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PhD THESIS SUMMARY

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: THE DIMENSION OF WEALTH AND POVERTY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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This doctoral thesis - *Christian responsibility in interpersonal relationships: the dimension of wealth and poverty in the New Testament* – aims a biblical theological analysis of an issue always present in human society regardless of time and framework. The reality of the social relationship between rich and poor has created ideological, economic, social cultures, which influenced the very progress of society from simple forms to complex structures. Equally, this polarity also leads to patterns of relationships between people, creating the premises for paradigms of functionality of societies. A theological analysis on the biblical basis of the relationship between rich and poor necessarily involves background analyzes of the dimension of wealth and poverty in the Christian spectrum based on the teaching of the Savior Jesus Christ and the experience of social life of the early Church. To what extent do Christian ethical principles of economic responsibility apply in the globalized society of the 21st century? In modern and post-modern societies, where major socio-economic reconfigurations take place under the impetus of globalization and, implicitly, dissensions between social classes, could the biblical Christian model of the relationship between rich and poor be implemented? To what extent does Christianity value wealth and poverty in a sense of civic responsibility? How can we participate in a wider economy without compromising our values?

These are questions that require as much analysis, debate. Religion, Christianity in our case, as an essential component in society, despite the fact that today it is required to be secularized and rid of traditional religious values, has the ability to direct certain vectors in psychosocial dynamics, stabilizing the relationship between rich and poor on criteria specific. It is these criteria that represent our points of design for a theology of wealth and poverty. We consider such an approach necessary.

A nuance of the significance of wealth and poverty, in a biblical theological paradigm, is all the more providential in today's context, that of postmodernist society conjugated by hyperconsumerism, as Gilles Lipovetsky mentions: “We live under the auspices of a new modernity: it coincides with the civilization of desire and was built gradually during the second half of the twentieth century. This revolution cannot be dissociated from the new orientations of capitalism engaged in the permanent stimulation of demand, the triumph of the market economy and the endless multiplication of needs: consumer capitalism has taken over, to carry it forward, the role of production economies. Over the course of several decades, affluent society has shaken up the way of life and morals, established a new hierarchy of ends and a new

relationship to things and time, to others, but also to oneself. Living in the present has replaced expectations about the future, and hedonism - political militancy; the fever of comfort took the place of nationalist passions, and entertainment the revolution."[1] Contemporary dynamics in its accelerated pace of consumption dictates new ways of presence of religion in society: "Circumscribed to the new religion of continuous improvement of living conditions, the taste for a better life has become a mass passion, the ultimate goal of democratic societies, a ideally claimed on any street corner. Rare are the phenomena that have managed to change so substantially the way of life and tastes, aspirations and behaviors of most people in such a short time. We will never highlight enough what the new man in liberal societies owes to mass consumption society. Apparently, nothing or almost nothing has changed: we continue to evolve in a society defined also by supermarket and advertising, by car and television. However, since the last two decades, a new earthquake has put an end to the old consumer society, transforming both the organization of supply and the daily practices and mental universe of modern consumerism: the consumer revolution itself has gone through a revolution. A new phase of consumer capitalism has been established: the hyperconsumption society. Its functioning and impact on human existence is a major one in the twentieth century."[2]

The message of the Gospel is constantly addressed to man in this framework of consumption, a message that specifies the dignity of the human person and invites awareness of responsibility towards those in the condition of human subsistence. Wealth and poverty are not only social conditions in the substratum of a society, but also have theological dimensions, as it results from the books of Holy Scripture. The conflicting antagonism between God and Mammon has a soteriological dimension as well as an ethical one. The soteriological dimension will find its resolution on the day of judgment, and ethics is embodied in the question of who we stand in fidelity and responsibility. As Philip Goodchild states in *Theology of Money*, " the alternative between God and wealth (personified as Mamona) is that between two existential references ", each of them " demands and shapes man's time, attention and devotion "[3]. Christian ethics is the rational process of making decisions in real life, which are in

[1] Gilles Lipovetsky, *Fericirea paradoxală. Eseu asupra societății de consum*, traducere de Mihai Ungurean, Polirom, 2007, p. 5.
[2] *Ibidem.*
[3] P.H. Goodchild, *Theology of Money,* London: SCM Press, 2007, p. 6.

agreement with both the will of God and the purposes of our creation, as revealed through the Logos, the Savior Jesus Christ. So, in essence, we take God's truth from His Word and apply it using our reason in real-life circumstances, in all their complexity.

