

OVIDIUS UNIVERSITY CONSTANTA FACULTY  
OF THEOLOGY  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FIELD OF  
THEOLOGY

**ON HOLINESS IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF THE  
HOLY APOSTLE JOSEPH**  
**(Summary)**

PhD Coordinator:

His Eminence Prof. Teodosie Petrescu

PhD student:

Pr. Mihai Cîrțan

Constanța 2023

This paper explores the need of human nature to articulate itself to the divine dimensions of God's work in the world from the perspective of the noutestamentary vein of the First Epistle of the Apostle and Evangelist John. Here I have deepened the theme of holiness and sanctification of the human being, first of all, in a general sense, in order, by integrating this message into the broader framework of the Christian Church's teaching of faith, to reaffirm the role and importance of the teaching on holiness and sanctification, and to be able to highlight once again the value and theological importance of the message and epistolary model that addresses to the world the message of salvation in the life of the Christian faithful that the Apostle John conveys through this Epistle.

The present research highlights the necessity of human being to articulate itself to the work of God as a permanent constant of human being, but also as a dimension of its communitarian and communal nature. It also examines, in context, the history of the issues that have survived, as religious reflections, in the relationship between Holy Scripture, the Church and the human being understood as a creature created by God. The study concludes with a synthesis of these themes analysed in order to highlight and prioritise, through an orthodox vision, the ideas debated that the concepts of saint, sanctification and holiness as proposed by the first Solemn Epistle of Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, also called Saint John the Theologian because of the lofty theological teaching contained in his writings, generate in the area of Christian spirituality and theology.

### ***ARGUING THE CASE***

Christianity is a religion in transition. As part of an ever-changing world that progresses, develops, renews and reinvents itself, Christianity is subject to the changes of human cultural and social existence. In the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century Christianity has been influenced by a series of cultural changes and transformations. One of these is the shift from a perspective that regards human truths and knowledge as universal to one that regards them as shaped, determined and even validated by specific cultural, social and political contexts. This change is the result of analyses and critiques of poststructuralism and postmodernism. But while this line of research is not always rendered or followed through to its ultimate conclusions, it has a profound impact on theology and the Christian Church in the world today. It also gives rise to a explicit critical awarenesses that

influence the shape of contemporary theology. These statements, their implications and consequences, are the main concern of this work, which aims to highlight the role of holiness in the life of the Christian believer from the perspective of St. John the Apostle, as he expounded it in his first Sovereign Epistle.

The notions of sanctification and holiness are characteristic of all religious ideas and beliefs, but in the Epistle of I John they are defined by St. John the Theologian from perspectives and in ways that neither Jewish thought nor the pagan world had previously addressed. Therefore, although we do not find holiness used as a term in the Epistle of I John, we do in fact find numerous references to the state of holiness described through the lives and experiences of Christian believers in the Johannine community.

Thus, the Apostle John addresses his disciples in this Epistle asking them to sanctify themselves and remain in holiness in all dimensions of their lives. As such, he speaks to them about holiness, urging them to remain in the faith they have received, to stand upright and steadfast in the face of false teaching, to love their neighbors as Christ himself loved the world, and to fear not the judgment of the Lord at the time of the Parousia because if they live a holy life through the work of the Spirit in this life, they will receive eternal life at the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, holiness must be the Christian's daily state of life.

### ***PURPOSE OF WORK***

This paper is concerned with analyzing the relationship between the theological message of the first Johannine Epistle and the reception of its sanctifying dimension centered on turning away from those who seek to divide and disturb the lives of those who have chosen to follow Christ. It is also interested in exploring the ways that give specificity to Johannine theology through which it interacts with the traditions of early Christianity through exegetical study that engages both the theologian and the theological community, which raises the question of the difference between the theological content and its message in order to specify and shed light on this possible direction of research. In this context, we acknowledge that both the context of the theme addressed and the human experiences shared by its perusal, along with other traditional theological sources, constitute significant components of the approaches taken by contemporary biblical scholars and exegetes of the Epistle of I John. In this way, we aim to

analyze the relationship between the pericopes making up the Epistle of I John in order to obtain all the relevant details related to the references on which the author of the epistolary text uses in his arguments to the community of disciples on the verge of disunity and dissipation.

