

**BABEŞ – BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF REFORMED THEOLOGY**

SUMMARY OF PhD. THESIS

The significance of the term ἐκκλησία with practical implications within the community of the new creation

Supervisor:
Prof. univ. dr. Molnár János

PhD.Candidate: Beniamin-Ioan Poduţ

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Key words

The Church, the Holy Scripture, Community, Vision, Passion, Mission, Mandate, Gospel, Jesus Christ, God, the Holy Spirit, Generation, Society, Holiness, Reconciliation, Redemption, Power, Creation, Model, Motivational, Signification, Formation, Visionaries, Calling, Perspective, Spiritual awakening, Society, Witnesses, Implications, Authority, Holistic, Approach, Formation, Dimension, The New Creation, Kingdom, Concept, Controverses, Perspective, Faith, Impact, Transformation, History, Providence, Support.

Introduction

The reason I chose to study this subject is determined by the pain that I carry in my heart for the Church of Christ today, who resigned to be content to stay in a church where comfort and complacency leading to “spiritual obesity”. This undesired effect has come against the consumption of programs where church members have become rather consumers than producers. The subject proposed in this paper involves primarily the biblical perspective on the Church of Christ and the practical part refers directly to the mission of the Church. Over the years, the concept of mission suffered distortion in both its essence and implications. On the other hand, the concept of mission in the third millennium is not any more of major interest from the believers. Unfortunately, such a mentality infests more and more the Christian area, which was not characteristic of the first century. The implications of this omission to fulfill the Great Commandment don't stop here, but entail defiance of the laws of God found in the pages of the Bible.

Before His ascension, Christ left this “nation” called “the Church of Christ” a mandate, namely the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-20, Acts 1:8). The two concepts, namely the Church and the Mission merge into each other; even more, they are in an indispensable relationship and can not exist without each other. He says the church without a mission is like a mission without the church, which is a surrogate. The two are called to be one; in fact, they were created to live in communion and help spread the Kingdom of God on earth.

The mandate which the Church received from Christ is not optional; the Church doesn't have the freedom to receive it or to reject it. Fulfilling this mandate makes, in fact, the church be the church, and rejection of this mandate leads to denying its authenticity and, finally, the end of its existence (here we particularly refer to the local church). To reject the mandate which the Church has not only a proof of her cessation, but more than this, it proves that the Church defies the authority of Scripture and God's commandments. The Great Commandment is not a piece of paper that we inherit today after many centuries, but the very word of Christ given to His Church.

Ecclesiology as a branch of Christian theology

The greatest challenge of the twenty-first century Church refers to the way in which the church defines its nature and its mission. Throughout the ages the Church has repeatedly defined the triune nature of God, the full authority of the Scriptures, the person and the work of Christ, but has not yet come to an appropriate resolution regarding the issues involved in defining the Church itself. One of the obvious results of this failure is the widespread imbalance that is felt in every part of the body of Christ. Since the Church

doesn't know itself, it cannot recognize itself. Since the Church does not understand its own purpose, this misunderstanding leads to the misachievement of the mandate received from God.

More than this interest in ecclesiology in general, in recent years, many scholars began their studies on ecclesiology by focusing on the mission of the Church, speaking thus about the church in dynamical terms. Although contemporary theologians and Bible scholars agree that we need to revisit the study of the doctrine of the Church in order to understand what the church and the mission of the church are in today's world, so with all these interests for theological doctrine, today is still much confusion about the Church. One of the misunderstood aspects results from the multiple uses of the term "church". Given the ambivalence of this phenomenon, a relevant ecclesiology must submit both the dogmatic and normative premise and the empirical reality in a manner that enables us to explain the conditions that lead to this distinctive phenomenon and makes the legitimacy and reality of current forms be intelligible. In any methodological survey, we need to focus on what the church really means, what distinguishes it, what its functions are, where it can be found and what it means in the context of secular.

