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SUMMARY OF PHD THESIS

Prayer as a cultic act in the New Testament. Hermeneutic explorations and historical-theological contextualizations

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CONTENT

1. Research topic and objectives

This doctoral thesis, entitled *Prayer as a cultic act in the New Testament. Hermeneutic explorations and historical-theological contextualizations*, it is intended to be an analysis of soundings in the field of the experience of religious and ecclesial life of the first Christian communities, as a matrix of the primary way in which the cultic relationship of Jesus with man and God is configured. The topic is challenging and equally complex in many ways. First, concrete historical data on the form and content of early Christian prayer are relatively few, almost non-existent, except for references in New Testament writings, especially the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 2:42 states that the early Christians persevered in the teaching of the apostles and in communion, in breaking bread, and in prayers. respectively our Father (Matthew 6: 9-13; Luke 11: 2-4). What is certain is that prayer was a central form of worship. Second, where did Christians in the primary communities pray? Only in the private houses where they also celebrated the Eucharist ("breaking bread") or participated in the prayers established at the Temple in Jerusalem? These questions open up other approaches to the reconstruction of the Christian cult in terms of Christian prayer: are there continuities or discontinuities between the formal and substantive identity of the Christian prayer with the Jewish one? To what extent is the prayer given to the apostles by Christ - our Father - a derivative of the prayers inscribed in contemporary Jewish cultic practice of the Savior Jesus, namely Shema and Tefillah? As can be seen, some interrogations may be striking, but they imply a note of objectivity in addressing the cultural reality of prayer taking into account essential factors and the configuration of the Christian worship through the Christian-Jewish community, theological aspect of the Holy Apostle Paul and the Christological dimension of the Christian cult.

It can be seen that the theme proposed for analysis is a topical one, and the biblical exploration of the valences of prayer in the religious experience of the New Testament Christian communities is the argument of our research, as the main objective. This purpose of the analysis can be constituted on the argumentation of a series of punctual objectives: a) the specification of the conceptual vocabulary and of the prayer in the horizon of the writings of the New Testament; b) the argumentation of the discontinuity / continuity relations between the prayer practiced in the first Christian communities and the prayer of the Jewish cult; c) the exegetical analysis of the prayer of our Father (Matthew 6: 9-13; Luke 11: 2-4), as a paradigm of the prayer taught by Jesus Christ to the Apostles; d) highlighting the particularities of the prayer in the Lucanian writings; e) the inclusion of the doxological and intercessory prayer in the theology of the Holy Apostle Paul.

Hermeneutical explorations in the writings of the New Testament reveal that prayer was a fundamental cultic act in the life of apostolic communities, an axis around which the gravity and modeling of the Christian cultic content, the experience and the experience that is present and experienced. the life of the Church forever. Practically, the Christian cannot think outside the experience of prayer, because prayer in its

dimensional valences (relational, communication, identity) gives substance to the meaning of being a Christian in the sacramental and liturgical space of the Church.

A definition of prayer is as difficult to realize as it is necessary to decipher its valences. That cultic religious reality, prayer, in its various forms, is present in all religious expressions articulated in the form of religions or cults. The Christian particularity of the meaning of prayer resides in its unique character which involves a subject and an object: man and God in a dynamic of personal relationship through and in the Savior Jesus Christ. The most comprehensive, but at the same time synthetic definition of prayer is offered by Saint John Chrysostom: ″ (...) we can say that the greatest good of prayer is that all the man who prays talks to God (sn); and every man knoweth what is the man, that he may speak unto God.

Prayer, as a cult act, has a multilateral dimension. Not only theologians, but also philosophers and religion, sociologists, psychologists were convinced of the importance of prayer in the configuration of its existential meaning. K. R. Stolz stated that prayer can be simple and comprehensively defined as man's relationship with God. This vision presents a specific relationship between two people. Clearly, the relationship is not between equals, implying just as much as the human being seeking an ideal connection with a deity. Such an effort involves the fact that the weakest member of this duo goes to the strongest for help and, indeed, this is the main feature of most types of prayer. Given this perspective, G. A. Buttrick assigns a certain degree of "humility" to the one who prays. J.P. Dubois-Dumee supports this view of prayer by stating that prayers are ways to God. .″ This definition leads us to focus on the experiential nature of prayer and its communicative essence. G. A. Buttrick emphasized the interpersonal conversational quality of human-God interaction, which he adapted from the I-you format.