Dealing with such a topic (wealth-poverty polarity) is a difficult topic for at least three reasons. First, Holy Scripture says a lot about the use of money and material possessions. It is difficult to know where to start the analysis from a methodological point of view, the New or Old Testament, which contain somewhat different economic experiences. Even if we limit ourselves only to the teachings of Jesus Christ about money / possessions, we risk missing the contemporary economic reality with Him, which is an extension of Jewish politics and society, but under Roman rule. Second, Holy Scripture often uses categories such as poor and rich differently than we use them today. " Poor " can mean poor material or poor spiritual and humble. If we are not careful, we will confuse the categories and misunderstand what Christ says about poverty and wealth. Third, it can be a personal and uncomfortable problem for people. We are not just talking in abstract terms about money and material possessions. We talk about how we should act with what we have and what we will have in the future. It's personal. Money is connected to our intention and heart. If we take economics or accounting courses, we will learn a lot about money. But this is the most important thing to accomplish: our attitude toward money reveals our heart, our intention: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21; 1 Timothy 6: 9-10). In the biblical horizon, the treasure has two meanings: a) money and material possessions, which are temporary and unstable; b) the reward we receive for faith in God and doing good for our neighbor.

Another idea that stands out in our approach is that wealth is a gift from God, as presented in the book of Genesis (26: 12-14; 2 Par. 1: 11-12). When mismanaged, wealth metamorphoses into a temptation to man's normalcy and spiritual integrity. Therefore, wealth brings us in the face of dangers, a recurring theme in the Gospels, especially Luke (18: 24-27). In the time of the Savior Christ, wealth had received a strictly pejorative note because of the abuses of the rich toward the poor and oppressed (James 5: 1-5). In other words, wealth risks holding us captive in the material.

In line with these considerations, our research will be carried out on several levels aiming at the following objectives:

a) the conceptual specification of the biblical terms that define wealth and poverty;

b) highlighting the socio-economic context in which the Christic teaching was expressed;

c) the presentation of the theological dimensions of wealth and poverty in the books of Holy Scripture, especially in the New Testament (the Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, the Catholic Epistle of St. James the Apostle);

d) the reception of Christian ethical principles about the relationship between rich and poor in the configuration of contemporary society.

The doctoral thesis, by bringing up to date the New Testament principles about the relationship between wealth and poverty, is placed legitimately and authoritatively in the context of the rhythm of consumerism in the sec. XXI, a rhythm that dehumanizes and abstracts both the socio-cultural condition of man and the religious one.

In the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, industrialization, urbanization, colonialism and globalization transformed the nature and scale of the economy and politics and presented immense social and spiritual challenges for the Churches of all spectra. The concomitant development of a vast accumulation of capital through small-scale and massive poverty at the individual, societal, national and international levels has led to broad Christian attitudes towards free market capitalism and responsible uses of wealth. In the early twentieth century, in the United States, when the social gospel faced the structural ills of urban poverty and identified the gospel as social justice in connection with liberal theology, many conservative Christians claimed the primacy of the gospel's spiritual message, focusing on charities. and have largely withdrawn from social involvement. Then liberal theology, influenced by Marxist ideology in the context of corruption and the harsh social, economic and political status quo in Latin America, took the notion of God's preferential option for the poor as the normative vision of the gospel and sought economically and " Liberation to the poor and oppressed " through the prism of transformation as a central concern.

Now, in the 21st century, the major challenge is consumerism which dictates irrational attitudes in man's relationship with himself and in the relationship between people. The ideology of consumerism is persuasively inoculated, reducing people's aspirations for things, to an existence exclusively dominated by the earthly. Man becomes a consumer animal, he is unable to look at the sky, to orient his life towards

the transcendent. He is the prisoner of a system of objects, living with the conviction that he can be fulfilled by consuming things. Family communion, the relationship of friendship, including the relationship with God are hijacked through a consumer understanding. Everything is motivated to consume as much as possible. The more ferocious a consumer becomes, the more he becomes lonely, hoping that the loneliness of souls will be compensated by the abundance of consumption.