The meaning of ἐκκλησία

The word "church" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek "ἐκκλησία" which comes from two words: "ek" meaning "out" and "kaleo" meaning "to call". The only two examples from the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus used the word "ekklesia" are 16:18 and 18:17. Paul uses the word "ekklesia" more than any other writer of the New Testament, since most of his writings are letters to specific local gatherings of believers. In addition

to specific references about churches in cities, there are also references to church meetings in private homes. When they send greetings to the believers Priscilla and Aquila, Paul also greets “the church in their house” (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15).

The Greek word “ekklesia” is used about 114 times in the New Testament, of which 24 times in the book of Acts. However, the New Testament church used the Greek word “ekklesia”, which referred more to a local assembly of believers, and not a building.

The ancient Greek word “ekklesia” can be found in the writings of authors such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato and Euripides (from the fifth century B. C.). In ancient Greek “ekklesia” meant “an assembly of people gathered together by the General Court”. In Israel General Court was formed in the beginning by the elders of each family group.

Septuagint uses the word “ekklesia” to translate into Greek the Hebrew word “qahal” which means “gathering”. Both “ekklesia” and “qahal” denotes a gathering rather than a “congregation”.

Uses of the word “ekklesia” in the Hebrew scriptures are seen by most Christian theologians as not referring specifically to the church (in that context, it refers to a specific assembly for a particular purpose), although many of these theologians regard the Hebrew people as “the people of God”, a foreshadowy meeting, a prototype or a small living prophecy that one day Christian Church will exist.

These definitions give us an understanding on the fact that the church in its nature is called to be both inside a building and beyond. The church of Christ, by its very nature, is a missionary church which is called to go out into the world and fulfill the purpose for which it was created.

Where is the church?

In other words, we must not ask just what the church is, but where is the church. The church can be found where the saints are and where they fulfill their calling from God. The presence of God makes us His people, Christ's presence makes the church be His temple, built of living stones united with Him who is the chosen stone of God (1 Peter 2:4-6).

The church is part of God's redemptive plan. It is not only a visible fellowship of God's salvation, but also the context in which to live salvation and experiment the new life. Church meets because it is called to be united in Christ. Church has its existence and essence in Christ. This is because God has acted once and for all for man's salvation through His death and resurrection.

The difference between the universal church and local church

Speaking about the church, we know that the church involves two aspects: the universal and the local aspect. From the universal point of view, the church is one. However, from the local point of view, the existence of the church is expressed in several places. Therefore, the universal church becomes the expression of several local churches. Some thinkers find in Scripture a classical distinction between the universal church (or invisible) and the local church (or visible). This distinction, which appeared with Augustine, was first clearly stated by Martin Luther, and then inserted by John Calvin in his theology. Westminster Confession of Faith defines the Church as being universal and local, recognizing the two aspects, but talking about them separately.

The universal aspect of the church

The universal church is composed of all believers from the earth and of all time. Although they live in different cities, in different countries, and have lived in different centuries, they are one in Christ and they belong to the Church (Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 1:22, 23; Hebrew 12:23). Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25) and on “God gave some to be apostles, some prophets, and teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28). In the last verse, he mentions the “apostles”, who did not belong to a specific church, but to the universal Church. The Body of Christ is united; even if it consists of several parts, they form one body. Total universal Church will be unified at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9), which will take place after the Rapture of the Church.

As we have seen, the universal Church is composed of all believers of all times. These believers are part of a particular church, that we called “local”. We can not speak of the local church and its mission without referring to the universal Church; the local church exists due to the existence of the universal Church. If the universal Church had not existed, we could not speak of the local church and its mission.

The local aspect of the church

The universal Church is invariably expressed by the local church. The church will always be a gathering of believers in a particular location. According to this, the local church is not just a part or a fragment of the universal Church. However, it is no less important or inferior part of the church as a whole. It’s rather the total church in its individual expression. However, each local congregation, large or small, is the Church of Jesus

Christ and, therefore, is complete in Him. When local assembly of believers meets at a specific location, the local church is the most concrete expression of the covenant people. Christians belong to a certain church, including God's people in a community that came together (Romans 16:16; Acts 5:11, 8:1, 13:1, 14:23; 15:22 and Revelation 1:11).