Contemporary definitions emphasize, in general, that prayer is an act of communication, often using terms such as "addressing" or "request", with "need" being the most common motivation for initiating prayer. The same emphasis is found in current theological dictionaries, where we encounter phrases such as reverent petition, fervent petition and, worship, communion and devotion. Attempts to define prayer focus on the personal-theological significance of the process. Why pray? Why communicate in this special way with God? G. Harness states that Prayer is an offering of our desires to God for things agreeable to His will. Prayer is thus a receptive communicative behavior, colored by individual motives (ie desires or lusts) that are inherent in the simple act of being human.

The problem of needs requires additional specifications. A need implies a deficiency, a deficiency or a weakness that must be corrected. Prayer and helplessness are inseparable. Most theorists state desires and inadequacies that produce stress and tension when they are unfulfilled. Many commentators extend the concept beyond simple satisfaction of needs. In some parts, they see prayer as offering individual growth potential, not just a means of overcoming some of its shortcomings or failures.

Prayer is communication. Through it, it is reported and even identified with the Divine. Theological literature on prayer emphasizes God's love, union with God, and a number of similar terms such as praise, worship, and worship. There is a relationship

between the one who prays (ie the prayer) and the Divinity to whom he prayed, prayer leading to this interaction different understandings and expectations. Clearly, prayers attribute power to God and, in most cases, anticipate goodwill on His part. This anticipation easily translates into a belief that someone has gained extra protection and security, which leads to greater peace of mind. In this case, a feeling of helplessness was counteracted by an increase in the sense of control, even if that control is experienced only indirectly. This key role in prayer, giving it a greater sense of control, is, of course, part of the wider realms of religion and spirituality, which seem to correlate positively with psychological and physical well-being. Almost everyone prays at one time or another. Each of us has been exposed to ideas that overwhelmingly describe worship and prayer in positive terms. Images of hope, promise, reward, and desired potential are part of the motivation for prayer and other religious activities. In essence, someone who prays is likely to have been well-conditioned culturally to expect a positive outcome from his or his prayer.

The socio-communicative aspect of prayer can be the most obvious feature. Whether it is psychologically conceived that taking place between friends or between a child and her father, the relationship involved in prayer grows rapidly in complexity. Clearly, for practitioners, prayer is not an ordinary conversation. As I mentioned, it is certainly not considered that by sweating between equals, neither by those who pray, nor by researchers. The status of the addressed object determines the grammar of the discussion, it is no longer the daily discourse of the people. Many scholars use a large amount of energy to define what should be the right relationship between a deity and a believer, and although it is not always openly recognized, factors such as ingratitude are commonly observed. The one who prays frequently opens his prayer thus acknowledging the high status, power, special concerns and mercy of God. Feelings are invariably expressed about when and where you should pray, the mood of the prayer, the methods of prayer, the reasons for prayer, the forms of prayer, and a number of other considerations. Prayer is simply a very meaningful conversation, with important implications for the existential meaning of life.

We can define prayer as a call to a higher power, invariably a deity conceptualized in a relational sense. It can be formal or conversational, enunciated or silent, using written words, song lyrics or contemporary utterances; it can be carefully circumscribed either spontaneously, publicly or privately, involving gestures, body postures, oral formulas, repetitions, concentrating on particular topics, meditation and various emotions; it can also stimulate or be stimulated by our emotions. Prayers are most often individual creations largely shaped by the doctrines and practices of our religious institutions. They can be based on different habits and given at certain hours or in certain functions.

But there is an aspect of the call through prayer, not only for the things he lacks or for one's shortcomings, but also for personal improvement, progress and growth. Such appeals do not have to be just for themselves, but can be for others, communities, nations, humanities or for those who have died or will be born soon; they can focus on past behavior or future possibilities. In short, efforts to encapsulate prayer in a few words are likely to change its potential. The best definition of prayer has a direction -

in fact, many directions - towards the cognition, motivations, personality and social and religious behavior of the prayer.

