianic person.

Given the vast amount of research conducted on *The Book of Psalms*, my PhD thesis resorted to consulting bibliographic resources. Thus, in a close connection with the fundamental notions with which this work operates are the historical sources and the specialty literature. For this, it was first necessary to consult a rich bibliography and working tools for introducing and familiarizing with the Old Testament theological principles, especially with the ancient Jewish mentality. Particularly important to our work were those works that we can consider to be extremely useful textbooks that helped us to familiarize with the psalm theology.

The work wants to be an emphasis on the peculiarities of faith and righteousness as it emerges from the Psalms, with an appropriate practical application for the contemporary consciousness of man. In essence, any academic step records an existential intent. *The Old Testament* has its original genius. By the surplus of thought and encouragement for improvement it become present in the spiritual needs of the believers. As a written Revelation, the *Old Testament* is part of our source and our norm of faith. In order to learn certain morals and life forms that revive the believers' soul, the *Old Testament* is a public service factor as a guide to the fullness in which all are united and perfect. The *Old Testament* writings not only depict a doctrine that is required, but bring a precious contribution to generating the idea of well-being. The ultimate term of human vocation finds a summative expression in that "be perfect", of course in the sense that the faithful

man does not remain in the state of the one who asks, but also strives and works to fulfill his longings.

The two issues examined have reached their desired outlook.

Exploring the Greek Septuagint, we can see that it did not have terms that correspond to the entire Hebrew ones. The first Hebrew term that the most frequent appears in the Bible is the radical אָמַן meaning “firmness” or “stability”. As a verb it is encountered in the form of the *hifil* meaning “faith” or “truth”. To confirm a truth, it was often said to someone or about something “so it is”, namely “Amin”. Used in the form of *hifil* which may have a predominantly causative effect, in the most frequently used cases it has an almost exclusively declarative meaning. As a noun, at *status constructus*, namely at genitive or together with the prepositions אֶל (be) = in, is expressed through “to trust in”, or לְ (le) = of, and expresses the direct connection that one can have with God. Faith in God in the sense of “trust” is fundamental in biblical monotheism. Most encounters of man with God end with long-term promises, and the divine message addressed to each generation always has the future in mind. For the biblical people it may not have been so important to meet with God, but it prevailed that man could trust the promises made by Him. It is therefore understood that the object of faith is first and foremost God even in the absence of these prepositions. Ex. *Be col zot hat eu od velo heemimt benifleotaiv*. (“Yet they have sinned and have not believed in His miracles”) (Psalm 78:32).

In the Old Testament, righteousness forms one of the central theological motives, even though within the historical tradition of the text the word has been put in comparison or in synonymous relation with other terms. The relationship that the word of justice also establishes with other terms such as: mercy, peace, judgment, faithfulness, truth, holiness and salvation, highlights the fact that justice is not only an appropriation of human character or of inter-human relations, but, more than that, perhaps unusual for the present perspective, generally and specifically designates the work of salvation of the world. From this perspective, justice must be seen as a theological specificity of the historical path of the Old Testament, especially if the act of righteousness is also seen in relation to the above terms. In the Hebrew language, the noun “righteousness” determines the

fundamental meaning of many words, namely biblical doctrines, which will have definite repercussions, not only on the Israelite life, but also on the structure of the Church.

The word forms the leitmotif of the Hebrew writings in the context when it does not refer only to the period when Moses received the law on Sinai, where we would rather be tempted to put it, but it designates a concept of life, a program well-established by this law on the basis of the covenant, which will favor its existence in itself (Lev 18, 5). All three parts of the Hebrew writings are at the center of the Covenant, which would be one with the receiving of the law and the observance of its provisions. The law for Israel becomes vital, because respecting or not respecting the righteousness that is ontologically included in it will draw on the blessing or curse (Dt 28). The covenant, with its consequences, will gradually become the center of the connection between God and Israel, between God and every Jew, or between the Jew and his community.

If the body of laws given to Israel became the ethos by which the chosen people distinguished themselves from other oriental cultures, then justice forms its content or is ontologically included in it. The revealed law, before being a law, is eminently pedagogical and saving. In this sense, the special motivation of the law is ultimately the keeping of God's righteousness with respect to the community, the surrounding creation, and of course the direct relationship of each Jew with God. Starting from this, we extract the cosmic dimension of justice, as the general order of the world already established by God through creation. It can be seen from this that God's Revelation to Noah, Abraham, and then more intimately to Moses, forms not only a historical event which, perhaps, would have been lost in time, but it was and is, on the one hand, the milestone between the religion of Israel and the religious doctrine of the neighboring peoples, and on the other hand, the foundation and clear evidence of God's approach to His people through His law (Torah). I said that it is a leitmotif, because in all three great structures of the Old Covenant, righteousness is the sign of the law, motivation and purpose of prophetic activity, and one of the most dominant reflections of poetic literature.

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