The Church and its mission seen in three dimensions

As we noted in the previous discussion about the church, it is impossible to talk about the responsibility of the believers in the church fellowship without explaining also that part of their activity must be developed in three dimensions. We can not speak of the mission of the church as about efficient ministry before we have a functional community, as we can not have a functional community before we have, in the church, people who glorify God with their whole hearts. These three pillars – worship, community and mission – are very important for a healthy church.

The ministry involves more our relationship with God, or in other words, our worship to God. Worship is not an option, but a common word in the Bible. If we want to have a spiritually mature and healthy church at the same time, then we must worship Him, first of all. When we choose to worship God, the next step we need to do is to have a good fellowship with each other and grow up together. The ministry to the church involves to a greater extent our community and strengthening of the church, how to grow up and how to serve one another. The ministry to the world involves our mandate. This mandate is satisfied and fulfilled by the local church which has received a mandate from Jesus. These three dimensions are interrelated and intertwined. But they can also occur separately. They are fundamental to other methods in which the activities to be performed by the

church can differentiate. A problem occurs when one of the three dimensions is neglected, or it becomes the only dimension of Christian life or it's disconnected with the other dimensions of our ministry.

The vertical dimension, towards God: the worship

The significance of Christian worship can be seen best in the light of its theological base. These doctrinal points are part of the total biblical revelation but the special elements of the Christian faith give some distinctive character to church worship. We must be the community of God's people that brings Him glory. "We worship God because God created us for this." In the book of Genesis 1:26-27, the author tells us that God created us in His image, which means that we are able to worship before Him and whenever we do this we fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

Not only that God created us to praise Him, but He also commanded us to worship Him. If we look in the Scripture, we see that the first four of The Ten Commandments deal with worship. Worship means to praise the One who is worthy. Therefore, only the Triune God must be the center of true worship. The nature of God determines how we should serve Him. Thus, Christian worship is not just giving all that we are to a holy God. It is an intentional response of praise, thanksgiving and worship of God revealed in the Word, made known and accessible to us through Jesus Christ and confessed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

As we said earlier, worship is an act by which believers come to praise their God. Worship is not just an act, but a commandment by which God calls His people to praise Him. True worship brings people into a closer relationship with God. After this

experience believers know God more because in their worship people not only praise Him, but have a new opportunity to know Him and knowing Him brings transformation. We can not speak of the good life of the community or the ministry made with passion before believers who are part of the local church learn to worship God.

The horizontal dimension, towards the church: the community

Human race was created to live in fellowship, in community, but it is spread everywhere. God's plan through Christ is meant to restore us to a life lived in community, in which diversity is to strengthen the community and vice versa. The church is exactly the place where God intends that this new life to be modeled. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “The Church is an expression of Christ’s existence as a church-community”. Despite the individualistic piety of many of the religious practices and beliefs, reinforced by the individualism of contemporary society, the local assembly of Christians around the things of Christ is “the irreducible unity of Christianity”, not the individual one. Moreover, the local congregation isn’t there to isolate, but to live in community with local assemblies rather than living behind religious practices and the things of Christ. As a community that has fellowship, Christ calls us to build one another up. We are to serve one another and meet the material and spiritual needs of the ones next to us.

There are several means by which members of a church may be edified. One of them is the fellowship. The Greek word *koinonia* (and words like it) means to hold something in common. In Greek thought the word applied to any type of legal social, civic and religious activity, who had a common element that was shared or affected all the participants. The New Testament speaks of *koinonia*, literally, which means to have or to

hold all things in common. Indeed, according to the passage in Acts 2-5, the Early Church members even had their possessions in common. Possessions contribution to the needs of others is called *koinonia*, fellowship. This is the most common use of the word in the New Testament. Church's response to God's grace and praise to the Lord, according to 2 Corinthians 8-9, Romans 12:13, 15:26 and Hebrew 13:16, is expressed by giving. Fellowship with one another is based on the fellowship with God (1 John 1:6-7). Christians are one in Christ, so they choose to show the dynamics and the effects of that relationship in their lives together with the other Christians.