A purpose of prayer may be to stimulate religious experience, to enter a state in which one meets God, to experience his ecstasy, an etheric feeling that conveys a sense of unity and completeness, along with new knowledge, how to joy and happiness. H. D. Lewis thus identifies prayer with all religious experience, with the living moments of religious awareness. He goes on to say that a lifelong awareness of God is induced and maintained through prayer. From a psycho-dynamic perspective, P. Pruyser suggests that the way he prays is designed to enhance an imaginative form of thinking, which in turn leads to religious experience. In other words, prayer probably activates unconscious factors which then stimulate it to produce conscious ideas. The association of religious experience with prayer implies the true purpose of prayer. Although some kind of experience is present in virtually every human activity, including prayer, much of what we live in our daily lives is far from what the true religious wants in prayer.

2. Relevance of the researched topic

The relevance of the research topic lies in the fact that prayer in the New Testament cultural experience is of fundamental importance in defining the primary Christian worship. We are not wrong in saying that the prayer of the first Christians was the matrix of their identity in the ancient multi-religious landscape, an identity marked by the first through its Christocentric meaning. This Christocentric imprint has become the essential vector of the Christian cult as a whole, but also of the theological development of the centuries that followed the apostolic period. The ecclesial experience, realized through the factor of the unity and vivacity of the Holy Spirit, was gradually resized in the cultic expression whose stake was Christ Jesus, and through Christ the Father and, implicitly, the Holy Spirit. Thus, beginning with the Apostle of the Gentiles, Paul, the materialization of the Christian cult takes place through metamorphosis, which means sacrifice, worship, adoration, prayer, biblical reading in a Christocentric dimension. Basically, it goes beyond the pattern of Jewish worship, centered on the worship of Yahweh, on the cultic focus on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah who redeemed the human nation from ancestral sin. However, this fact reaches a sensitive point, still debated today in the sphere of biblical scholars and liturgists.

As I mentioned, a special focus in our research is focused on the reconstitution and evolution of the Christian cult in the first Christian communities, which opens the issue of the relationship between primary Christianity and the Jewish cultured experience. Can an understanding of Jewish origins and the Christian cultic dimension be assumed in its primary form regarding the practice of prayer? Is it legitimate to assume that worship was a distinct activity in both traditions and that ancient Christian cultic practices were derived from Jewish ones? What are the intersections regarding the form, formulas, and substance of prayer between New Testament Christianity and contemporary Judaism of the Savior Christ? Difficult questions that require answers that are complex from a historical-biblical point of view. However, worship in the

modern sense of the word is something else for both ancient Jews and Christians. The ancient Christian identity was expressed and sustained by a variety of quite different ritual practices, individual and community. Worship was not a kind of weekly corporate activity, but a lifelong devotion to God. This included particular bodily expressions of devotion, performed privately or jointly from day to day, as well as the deepest dispositions of the heart and mind expressed in some moments of conscious adoration or gratitude; the cult took shape in such particular events, but was not limited to them, as stated by A. b. Mcgowan.

It must be admitted that the Savior Jesus Christ Christ acted as a Teacher in the Jewish environment in which he was born, raised, formed, being a tributary to this religious way of identity. Christ had a conformity with the Jewish cultic practices: he goes to the Temple in Jerusalem, reads from the prophets, celebrates the Passover, etc. To assume that He and the apostles created new forms or acts of worship, radically situated in discontinuity from the Jewish cult, is wrong. Of course, this does not mean that there is a fundamental continuity between the early Christian worship and the Jewish worship held at the Temple in Jerusalem. For these reasons, we are talking more about restructuring the Jewish cultic forms into new Christological meanings. The Christian Baptism is different in comparison with the sacrificial libations of Judaism, the Eucharist is different than the sacrificial mass of the Passover, in a different pattern are the Christian assemblies and the structure of the community and the post. Practically, Christ and the apostles established new cultic impulses, on other religious and doctrinal coordinates, impulses and forms that have developed over time to the complex forms of today.

