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ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS
“JESUS CHRIST, THE CRUCIFIED AND RISEN ONE, IN
THE THEOLOGY OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE”

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations	3
Preliminaries	7
1. Current State of Research	7
2. Research Objectives	11
3. Research Methods	12
I. THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE.....	15
1.1 INTRODUCTION	15
1.2. THE ORIGINS OF THE FUTURE APOSTLE.....	18
1.2.1. Date of Birth.....	18
1.2.2. Place of Birth	20
1.2.3. The Parents of the Future Apostle.....	24
1.2.4. Saul's Childhood.....	31
1.3. THE OLD TESTAMENT JEWISH BACKGROUND. EDUCATION IN JERUSALEM	35
1.3.1. The Apostle Paul and the History of His People's Liberation.....	37
1.3.2. The Future Apostle's Statements about Himself	40
1.3.3. Saul Saul's Jewish Education	44
1.3.4. From Tarsus to Jerusalem	47
1.3.5. Saul the Persecutor.....	49
1.3.6. Did Saul Know Jesus Christ Before the Damascus Experience?.....	52
1.4. FROM JERUSALEM TO DAMASCUS – THE CONVERSION	54
1.4.1. Saul's Baptism	57
1.4.2. Paul, - An Apostle Not from Men.....	59
1.4.3. The Effects of Saul's Conversion on the Christian World.....	60
1.5. PAUL, - A ROMAN CITIZEN.....	65
1.5.1. A Brief Overview of Roman Society	67
1.5.2. The Most Significant Rights of a Roman Citizen	68
1.5.3. The Apostle's Right as a Roman Citizen	70
1.5.4. "I am a Roman citizen" (Acts 22:25–29)	72
1.5.5. The Appeal made to Caesar Nero	77
1.5.6. The Defense before the Sanhedrin	80

1.5.7. The Apostle between Antonius Felix and Porcius Festus	82
1.5.8. Paul and Rome	84
1.5.9. Martyrdom in Rome. Testimonies from Tradition.....	88
Conclusions.....	91
II. JESUS CHRIST—THE CRUCIFIED ONE. THE CROSS BETWEEN SYMBOLISM AND POWER.....	94
2.1. INTRODUCTION	94
2.2. THE SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE HOLY CROSS	101
2.3. THE CROSS AS THE GOSPEL AND GIFT OF SALVATION.....	113
2.4. GOD’S POWER IS REVEALED IN WEAKNESS.....	116
2.5. THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS OVER DARKNESS AND SIN	122
2.6. THE CROSS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CRUCIFIXION.....	125
2.6.1. Christ Crucified in the Theology of Saint Paul.....	131
2.6.2. The Cross as a Symbol of Suffering	136
2.6.3. The Crucifixion of the Lord in the Life of the Christian	140
2.7. JESUS CHRIST, SAVIOR AND LORD (KYRIOS)	146
2.7.1. Jesus—Master of Death and Conqueror of Death	151
2.7.2. Jesus Christ—the Messiah	156
2.7.3. Jesus—Lord	166
2.7.3.1. The Use of the Term “Kyrios” in Christianity	167
2.7.3.2. St. Paul’s Use of the Term “Kyrios”	170
2.7.3.3. Several Moral Uses	173
2.7.3.4. Eschatological Uses	175
2.7.3.5. Conclusions Regarding the Use of the Term “Lord”	176
2.8. JESUS, THE SON OF GOD.....	177
2.8.1. Saint Paul’s Use of the Title “Son of God”	178
2.8.2. The Incarnate Son of God Is Our Supreme Goal	181
2.9. THE ATONING DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST	183
2.9.1. The Crucifixion: Some General Aspects	185
2.9.2. The Death of Christ the Savior	186
2.9.3. The Cross on Which the Son of Man Was Crucified.....	189
2.9.4. Christ on the Cross.....	190
2.9.5. The Central Role of the Death of Jesus Christ.....	196
2.9.6. The Cross and Its Multiple Images	198