The Church strengthens its members through training or education. Paul's Epistles often describe the work of teaching or instructing by the word "building", using the image of building of a building. Building means first, "the act of building" and "completed building". "To build" means "to raise a building". These words are used in their literal sense in the New Testament, but we are interested in their metaphorical sense, meaning a spiritual edification. The basis of this metaphorical sense is the comparison with a house church (1 Corinthians 3:9-12), in particular, with a temple (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Peter 2:5, Ephesians 2:20-22). The Greek terminology of Ephesians 4:11 brings "pastors and teachers" in a close relationship with a different category from the previous group. Teachers share with pastors the work of edifying the believers. Teachers were particularly associated with moral instruction and practical application of spiritual discovery. Most uses of the noun *didaskolos* (teacher) in the New Testament is found in the Gospels and they refer to Jesus, who was often called this way (Matthew 8:19, Mark 4:34).

Preaching is another method that has been used by the church since its inception. The importance of preaching may be indicated by the fact that words referring to

preaching are used over 120 times in the New Testament. It is a fact universally acknowledged by scholars today that the word “preach” (kerygma) in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 refers to the message rather than to the act of preaching. The word was used by the Greeks for the proclamation of a message, but could not include the act of preaching itself (Luke 11:32). The essence of the apostolic preaching is Jesus Christ. By preaching the Word of God, people turn to Him and the people of the Church of Christ can grow by the same preach. Humans are social beings, created to have fellowship, communion with God and communion with each other. In the local church we can see this aspect of Christian life. Here believers read the Bible, pray together, encourage one another and so on. The aim of fellowship is to increase in God’s knowledge and training to fulfill the mandate of the local church. A local church can not send people to mission before it learns to worship God and edify its members. Unfortunately, many churches do not have a real worship and a sincere fellowship, and this can be seen in their work. It is impossible to know God through a life of worship and fellowship and ultimately to stay idle. Perhaps this is why many churches are not directly involved in mission. On the other hand, if a church manifests a life of worship and close fellowship, it will not remain close between its four walls, but will come out and fulfill the mandate with which it has been entrusted.

The dimension towards the world: the mission

In the Bible, “mission is the divine work of sending intermediaries either supernatural or human, to announce or make God's will so that the goals of judgment and redemption to be fulfilled”. This biblical concept of mission is expressed through the use of verbs meaning “to send”, God usually being the stated subject.

Mission in the Old Testament

Right from the beginning of the Old Testament we see that there is the concern that all nations believe in the Son of Promise that was to come, the one to be born from the seed of the woman Eve, from the family of Shem and from the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. The message of the Old Testament is both universal and international in its approach. This is very clear from Genesis chapters 1-11, which includes an universal audience. The clarity of this aspect is also revealed by the fact that the living God gave the first great commandment to Abraham when He chose him to be an instrument in His hand.

Israel's history is a history of mission. The record of collective mission of Israel began with the fascinating true story of a personal mission, the mission of Abraham, in Genesis 12:1-3.

God has always been God of the nations, so He naturally turns to nations. The special role of Israel wasn't to hide the salvation of other nations, but rather spread it to all. In Abraham, "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 18:18). God chose Israel in the Old Testament to be the mediator through which He will reveal His name and His glory to the other nations.

A review of the Old Testament demonstrates that the subject of mission, in its broad sense, is the focus. According to the Old Testament, mission began with Abraham, when God called him. The mission that Abraham began was passed on to Abraham's descendants and finally to all nations. As we can see, mission is not a phenomenon hidden from the pages of the Old Testament; moreover, mission as a concept found in the Old Testament stands as a strong foundation for the mission in the New Testament.