Because the Eucharist, baptism, and daily prayer have appeared in different ways and purposes (not that variations on a single theme of worship), there are quite different answers to the way in which Jewish origins are important for each of us to understand. In the case of prayer, Jewish practice was indeed the immediate and organic starting point for many things that the early Christians did, and it is the important foundation for us to understand. However, not all ancient Jewish texts and prayer patterns known to us provide evidence relevant to the prayer of the first disciples and of Jesus Christ or that of the older ecclesial community. Since Judaism, as well as Christianity, has changed over time, the rabbinic materials of later centuries, such as Mishnah and, even more so, the Talmuds, have shown how they have prayed. of distinct Christian practice (and sometimes in congruence with it), but without direct disclosure to its sources. The Acts of the Apostles depict the early Christians who participated in specific patterns of prayer, among a characteristic set of community practices: “And they persevered in the teaching of the apostles, and in communion, and in breaking, and in prayer. Δὲσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καχ ταῖς προσ. This depiction in the Acts of the Apostles (1:14) of the early Christians who participate together in "prayer" already suggests something more than prayer in general.

However, the same scriptural sources mention that some Christians continued some Jewish practices, being described as going to the temple to pray after they had become believers in the crucified and risen Lord (Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46). In one case,

the apostles Peter and John are depicted ascending the temple at the hour of prayer, the new hour (Acts 3: 1), suggesting not only that the Temple was a convenient place for them, but that they joined the prayers together. held at that time in connection with the daily sacrificial offerings. Christians also seem to have continued to participate in synagogue meetings (Acts 9:20; 13: 14–45), but these were not necessarily the normal place for daily prayers; if attending the temple for daily prayer was not a practice for many devout Jews, personal marriage was probably the alternative place.

Since first-century Judaism itself was diverse, and its forms of prayer reflected this variety, different elements of communal prayer must not have been in great tension for the early Christians in Christ. The mere act of distinctive prayers for one (other) identifiable movement — including in this case a focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ — was not necessarily so remarkable. Some of the features of the Jewish prayer shared by these early Christians in his temple house are conclusively attested. A model of morning and evening prayer, already prescribed in Deuteronomy (6: 7), centered on the formula known by its opening in Hebrew as Shema ("Hear"): "Listen, Israel: The Lord is our Lord, only the Lord." Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deut. 6: 4–5) First-century Jewish theologians confirm the importance of morning and evening prayer. Later, Mishnah explicitly links this double pattern with Shema recitation, and this could have been practiced in the first century as well. Morning and evening were not the only recognized moments set for prayer; The ninth hour of the afternoon, when Peter and John went to the temple (Acts 10:30), was the time when the true evening sacrifice was offered.

Short Prayer Shema was more the center of a Jewish prayer than the whole, complex prayer. It seems that some Jews recited the Ten Commandments with it. The elaborate prayer, known as the Tefillah ("Prayer"), was an extended Shema with its petitions of blessings (berakot) and appeared during the first century, but was not a universal formula of Christ in his time. Such berakkah-type blessing prayers are very prominent in rabbinic texts and much older than they are, already appearing in biblical texts (Acts 24:27). They tended to be the Blessed Lord, followed by the appointment of bases for the blessing, such as the remembrance of God's merciful deeds. Early evidence of the rabbis indicates how this form developed in its different way from Judaism in the first and second centuries, but it cannot be assumed that this reflects the typical experience of all the Jews who prayed in the time of Jesus.

Another form of prayer was based on thanksgiving, praise or gratitude, expressed as a direct address to God, as in the formula I thank you (Ps. 136). These hodayot (hence hodah, ″thank″ or may ″thank you″ or even ″confess″, hence ″thanks″, hodayah) were also found in early biblical contexts. An entire collection of hodayot was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QHa), which probably reflected the concerns and practices of the sectarian Essene community. The prominence of contentment in early Christian prayer confirms the fact that similar themes and forms were important to the origins of the specifically Christian practice. Such a prayer was normally performed standing (Luke 18: 1) with outstretched hands (1 Tim. 2: 8). New Testament texts describing the prayers of those in urgent need of something suggest that the

kneeling was also well known, but was specific to such situations, rather than 9 daily practices (Acts 9,40).