Given that the role of the Johannine message is so important because of its perennality and the theological depths that it conveys continuously over the ages with the same persuasive power and doctrinal aplomb and pathos, to understand this type of Christian theology, but also given the fact that the language of the Epistle of I John resists and remains equally alive to all translations in all languages of the earth and all cultural contexts, social and historical contexts to which it has been addressed throughout history, we believe that highlighting the holiness which the Epistle of I John subliminally conveys is an absolutely necessary approach whose message must be addressed from generation to generation to all the nations of the world, with the same care and love, with the same firmness and insistence that the Apostle John had towards his disciples when he addressed this first Epistle to them. We will not here undertake a radical theological approach to the Christian First John, but, in a contextual sense, we will keep the Johannine theological message in its inextricable form, bound to the context in which the Epistle was written, but open to all horizons who wish and want to listen to it, to see it with their mind's eye, to believe in it, to remain there and to witness to it further so that the thought of Saint John the Theologian may permeate the time of this world until the end of time. This is the major objective of the present study. Such a reading of our work, carried out in the key of biblical exegesis and contextualized in the missionary message of the scriptural witness, considers that it contributes to the promotion of authentically Christian teaching in conditions linked to the context of the universalization of the message of love and trust as spaces for the manifestation of God's holiness in man and in the world. These elements of Christian doctrine present in the Epistle of I John give us the opportunity to reflect on holiness from a number of perspectives, such as, for example, to consider how Christian theology is indeed bound to the context of a distinct and difficult moment or somehow transcends the historical context through the persuasiveness of its message. Or also what is the relationship between different faith teachings and how they are presented in identifying the state of holiness. And, even more so, to problematize Christian identity as fact and essence of the state of holiness.

It should be noted that the situation described in the Epistle of I John is in fact a description in nuce of the great Christian theological pluralism, but also religious pluralism at the timeless human level. Therefore, analysing the text of the Epistle of I John, in our opinion, it is obvious that we can speak of a Christian "orthodoxy" or of a Christian "core" that can be a

universal model of holiness and sanctification in within these different religious faiths and theologies that can be identified in the content of the Epistle of I John. At the same time, we note that this context highlights the sanctifying value of the message that St. John validates through its persuasive capacity not only for his disciples, but for man of all times and places. It is in a set of such approaches that the place and significance of the study we propose to carry out and address to contemporary theology lies, which represents, in our opinion, a novel approach in the field of Romanian biblical studies today.

### ***RESEARCH STATUS***

In the Christian interfaith space, the subject has been debated for over half a century. Approaches to this topic have produced much literature, but have not exhausted the ideas discussed, although they have thus outlined the general message of the first Johannine Epistle. At the same time, agreement was reached on the style, form and structure of the Epistle, while the debate on its authorship remains distinct in its conclusions. For these and other reasons, the debate about the message of the first Epistle of St John the Theologian continues to occupy an important place in contemporary religious affairs. The Apostle's relationship with his disciples, for example, has been another topic of debate from the outset. The diversity of the people to whom Christ addresses himself, and which John continues in his Gospel and Epistles as they appear in the New Testament, is revealing in this respect. Moreover, the entirety of Holy Scripture reveals that the prone work of the Holy Trinity is constantly being done for all creation.

While the study of the Epistle of I John continues to generate debate, in terms of the theme of our paper related to the sanctifying message it conveys, there are numerous approaches that are significant to the way biblical studies understands how to treat this theme. In this context, what stands out at the moment is a contemporary Christian theological enterprise that deals with an undeniable aptitude for researching biblical texts. Therefore, we too will follow the same path of biblical exegesis in order to examine and understand how exegetical thinking has developed so far concerning the relationship between the context of the early Church and the development of Christian theology faced with challenges, turmoil and disunity since its inception.

Although there are sufficient bibliographical sources on this or adjacent topics, none of the works systematizes a cohesive and unified approach to the theme that our paper proposes. It is true that what has been written on this subject so far cannot be contested or overlooked, and this information is also taken up in the present work, but the final conclusion of our work is decisive and clarifies that.

### ***GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORK***

Chapter One, entitled JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF THE HOLY APOSTLE JOHN, consists of two chapters, each sub-divided in turn, in which, in a constructive way, we have presented the main defining characteristics of the first Johannine Epistle and the general themes which are evident on a first reading of the text.

Thus, in the first part I began by presenting the place and date when the first Johannine Epistle was written, I identified the recipients of the Epistle, I highlighted the author's objective by noting the literary character of the Epistle, and in the second part I presented the spiritual authority of the Apostle John, the theme of eternal life, sin and redemption, what it means to abide in Christ and love God our neighbor.

In the second sub-chapter, THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRST EPISTLES OF THE HOLY APOSTLE AND GOSPELIST JOHN. CONTEXT, STYLE AND STRUCTURE I have composed it in five parts in which I have developed the theme of the Epistle, specifying in detail the author's motives, analysing the epistolary character and the structure of the book and I intend to carry out a complete exegesis from a grammatical, historical, semantic and structural point of view. In this regard, we have specified the structure of the first Subordinate Epistle of St. John the Theologian in which we distinguish: the prologue and the structural analysis of the pericope I John 1, 1-2, 27 as well as IJohn 2, 28-5, 21.

This approach allowed us to place our research in the context of biblical study and, at the same time, opened the perspective of approaching the concept of holiness in the relationship between the disciple and his spiritual father, but also the relationship between the believer and his fellow human beings and God.

In this regard, in the third chapter, THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ROLE IN DEFINING CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

IN THE EARLY EPISTLES OF THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST IOAN, we insisted on highlighting the role that holiness plays in the life of the Christian believer.