Early Christian mission and Jesus

Early Christian mission can not be understood without the person, the ministry, the death, the resurrection and the mandate of Jesus. Jesus' vision is based on His mission, and as it approaches and lives his mission, his vision becomes broader. He is portrayed as the one sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but as a shepherd, he should seek them, meet them, save them and wear them in His arms. He proclaimed that he was sent by the Father with the task to seek and to save that which was lost. In John's Gospel, the fact that Jesus sent His disciples was understood to be a continuation of the mandate of His Father (about 50 times in John, first 3:17, 10:16, 17:18, 21 and 23 to be compared to 14:31) and sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and Jesus (John 14:26, 15:26 and Luke 24:29). For this reason, John uses the same word, "send", (Latin *misso*) in both cases. In John 17:18-23, Jesus said, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world". In John 20:21, He changes this phrase for a more personal tone: "So as the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you". In His prayer for the disciples in chapter 17, He tells the Father that He gave them the word of God and made them ready to take the message to the world. Jesus can only be appreciated in a relationship with His mission – to install the rule of His Father. The universal nature of the mission of Christ is nowhere seen more clearly than in His teachings. Christ fulfills His ministry to the world through His Church and its ministry is to present Jesus to the world. Paul tells us:

„God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself. In Christ, God did not hold the world guilty of its sins. And he gave us this message of peace. So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

In this passage Paul presents a strong argument that the believers who are in Christ are sent into the world to provide the world with Christ, for the world to be reconciled with God through Jesus. It is the mission of the Church to go into the world and to present Christ to the world. Because when He was on earth, Christ himself fulfilled this mission, He has now left this responsibility in the hands of the Church. As we noted, the Church is called by its nature to mission, and within its mission it needs the two elements that have been used by Jesus in His ministry: preaching and teaching. Jesus began His ministry preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and then He began to teach the people the truths of God's Kingdom. Likewise, a missionary church must first proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God and then teach the people about the true meaning of the Kingdom. Ideally, spiritual training and community are directed both externally and internally. This outside manifestation is called „mission“. We must remember that the community does not exist for itself or for its own fulfillment. Community's mission is to proclaim the message of God's Kingdom.

Moreover, the Church's mission is not only to present the Gospel, as we have seen, or to seek the lost people and bring them to Christ. The mission of the Church lies in planting new churches. Christ calls the Church to be a missionary Church to plant churches where none exist. It is often said that “a church that does not create another church is a dead church”. Unfortunately, many churches today have closed within their four walls and are content to sit and “to worship God”. Christianity should not forget that “if the mission is lost, the Gospel is lost”. When given this task to the church, Christ assured it of His presence and power. Church goes where God is already at work.

Mission belongs to the very nature of the Church as the Church continues the ministry of Christ, saving mankind. This ministry can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The author of Acts mentioned in chapter 1, verse 8: “But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses – in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world”. The church doesn’t fulfill its ministry by its own forces. The Holy Spirit was given to the Church as a permanent gift that empowers it in its ministry and gives zest to it for a dynamic life. Therefore, by definition, the Church can not remain static or satisfied with its present condition. It must always minister, proclaiming, announcing and teaching others the good news.

We can not talk about Church and mission as two different things because they only exist together. Church and mission can not be separated and if someone would try to separate them this would lead to a serious crisis for everyone. Believers can not talk about the Church without speaking about the ministry and they can not talk about ministry without talking about the Church. These two components, the Church and the ministry, have an important role in God's plan for the salvation of the world. The ministry, which is the very nature of the Church, is fulfilled only through the local church.

The Church and the Kingdom of God

The Church not only has a clear mandate of mission, but also has a direct message for this task. The message that the Church spreads through its mission is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The reality of the Kingdom of God plays a very important role in the mission of the church throughout its ministry. To understand the role of the Church as a

visible expression of God's Kingdom, we must define three key differences between the Church and the Kingdom of God.

First, the Church can not be amounted to the Kingdom of God. The Church consists of those who are submitted to God's reign, but they are also “submitted to sin and uncleanness”. Church is a mix of truth and sin, and sometimes it is a visible expression of the Kingdom, but sometimes it isn't. The Church can not be amounted to the Kingdom of God, but it can be a visible expression of it. In this context the Church can be defined as a group of people who submit to God's reign and accept His commands in their lives (Colossians 1:12-14). This makes the Church be the present manifestation of God's Kingdom, a kingdom in a secondary sense, meaning the sphere in which the reign is carried out. The Church is not the Kingdom, but is closely related to it. The importance of this correlation can be seen in the equivalent expressions used in the New Testament for the Kingdom and in connection with it. These equivalent terms indicate the importance of being under the reign of God in Christ. One way to describe the hope of the Kingdom in the Bible refers to what God did for the salvation of His people. The terms “rule” and “salvation” are found together in the Old Testament (Psalm 74:12, Isaiah 33:22 , 44:6).