2.9.7. The Heavenly Father's Purpose Through the Death of His Son	202
2.9.8. The Crucified Christ and the Christian Life.....	204
2.10. RECONCILIATION AND ADOPTION.....	206
2.10.1. A Testament for the Whole World.....	207
Conclusions	212
III. JESUS CHRIST THE RISEN ONE.....	214
3.1. INTRODUCTION	214
3.2. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AS A HISTORICAL EVENT	218
3.2.1. The Resurrection—Historical Evidence. Witnesses to Jesus' Death.....	225
3.2.2. The Resurrection of Christ in the Accounts of the Holy Gospels.....	236
3.2.2.1. The Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark.....	237
3.2.2.2. The Resurrection in the Gospel of Matthew	242
3.2.2.3. The Resurrection in the Gospel of Luke	251
3.2.2.4. The Resurrection in the Gospel of John.....	260
3.3. "CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS TRULY RISEN!" – THE FORMULA OF ETERNAL LIFE	284
3.4. ESCHATOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.....	292
3.5. THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD IN THE CHRISTIAN KERIGMA	295
3.5.1. The Resurrection of Jesus and Our Resurrection	298
3.5.2. The Resurrection and the messianic identity of Jesus Christ.....	302
3.5.3. The Resurrection of Jesus and the Empty Tomb	303
3.5.4. The Transcendence of Creation—an Effect of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.....	304
3.5.5. The Risen Christ Gives Himself through the Eucharist.....	311
3.5.6. Death and Evil Are No Longer Transcendent.....	313
3.5.7. The Universal Resurrection	318
Conclusions.....	321
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.....	323
ANNEXES	331
BIBLIOGRAPHY	333

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The death and Resurrection of the Incarnate Son of God—the foundation of the Christian faith—represent two major dogmatic and apologetic pillars for the Apostle Paul. The doctoral dissertation, which I have entitled “Jesus Christ, the Crucified and the Risen One in the Theology of Saint Paul the Apostle,” proposes a systematic analysis of the Paschal event —the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—within the broader context of Pauline theology, highlighting the Christological, soteriological, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions of this fundamental core of Christian revelation. This theme, a favorite of the great theologians from all branches of Christianity, still arouses the interest of those who seek the Incarnate Son of God, the One crucified on the wood of the cross and risen from the dead. Not, however, without certain risks of misinterpretation.

The motivation for choosing this theme lies in the conviction that Pauline theology can only be adequately understood by starting from the indissoluble unity between the Cross and the Resurrection, which constitutes the core of the apostolic kerygma. In the context of contemporary scholarship, where there are either tendencies to fragment the Pauline message or reductive interpretations, the present work proposes an integrative approach.

The importance of this topic stems from the fact that, in the Pauline Epistles, the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ the Savior are not regarded merely as historical events or isolated doctrinal reference points. They constitute the foundation of the entire economy of salvation, as well as the framework through which Christian existence is interpreted. For the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, is the center of the apostolic preaching, the foundation of faith, and the ontological principle of the new creation. St. Paul shows, in his writings, that the Sacrifice on the Cross of Christ the Savior and the Resurrection are the most compelling proofs of the messianic identity of Jesus and, intrinsically, of the revelation of faith in Him.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

From the very beginning, the objectives of this doctoral dissertation have been centered on the glory of the Incarnate Son of God who conquers death. The two themes—the crucifixion and the

Resurrection of the Lord—constitute the core of the theology of salvation in the Apostle Paul. These two events cannot be separated; they form the fundamental structure of justification and life in Jesus Christ.

The research endeavor stems from a long-standing desire to delve deeper into the greatest Christian mystery: the Resurrection of Christ the Savior. Over time, the great Christian theologians have each offered their own interpretation of the Risen Christ, and to this vast array of human thought regarding the Incarnate Son of God, we too add a small “mirror-like” exegetical treatise, presenting the life and thought of the Apostle to the Gentiles before and after his conversion, so that each part may illuminate and explain the other.

The first objective was to compile various sources on the research topic, to understand them, and to articulate truths of faith as conclusions. We selected numerous theologians who have debated the topic, including several from Western culture: Professors Sabin Verzan, Grigorie Marcu, Constantin Galeriu, Vasile Mihoc, Ștefan Buchiu, Dumitru Stăniloae, Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin, as well as N.T. Wright, Emil Bock, Francoise Brune, Marie F. Baslez, Gerhard Maier, Joseph Holzner, Tom Holland, and other researchers.