The historical manifestation of religious experience in the Johannine epistles emerges from an understanding of how John gave his First Subordinate Epistles the integrity of the message so that it could be correctly interpreted and received by the addressees. In this regard, we found it necessary to highlight to establish the authority, integrity and identity of the author in order to highlight how his religious message was validated by the early Christian community and in defining Christian holiness. For this it was necessary to analyze the semantics of the Epistle by pericope in order to highlight how the author exposed the experience of early Christian faith, the witness of faith through the senses of body and soul, family life understood as archetypal metaphor and experience of communion in the Christian community.

The fourth chapter, REVEALING THE HOLY MESSAGE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST THROUGH EXEGETIC ANALYSIS OF THE HOLY GOSPEL THE SOBORNICAL EPISTLES OF THE HOLY APOSTLE JOHN, is also made up of five sub- chapters and, as the title summarises, refers to the general framework for approaching the subject studied. In this sense, here we have taken up to deepen the objectives of the Epistle, thus identifying that the main objective is to highlight the identity of Christ as the Son of God through the references that John makes to His Incarnation. The secondary objectives I have extracted by analysing the way in which the adjacent ideas have been configured and explained and, consequently, I have summarised that the Epistle is one of hope, that it is authentic, persuasive, dynamic, credible through the presentation and composition of the images to which the author appeals in the realisation of his message and in the formulation of his sentence.

Therefore, in the final part of this chapter, as a culmination of the ideas and arguments used by John, we have carried out an exegetical analysis of the message of holiness by analyzing the technique of addressing the author of the text, thus noting that the sanctifying message emerges from the fluidity and coherence with which the Apostle addresses the most important teachings of faith to his disciples.

Chapter Five, SEEING, HEARING, AND ACHIEVING AS A MEANS OF MEASURING THE WORK OF THE HOLINESS OF THE WORLD BY THE SON OF GOD, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, IN THE LAST SUBBORNICAL EPISTLE OF OF THE HOLY APOSTLE JOHN, deals with the relationship between the theological teaching that Jesus is Christ the Son of God incarnate, and is as detailed a presentation as we could make of the

resources available to us. Thus, as the title indicates, in an interfaith cultural, historical and social context, in this chapter we have deepened the dimensions of the sanctification of the human being from the perspective of the sanctification and holiness of the saving work of Jesus Christ as a representation of the knowledge of God and the sanctification of human nature within the divinized community from the perspective of Christ-likeness, in which Christ as the Son of God confirms the state of holiness as the reality of the mystical presence of God in the community and communion of Christian life.

As such, the sanctifying dimensions of the Christian community are defined by defining and integrating the salvific ministry and eternal life into the sanctifying definition of the Christian community which is carried out according to the family-type model of the Holy Trinity.

The result of these interrogations and interpretations obtained through the present study reveals how the definition of the notion of familia Dei, the preferred concept of the Apostle John, remains an exhaustive expression of the contextualization of the Johannine message in the space of the Orthodox faith, which, in this sense, defines the characteristics of the first Solemn Epistles of John the Theologian, which have been handed down through the ages as models of a universal experience of God expressed later throughout the Christian tradition as the outpouring of the love of the Holy Trinity over all creation through the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The realization of this teaching of faith, which springs from the Church's teaching of faith and from Holy Scripture through the work of the Holy Spirit, has been our concern for the fifth chapter, succinctly called The Orthodox Contribution, in which we have also synthesized and presented Orthodox Christian teaching on mission in order to present how the Orthodox Church addresses the world in order to contextualize it for salvation.

The last chapter, the sixth, HOLINESS AND HOLINESS OF THE HUMAN BEING AS THE ESHATOLOGICAL STATES OF GODLY LOVE IN THE LAST EIGHTH THE HOLY APOSTLE JOHN THE APOSTLE OR KOINΩNI A IN FAMILIA DEI, discovers the eschatological future that perfects the present in which the created world lives as the state of the world from all time. For this reason we have deepened towards the conclusion of the present study, how, throughout six sub-chapters, we have presented according to John's vision, the Son of God constitutes the sanctifying presence of the world through trust and witness in His work.



This is why I have considered the "Last Hour" (I John 1:18) to be the key to the meaning of the sanctification of the human being contained in the parousiac message of the first Johannine Epistle. The community dimension and the religious life of this community, the second coming of the Lord and the day of judgment as dimensions of the familia Dei, the birth and following of Christ as permanent marks of sanctification, constitute the definition of *κοινωνία* which, through the work of the Spirit, are witnesses of Christ's work in the world for its sanctification. Therefore, those who believe in Christ must not fear and dare, not be ashamed at the second coming of the Lord, because they are born of the love of Christ which they will share in the same way that Christ, as the Son of God, gave it to those with whom He made Himself of one accord in order to make them like Him, and to see God as He is because of this supreme likeness to the Son of God.

Thus, in the text of this paper we will show that the theological message on sanctification and holiness is a challenge that St. John the Theologian addresses to his disciples to convince them that following Christ is the only option for salvation, which is why the text of the Epistle of I John represents not only an exhortation addressed by the Apostle and Evangelist John to remain in the saving faith that Christ preached, but also the perception of the sanctifying and deifying message of this Epistle that requires an appropriate approach to any study.