The prayer of Jesus Christ has been identified as a model, as a paradigm by His disciples. While the Christian exegetes of the first centuries, as well as the more recent ones, reflected on the various aspects of the practice and theory of prayer attributed to Jesus Christ in the Gospels, the Lord's Prayer: 9 Matthew 2: 6; it was generally seen that the most important part of this teaching.

There are parallels between the requests of the Lord's Prayer and the 18 blessings (Shemoneh Esreh) added to Shema to compose Tefillah, as well as the prayer known as Kaddish prominent in later Judaism; both emphasize praise to God and recognition of God's holiness. The Lord's Prayer is not derived from it, but it reflects a common environment, at least with Tefillah, Kaddish being attested much later. The first readers of the Gospels did not think of the Lord's Prayer in the first place as a model or a handbook on prayer, although it may have been so, but for them, the first intention was to utter it in their prayers. This was already explicit in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, where established prayer is contrasted with "much talk." (6: 7). The example and teaching of Jesus Christ also reflects a concern for the communal dimension of prayer and the role of the Temple (Mark 11:17; Luke 2:17; 18:10), as well as a more solitary aspect (Matt. 6: 5-). 6; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). Both aspects, public and private, were applied in later Christian practice.

It is noteworthy both the differences and the similarities between the versions of Matthew and Luke to the Lord's Prayer, so that the version of Luke could reflect an original form, the longer one of Matthew could be related to the language. or a Greek rendition of an Aramaic original). However, we may not think of a single original frame of prayer. Beyond these two obvious canonical versions, the actual manuscripts of the Gospel offer up to six different versions. The form of the Lord's Prayer in the early Christian compilation of the regulations for the life of the Church, known as the Didache, is similar to the version of the Gospel of Matthew, but probably reflects the prayer as it was said in the community itself.

These differences in detail, on the one hand, and the similarity of the nucleus, on the other, are both important indicators of the meaning and use of prayer in the early decades. Diversity provides evidence that the Lord's Prayer was used on a large scale and that community use proposed adaptations to liturgical texts, then and now. The community confirms the use and importance of the wide attribution attributed to prayer and the author. There were other prayers, composed in time in some cases, but with recognized forms, offered at set times. Such poetic and prayer compositions provide an idea of how prayer was and situational Christian praise. The content of such a prayer seems to focus on the petition or intercession, on the one hand, and on praise and thanksgiving, on the other. The language of thanksgiving or confession prevails, in general, over that of blessing, which I have seen coexisting in contemporary Jewish sources.

The reference to Jesus Christ and the idea that prayer was offered "through Jesus Christ" is also characteristic of early Christian texts (Rom. 1: 8; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 2: 5; Jude 25) and probably by following the practice of prayer. Paul's writings also refer

to the prayer addressed jointly to God as Father and Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 3: 11-13) and especially to Jesus Christ (Rom. 10: 9-13; 2 Corinthians 12: 8).). Pliny's account of the Christian practice of prayer addressed to "Christ as God" (Letters 10:96) also suggests his Christian-centric prayer, reminiscent of Jewish forms such as a new Hodacenth.

All these brief details about the form, the substance of the Christian prayer in the New Testament, and its interference with prayer in the Jewish cult are important coordinates of the relevance and topicality of the theme.

3. The methodological framework for research

The doctoral thesis aims at a biblical approach, with interdisciplinary multilateral inflections (liturgical theology, Church history). For a systematic logical presentation of the theme of prayer in the New Testament, as a point of reference in the biblical scientific approach we used specific research methods such as: ; b) the historical-critical method, through which an attempt was made to contextualize the Christian data about the prayer practiced in the first communities according to the Acts of the Apostles; c) the comparative method, by which the interferences between the forms, the background and the particularities of the prayer from the early Christian cult and the Jewish cult were systematically analyzed.

As a scientific tool for analyzing and interpreting certain biblical terms with reference to prayer, I have used lexicons, dictionaries: W.Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament and other Early Christian Literature,* E.T. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (eds), 3rd edition revised by F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Ed.), Vol. 2, Regency, Grand Rapids, 1976; *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter (Eds.), Intervarsity Press, Leicester, 2000; H. W. Beyer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 1987; G. Kittel. and G. Friedrich (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ET; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976); Schlier, H., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 5, 1986.

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