By evading the relationship in a symbolic way, the mystery of the person and of life are distorted in the system of objects imposed by the ideology of consumerism. The technical civilization of consumer society tries to compensate for the disappearance of the relationship based on gestures and personal abilities through the efficiency of an impersonal system. The power of technique to abstract and formalize existence has led to a deficit in gestures, personal feelings and an increased complexity of objects. Jean Baudrillard shows that through the existing technology in the consumer society, through which several common body gestures have been replaced by automatic techniques, have profound psychophysiological consequences. He shows that there has been a real revolution on a daily basis: in today's society, objects have become more complex than human behavior in relation to them. The objects were differentiated by an increased complexity, while the interpersonal and intrapersonal relations became impoverished. Jean Baudrillard[4] shows through an analysis of impressive depth that the identity of consumption is not due to a certain material practice, nor to a phenomenology of abundance, nor to a state of mind oriented on the desire to consume the possessed object, but by a manipulation. of signs. In this process, both the identity of the subject and the object, and the relationship between them are distorted. By interpreting consumption in this way, one can explain the deficit of life, of living relationship which is replaced by the relationship of consumption in contemporary society. Desires, passions, projects, everything is subject to the logic of consumption through which a system is built where all human projections are efficiently integrated, dissolving the particularity of human identity and dignity.

By diverting the relationship between subject and object in the consumer society, the pattern of homo economicus is developed for which there is a reciprocity between objects and needs. The encounter between homo economicus and the society of abundance generates a series of needs. Such a man, dominated by a thought

[4] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulare şi simulacre,* Cluj, 2008, pp. 13-14.

structured by formal rationality and technocratic efficiency, will seek to fulfill his needs narcissistically, making the most of objects in this regard. But the infinite need of man converted by the ever more varied and intense satisfaction of needs by the possession of objects cannot be materially fulfilled. The consumer man produces in order to consume even more, and in this dynamic, he is integrated in an abstracting and dehumanizing system.

There is a reciprocity between consumption and production. The man of the consumerist society, inventing new and various forms of satisfying some needs, artificially induced is more and more integrated in a production system, guided by the logic of technocratic efficiency. Education has become a tool for maximizing the capacity of a higher salary, with the focus shifting from being to having. What is related to the systematic consumption in the society of the XX-XXI centuries presents the prolongation and the equivalent of the training exercised on the population from the rural area in the XIX century that migrated to the cities in the context of the industrial revolution. The same social engineering generates the deception of believing that the man of consumer society has freed himself from the straps of a system, when in fact he becomes more enslaved by a system to which he gives his whole being.

The consumerism of today's society is not reduced to the economic, social or political field. As Gilles Lipovetsky mentioned, we are facing borderless consumerism, world-consumption that generalizes hyperconsumption in all areas of globalized society. It is a state of mind that exacerbates consumption, proposes it as a life experience, emotional and even spiritual. In this sense, the consumerism of the hyperconsumption society becomes a kind of new religion that promises man the magical satisfaction of all desires. Life on both a personal and community level is organized according to the principles of consumerism.[5]

For the purpose of a precise and nuanced biblical-theological analysis, we opted methodologically for a series of scientific techniques generally used in theological research, which have certain peculiarities. In this order of ideas, we opted for the following methods:

a) The historical method, by which the reality and the economic and social structure in the ancient and contemporary Judeo-Christian space of the Savior Jesus Christ were contextualized. Based on this method, we updated the pattern and mentality

[5] Gilles Lipovetsky, *Fericirea paradoxală,* p. 11.

of people regarding wealth, poverty and the relationship between rich and poor. Thus, we can understand the critical notes of the Savior Jesus Christ and the New Testament authors toward the rich.

b) The exegetical-hermeneutic method, through which we explored the dimensions of wealth and poverty in the Old and New Testaments by appealing to biblical commentators, exegetes and interpreters established in the literature.

c) The systematic method, which allowed us a structural logic in the development and fluidization of the ideas that composed each section of the thesis.

This doctoral thesis intended to decipher the theological dimension of wealth and poverty, the social relationship between rich and poor on the premises of New Testament teaching. Although the society of the 21st century is much more complex in terms of social, cultural and technological structures, the principles of economic and social relationship have generally remained the same.