The second objective of the thesis was to organize the sources and provide a subjective commentary on them according to distinct, predefined topics of interest, which formed the main body of this work. The research frequently encountered nuanced issues, which often took precedence over strict, dogmatic arguments.

The third objective of the thesis is the very essence of the work: the confession of faith. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed simply, academically, directly, and indirectly. The necessity of proclaiming the Incarnate Son of God has also influenced this work, and the voices brought to the broader stage of our argument have revealed with integrity the primary intention of doxology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With regard to the research methodology, while not claiming to be exhaustive, this work required a laborious scientific process. Theological exegesis was interwoven with literary-critical and historical analysis, resulting in conclusions that we sought to bring as close as possible to an honest, universally valid truth. In general, regarding the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is a tacit consensus among the majority of theologians from the three major branches of Christianity: Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, became man for us and rose from the dead. This truth of faith is, ultimately, the foundation of what we believe. It resulted, therefore, from the exegetical

analysis of the Pauline texts, recourse to patristic tradition, as well as dialogue with contemporary exegesis.

The following methods were used in this study:

a) the dual interpretation method

The two main themes of the thesis—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—are antithetical yet directly causally linked, with both microcosmic and macrocosmic implications.

b) the documentary method

This method involved bibliographic research of several sets of works categorized by distinct disciplines.

c) the historical-critical method

This is the most commonly used method in most humanities studies (literary and theological). It takes into account the historical and cultural context of the time (the 1st century B.C. and the 1st century A.D.), which was highly complex and crucial for understanding the emergence of the Christian faith and, by extension, Pauline thought.

d) the comparative method

The statements in the thesis were “held up to the mirror” of the approaches taken by theologians from other branches of Christianity, with the inherent and valuable differences being analyzed in a critically neutral manner, based on objective criteria.

e) the hermeneutical method

We have endeavored to analyze both the traditional and contemporary interpretations of theologians regarding the announced theme. We have also highlighted the fact that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has been reflected in worship for thousands of years, constituting its very center.

f) the systematic method

Within the strictly dogmatic framework, the Resurrection of the Lord is part of God’s plan—known from time immemorial—to restore humanity to its original state of divine sonship through grace.

g) the apologetic method

Regarding detractors who deny the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have drawn not only on the writings of the Holy Fathers of the past, but also on scientific advances that today make the dialogue between religion and science a plausible one.

Personal Contributions of This Paper

Starting from the concept of originality, the question arises: what does it mean to be original? Of course, there can be many answers, but we also consider the fact that one possible answer regarding originality is that being original does not mean creating something out of nothing. Originality also involves being able to construct and rearrange elements that already exist. Novelty, in this sense, arises from synthesis and syncretism. The more sources you have access to, the greater your chance of becoming original.

Therefore, regarding the novelties introduced into the framework of the research topic, I have identified the following aspects:

- systematizing the relevant sources regarding the Pauline biography;
- re-evaluating certain patristic texts and integrating them into the overall argument;
- bringing several pertinent voices from Protestant theology into the discussion;
- focusing on the relationship between the two elements presented in the title as the most relevant within the definition of Christianity as a revealed religion;
- emphasizing the value judgments of the argumentative discourse arising from the comparison of several Pauline positions that converge with his personal belief regarding the messianic identity of Jesus Christ;
- The Sacrifice and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which redefined the Universe and humanity in their creaturely significance.

The structure of the work is as follows:

This work is structured into three distinct chapters, arranged in a logical and exegetical-theological sequence, each contributing to the deepening and clarification of the fundamental dimensions of the researched topic. In this form, the arrangement of the material meets the methodological requirements of scientific research and provides a coherent, unified framework for the analysis and in-depth study of the proposed subject.

CHAPTER I

In Chapter I, we highlighted the fact that everything that happened to the son of Jewish parents, from the tribe of Benjamin, born in the Jewish diaspora but also a Roman citizen, was a grace from God. His Jewish education, formed within the strict framework of Pharisaism and, according to Tradition, under the authority of Gamaliel (cf. Acts 22:3), demonstrates a deep knowledge of the Torah and its interpretation in the spirit of the Law and the Oral Tradition. Contemporary exegetical insights emphasize that this formation was not abandoned after his conversion, but rather reinterpreted Christologically, in the light of the revelation on the road to Damascus. Through God's direct intervention on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4), Saul too receives the gift of knowing God, playing a decisive role in the transformation of Christianity from a Jewish movement into a universal religion. This exceptional conversion is part of the global heritage of Christianity. Although it is situated after the Ascension, what actually happens to Paul is a theophany of the kind that occurred after the Resurrection. Shocking and healing, it would influence Paul the man until his death.