The second difference between the Church and the Kingdom of God that must be clarified is the fact that citizenship in the Kingdom of God includes attending church, while membership in a church is not necessarily synonymous to being a citizen in the Kingdom. It is true that the Church is not a goal in itself, because it is moving towards the Kingdom of God whose seed, sign and instrument it is. The Kingdom can not be separated from the Church because both are inseparable from the person and the work of Christ.

Therefore, it is impossible to separate the Church and the Kingdom as if the first belongs exclusively to the imperfect reality of history, while the latter is the perfect eschatological fulfillment of the divine plan of salvation.

The third aspect is the fact that the Church is God's instrument, while the Kingdom is God's reign. Church fulfills its mission by two ways concerning the Kingdom of God. First, it is the only institution divinely founded in preaching the Gospel. Secondly, the Church is God's instrument to witness to the world.

The Church of Christ and the Kingdom of God are in an interdependent relationship. The gospel of the Kingdom is spread through the ministry of the Church and people have the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God. Only the Church can bring, by its mission, the Kingdom of God in people's hearts.

God's power manifested in the life of the Church provides a holistic view of serving

The power of God and the new creation community plays an important role in the life and the work of the Apostle Paul. From the Pauline perspective, God's power is at work in every moment of history and it can be found in all the aspects of creation that He brought into being from nothing. The entire Universe stands as a witness to all that God is doing by His power in every moment on the time axis. The main purpose in the manifestation of God's power in all creation is its support and its redemption at both individual and cosmic level.

In Pauline theology individual redemption took place through the work of reconciliation that God has made possible in Christ. This is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 5:17, when he says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature [a

new creation - *καινή κτίσις*]. Old things are passed away; behold all things have become new”. By introducing the noun *καινή κτίσις* • Paul wants rather to communicate the idea of personal redemption. At the same time the expression *καινή κτίσις* • used only by Paul twice in his writings (Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17), must be understood rather as “a new creation” and not “the new creation”. The phrase “if anyone is in Christ” suggests that the old man experienced a new nature in Christ through repentance and faith, while the further verse “is a new creation” implies a new nature that is made possible through the redemptive work of God in Christ.

When Paul refers to “a new creation in Christ”, he makes us aware of the inauguration of a new world that began with Christ’s coming. Therefore, the new creation is just one of many ways in which Paul emphasizes the triumph of the spirit over the body.

Much more in this case, the Church of Christ is called to know both its identity and values. Often, there is a deep crisis in the understanding of the values that the Church has. This crisis has generated chaotic interpretations that led to all kinds of fanaticism, personal beliefs and fables that have absolutely nothing in common with the Christian values. This crisis is caused by the religious illiteracy that has widely spread in Christianity today. The effect of this illiteracy has been the cause of many tensions generated between believers who make up the Body of Christ.

We hope that this generation will be able to get rid of the mediocrity that has mastered long periods in the Church of Christ. The problem of the substitution of Christian values with personal beliefs, theologically speaking, is as serious as serpent’s attempt in the Garden of Eden to undermine the divine command through “really” (“Has

God really said...?" Genesis 3:2). An equally sensitive issue was the coming of the Judaizers from Jerusalem to Galatia to introduce a change in the values that Paul has established in the newly formed church.

In this battle for the recognition of values we must ask ourselves whether there is a credible voice that has the ultimate authority concerning the belief and the practice when it comes to religious problems. If we approach this issue from a religious perspective, we can say that God is the legitimate authority – the one who has the right to prescribe what we should believe and how we should behave. The word of God revealed in the pages of the Holy Scripture is the authority that should be considered in the human belief and conduct.

By authority of the Bible we understand that the Bible, as an expression of God's will for us, has the sovereign right to define what we should believe and how we should behave. A careful reading of the Bible makes us aware of the importance of this truth and the impact that God's word can have on any human being open to divine revelation.