It has been found throughout our analysis that the problem of wealth, poverty, and the Christian faith is as old as the New Testament and extends to the Old Testament. As noted, Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) required a kind of discipleship that forbade any competitive commitment to other nations or to anything other than oneself, including money, property, and goods. From the beginning of the Christian community, the way we deal with riches has been an important aspect of Christian discipleship and has been thought to express "an essential articulation of our faith in God and our love for our fellow men."[6] Christians argued that Christ's attitude toward and use of wealth was a critical feature of the identity that distinguished Christians from non-Christians. Regardless of how wealth and poverty are theologized, Christians have had to deal with and respond to the "clear" call for the social (material) responsibilities of the gospel. This test examines the ways in which Christians have interpreted, applied, communicated, and struggled with what they believed they understood as the Christian principle and mandate regarding material possessions. In this regard, we appealed to the Jewish and Greco-Roman foundations of early Christian teachings on the riches and condition of poverty, then focused primarily on the teachings of the New Testament, to finally address the interpretations and subsequent applications of these teachings. in a current historical development.

[6] L. T. Johnson, *Sharing possessions: Mandate and symbol of faith*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981, p. 17

I noticed that the ancient Mediterranean space shared a number of cultural perspectives that provided an important context for understanding New Testament teachings on the relationship between rich and poor.

In the Jewish tradition, the service of helping and caring for the poor were mandated by law and highly praised as means of atonement during the second temple (apocryphal tradition). While the rich believed themselves blessed in the older tradition and literature of wisdom, the prophetic critique of wickedness and the call to justice focused mainly on the strong and oppressive rich (often the same group of people) on the powerless and pious poor. In the Greco-Roman tradition, while philosophers extracted the virtue of liberality and public welfare of the rich, based on the principle of reciprocity, they also noticed the greed and greed of the rich, which were their characteristic vice; however, there was no general concept of social responsibility for the poor.

While Jesus associates with the rich and powerful (Matt. 27:57) and receives support from people with financial means (Luke 8: 1-3), Jesus in the synoptic gospels continues and radicalizes the traditional Jewish understanding of riches in an eschatological framework. First, although Jesus never condemns wealth as evil in itself, he constantly addresses the danger of riches as an obstacle to full commitment to God. In interpreting the parable of the Sower, "the deception of riches and the lusts of others" (Mark 4:19; Matt. 13:22; Luke 8:14) suffocate the word. Jesus regards Mammon as personalized riches against God, which claims the service and loyalty of a person as God does, but rejects the possibility of double service on our part: no one can serve both God and Mammon; money as a competitive object of devotion is implicitly given up. In the story of the rich young man who tries to inherit eternal life (Mark 10: 17–30; Matt. 19: 16–29; Luke 18: 18–30), man's wealth prevents him from following Jesus and therefore , the entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus pronounces that for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God is a virtual impossibility, except for a miraculous divine help. Second, while Jesus warns of the danger of earthly riches as a stumbling block, He also contrasts them with the eternal value of heavenly riches. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges his listener to keep his only treasures in heaven, as opposed to material ones, for what lasts forever is in heaven (Matt. 6: 19–21; Luke 12: 33-34) . In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus criticizes the rich man who put his trust in his earthly riches as a "madman" because he "gathers treasures for himself and does not get rich in God" (Luke 12:21). A clear example of keeping heavenly treasures and being rich toward

God is shown in the narrative of Zacchaeus, the repentant publican, who not only received Jesus into his home, but promised to give half of the goods. its poor " and pay back four times if he cheated on someone (Luke 19: 8). Thus, as has been widely acknowledged, Luke strongly links the correct use of riches to discipleship. Third, because the assurance of heavenly treasure is transposed into the care of the poor, God has a special interest in the poor. This theme is consistent with God's protection and care for the poor in the Old Testament. Jesus proclaims his mission in the terms of Isaiah 61: 1–2 (Luke 4: 18–21; Matt. 11: 5) with a specific reference to preaching the good news to the poor. Moreover, Jesus commands the rich ruler to sell his goods, give them to the poor, and follow him as he seeks eternal life (Matt. 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22).). Again, the evangelist Luke is well known for his special care for the poor, as references to Jesus' compassion and service. In the Beatitudes, these are the ones who receive the Kingdom of God, since the corresponding woes are pronounced to the rich (6:20, 24; cf. Mt 5: 3). God's special concern for the poor is also expressed in the theme of the "great reversal" of riches between the rich and the poor (Luke 1:53). In the messianic supper,, the poor, the unbelieving, the blind, and the lame " become God's honored guests, while others reject the invitation because of their earthly possessions (14:21; 14:13).