In this first chapter, we have also emphasized the unity between the Apostle's social status, his missionary strategy, and his theology. I have argued that the Apostle's Roman citizenship became a providential instrument for spreading the message of Christ crucified and risen. In Acts 23:11, the Lord appears to Paul (who was in prison) and tells him that he must bear witness to Him in Rome as well. Here we can see how God uses the Apostle's Roman citizenship—and even his trial—so that His Gospel might reach the heart of the empire. In fact, the entire trial of the Apostle Paul becomes a biblical testimony to the Gospel, as he states: “It is for the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial” (Acts 23:6).

The influence that the Apostle Paul has exerted throughout the Christian millennia remains vivid to this day, with an undisguised realism. His writings, among the earliest preserved in Christian historiography, reveal the twists, quests, and anxieties of a genius in search of God. An apostate and condemned for his bloodstained past, Saint Paul would acknowledge throughout his life the great mercy of the divine toward him. The personal revelation that Jesus bestowed upon him on the bloody road to Damascus, where he was on his way to persecute and arrest other Christian families to their deaths, remains today, for many of us, a near-impossibility, given the context.

The Apostle to the Gentiles never renounced his Judaism, his identity, or his training. He could not deny his traditions or the Law, yet he Christianized them and filtered them all through his faith in the crucified and Risen Lord, his “heritage” instantly taking on a new spiritual dimension. Saint Paul remains a Jew, arguing that all Jewish traditions and the Law must be interpreted from

the messianic perspective of the One who became incarnate and inaugurated the kingdom awaited by the Jews—not as they understood it, but from the perspective of the Crucified One and the One Risen from the dead, the One who opens, Exalted at the right hand of the Father, the Way for everyone to God.

CHAPTER II

In this chapter, we aimed to highlight the fact that the theology of the cross and the resurrection remains the central message of Pauline theology. In the Epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, the Apostle Paul develops the idea of the cross as a “stumbling block” and a paradox of salvation. Indeed, he preaches “*Christ crucified: to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Gentiles folly*” (1 Cor 1:23), yet the power of God for those who are called. In the Epistle to the Galatians 2:19–20; 6:14, reinterpreting what the Apostle Paul says, I emphasized that the Christian life is a participation in the crucifixion, and the cross becomes the sole cause for praise, overturning the world’s values, and in the Epistle to the Christian community in Philippi (2:8) I have shown how Christ’s humility “*even to death, and death on a cross*” reveals the perfect obedience through which God transforms the shame of the Cross into glory, making the cross the center of faith and salvation.

In this chapter, the work aims to highlight, in contrast to the model of humility set by Jesus Christ, those who act as enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18), who reject the logic of sacrifice and self-denial implied by the cross. One can observe how the Apostle also describes them as having “glory in their shame,” suggesting a moral reversal in which sin is justified or even praised. The passage in Philippians 3:18–19 is also very important because it is the only one in Holy Scripture that alludes to the destruction of those who dishonor the Cross. This perspective can lead to a great truth for every Christian, because it becomes an obligation rather than an option, and this is where the strength of Christianity lies. Therefore, we have sought to demonstrate that the Cross is a power, receiving its power from the One who was crucified on it, transforming its shame into a Sacrificial Altar upon which He washes away the sins of all humanity.

This second chapter of the work invites reflection on the Cross in Pauline theology, emphasizing precisely its profoundly paradoxical nature. The Cross, as a sign of weakness, becomes the supreme manifestation of God’s power, focusing us, in particular, on Epistles such as 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, where Saint Paul emphasizes that salvation does not come through the Law or through merits, but through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ crucified. The chapter concludes with several conclusions in which we indicate that the texts we have referred to, from the Epistles mentioned above, represent the New Testament foundation of the veneration of the Cross practiced by Christians as early as the second half of the first century, thus confirming that the Cross was also part of the lives of the early Christians.