Luke's concern for the rich and poor continues in the Acts of the Apostles, as we have noted, with a greater emphasis on the unity of newly established Christian communities. The two famous passages (Acts 2: 43–45; 4: 32–37), which have been referred to throughout history as the norm normative ideal " of the community of goods for Christians, rather describe the expansion of discipleship (koinonia) into the community. Jerusalem as part of its distinct Christian identity. The Acts of the Apostles also show positive and negative uses of wealth: those who practiced generosity for the poor (9:36; 10: 2, 4) and those who gave priority to money over the needs of others (5: 1-11; 8: 14-24).

For the Holy Apostle Paul, wealth primarily denotes the character and activity of God and Christ — spiritual blessings and / or salvation (Rom. 2: 4; 9:23; 2 Cor. 8: 9; Eph. 1: 7, 18). , 2: 4, 7) - although it occasionally refers to typical Jewish piety and Greco-Roman moral teachings of the time, such as generosity (Rom. 12: 8, 13; 2 Cor. 8: 2; Ephesians 4:28). ; 1 Tim. 6:17) and hospitality (1 Tim. 5:10) with warnings against pride (1 Tim. 6:17) and greed (1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Tim. 3: 8). 1 Timothy 6:10 seems to reflect a popular cynical-stoic moral teaching of the time: "The love of silver is the root of all

evil, and those who lusted after it have gone astray from the faith, and pierced themselves with much pain." . The focus of the apostle Paul's generosity is on the collection for the Jerusalem Church (Gal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 16: 1–4; 2 Cor. 8: 1–9: 15; Rom. 15: 25–31) as an important symbol of unity. between the Jewish believers and the Gentiles, with a call for material and spiritual reciprocity.

In the rest of the New Testament, the Epistle of St. James the Apostle, as we observed in chapter III of the work, is notable for its vehement condemnation of the oppressive rich, who were probably outside its Christian community, which consisted mostly of the poor. . Reflecting the Old Testament prophetic tradition of the "wicked rich" and the "pious poor" and adopting his discourse, James condemns the rich with the sins of not paying for the work of the poor, for oppression, for the luxurious lifestyle.

Finally, Revelation treats earthly riches and commercial activities with great ambivalence. While Jesus exposes the true poverty of the Laodicean church's wealth (3: 17-18), he presents himself as the true source of wealth (2 Cor. 8: 13-15). Later, earthly riches and commercial activities are associated with the sins of Babylon, the earthly power of evil with selfish glory and luxury, the fall of which is imminent (Rev. 18: 1-24). However, Revelation also depicts the New Jerusalem with a lavish materialistic description, made of pure gold decorated with "all manner of precious stones" (Rev. 21: 18-19).

Early Christians continued their identity linearity with the Jewish conscience and the New Testament about wealth and poverty, as they moved further and further away from the Jewish context and identified more with Greco-Roman culture and society. Although there were divergent theories and practices regarding wealth, several consistent themes developed in the early church. First, a persistent ambivalence toward the rich and the rich continued, while the Church increasingly accommodated the rich in the community. The perception of the rich as inherently greedy and of wealth as being prone to danger and temptation led many Church Fathers to denounce the rich for their sins of greed and pride and to warn them of divine judgment for neglecting the poor. On the other hand, the Church Fathers theologize the salvation of the rich, as Christianity raided the upper class of the Roman Empire and assumed private property and social inequality as reality. Thus, the rich were considered necessary for the well-being of society and the Church for their material contributions and, at the same time, as spiritual inferiors to the poor, for their attachment to earthly possessions. This leads to the second theme: the main way to reach salvation for the rich and avoid greed was

generosity and charity. Influenced by the late Jewish tradition, charity gained saving and atoning value during the early Church. The rich and the poor had to help each other through this "great exchange" and symbiosis, which was finally established and continued in the medieval period. The answer also became an important means of penance and merit, necessary to obtain eternal reward. Eventually, a radical option, the renunciation of wealth and voluntary poverty, found its institutionalized form in monasticism. Monasticism sought to embody the "perfect" way of living the Christian life by giving up riches, the "perfect" way of following Jesus (Matt. 19:21) and in the community of goods, the "normative ideal" of the Church in Jerusalem (2: 43–45; 4: 32–37).

In conclusion, the doctoral thesis updates the ethical principles of reporting and the use of wealth, but also the theological dimension of poverty in the religious history of the two testaments.

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