CHAPTER III

In the third chapter of this work, we aim to shed light on Paul's thinking regarding the event of Christ's Resurrection, which constitutes the ontological foundation of the faith, for the Apostle interprets the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as a decisive soteriological event through which victory over sin and death is achieved, in typological continuity with the figure of Adam.

In the theology of Saint Paul the Apostle, the Resurrection of the Savior is the foundation of the entire Christian kerygma. We are not merely discussing the miraculous event or the symbolic expression of life. We are referring to the objective reality that underlies Christian faith, salvation, and hope, at the center of the entire theology of Saint Paul. In this chapter, we have addressed the theme of the Lord's Resurrection by oscillating between the direct testimony of the Holy Gospels, as the primary source of the event, and the Pauline perspective, showing how the narrative framework of the Apostles harmonizes with the foundations of faith expressed by the Apostle Paul. Also included in the long list of those who saw the Risen Jesus Christ, Saint Paul becomes the necessary link to the four Gospels and the liturgical experience of the early Christians, from which it follows that the Apostles' experience and Pauline theology spring from the same single Reality. We have also highlighted the fact that, in the Pauline vision, the Lord's Resurrection is the decisive moment, the turning point, regarding "the beginning of the end," and the guarantee of the resurrection of all believers, which means that eschatology is not merely a future expectation, but is already a reality begun in the present through life in the Spirit. At the same time, I have also drafted a *Pauline creed* in several points, as a summary of the Christian faith, which serves as the starting point for spreading and preaching the Gospel and the teaching about Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen One.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

We have summarized the results of our research into 23 clear and concise points. They represent the essence of the entire work and are organized in a way that makes them easy to follow. Of course, a great deal has been written about the Apostle Paul and his theology, and more will likely be written. No one can claim to have read everything that has been written about the great Apostle. He is, by far, the most studied author of Antiquity. Every year, doctoral dissertations, new volumes, and thousands of articles dedicated to his personality and theological thought are published. Perhaps many have asked themselves: why? There are many answers to this question, but one seems to stand out more than the others: the Apostle wrote approximately half of the books of the New Testament, laying the conceptual foundations of Christianity. The epistles he wrote are, in fact, extensions of the Gospels, and they go beyond the biblical account, explaining Christ to us beyond time. God's foreknowledge has been with Paul even before he existed, so that at the right time, He might deliver him from the people among whom he had become entangled in an Old Law monopolized by the Pharisees, so that Paul, ultimately, might shine before the world as the universal Christian.

Why is Damascus such a pivotal moment in his life? The fact that Jesus was crucified was, for the former persecutor, clear proof that He could not be the Messiah. However, can you truly hate something you know nothing about? Of course, he had thoroughly analyzed the message of the Lord Christ and considered it a real threat to traditional Judaism. Saul the persecutor knew Jesus as an ideological rival. But was that all there was to it? He was "smart"—not just a traveler struck by a light, but a refined intellectual, thoroughly prepared, who was grappling with a reality he knew but categorically rejected. His radical transformation thus becomes all the more dramatic: from one who knew Christ "by the letter" and hated Him, to one who knows Jesus "by the Spirit." The Apostle Paul remained a Jew; he could not deny the Law and traditions, but he Christianized them. All of this was filtered through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, taking on a new spiritual dimension, one situated on a much higher plane. Saint Paul is the prototype of the athlete of Christ. In fact, theologian Warren W. Wiersbe offers a very valuable insight: he links the conversion near Damascus to the conversion of all humanity, a process that continues even today.

The duality of death and Resurrection remains central to Saint Paul's Gospel, transcending even his repentance and the entire past he had to confront. A death and a Resurrection he knows firsthand, for he lived through those times. The Apostle bears witness from his own life, not from Tradition or hearsay. "Christ died for us" is the Pauline statement uttered almost obsessively. Logically, the Resurrection is tied to death. Christ dies unjustly on the Cross, but injustice, as a just and loving God, He transforms into justice and Resurrection. The Apostle Paul, a scholar of the

Law, becomes, in an anti-scientific way, the dogmatist of the Cross, proclaiming its folly and madness. Likewise, the issue of atonement that the Christ-Sacrifice brings through His martyrdom constitutes a central theme of the epistles.

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