The revealed Word and the Spirit's work are of major importance in the illumination process. Without the illumination of the unique presence of the Holy Spirit, man can not and does not have the ability to accept the authority of the Scripture as the supreme model for his personal life. Only when the human mind is conquered by the presence of the Holy Spirit the human being will have the power to accept the authority of the Scripture as the supreme model for his life. Besides this experience, human beings will continue to live life as a set of values that are meant to destroy the image of God in man, finally bringing him in conflict with the moral law of God.

Church's values have a strong foundation; they are not prescribed by a human hand, God himself is their author. Keeping these values is very important in a society like that of the third millennium. Unfortunately, more and more churches are willing to negotiate their values for popularity and for a colorful Christianity that does not require a fully living by the precepts of the Scripture. The primary need of the Church is to return to Christian values to acquire spiritual health and a powerful testimony in the contemporary society.

A healthy perspective on life is strictly related to Saul's question on the Damascus road, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Often life drains out of this question without knowing what to do or why we are on this planet. In some circumstances of his life, Nicolae Iorga said: "The mystery of human existence lies not in living, but in knowing what we are living for". Unless we don't know what we are living for or what the meaning of our lives is, not only we are the victims of our own limitations, but because of this confusion, God's plan for our lives is affected also.

Issuing from this present reality in the evangelical Christianity we should not be surprised that so many churches, even after decades of "running" still fail to clarify the purpose of their existence. The two coordinates, namely the purpose of life and the purpose of the church are in an inseparable relationship. Neither can be separated from each other and none can be neglected; the purpose of the Church is nothing but the deliberate result of a life lived aware of the claims and expectations that God has for His creation.

Issuing from the two elements, the necessary question for the vitality of a genuine church is: "Why do we exist?" Unless we have the courage and the willingness to stand as

a church, facing this challenge, the church to which we belong will have “no foundation, no motivation and no direction for ministry”. The current generation must take this question because the Church is heading towards a random and devoid of any purpose direction. The present reality of the Church should be Christ's trumpet that awakens Christians from apathy, confusion and lamentation.

What else could wake up a community of people who are into carelessness, fraying their clothes on the church's benches without even knowing why they are there and where they are going? When you become aware of the importance of the goal itself you can not spend the rest of your life as before. From that moment on, existence becomes coherent, theology undergoes a reorientation and it all starts to come alive. And all this can be achieved when a handful of people from a particular church somewhere in the world faces with the question “Why do we exist as a church?”

The necessity of such a perspective is of major importance for the Church of Christ in the third millennium. The circumstances are such that, as a Christian, you realize that the God of history will soon bring the mankind to the finish line. This perspective of the end should be a strong enough impulse to produce a spiritual convulsion. Living its life from the perspective of the end or, why not, in the light of eternity, I am convinced that the Church today would have a totally different direction from the one that it currently has. A perspective on their future or eternity would actually awaken the hearts and minds of Christians. This perspective would lead to the existence of healthy and growing churches. Unfortunately, many churches have not yet reached a consensus when it comes to setting the goals of their existence.

First, it is important that every church should clarify its goals. When goals were well set and clear enough for the congregation to understand them easily, from a strategic point of view, the first step was made as the basis for all that is to come, this first step being the most important one.

The second important aspect is the communicating the goals. It is not enough to clarify the goals of existence; the church must communicate its goals in a meaningful way so that the congregation clearly understands the purpose of the church to which they belong. Of course, the goal of every church should be consistent with the view that the Bible issues. A different purpose from the purpose which we find in the Scripture is not a relevant purpose; therefore the church is heading to a wrong direction. One way to communicate the goal is formulating of a clear purpose statements such as: "The purpose of the Church of Christ is to worship God in reverence, to grow to spiritual maturity similar to that of Christ and to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom to the unsaved people."

The third important aspect is the organization based on the church's goals. For the implementation of these goals the church needs a system and a structure that can provide a framework for the operation of these goals. Many times, many churches are just stuck here. Indeed it is a very complex aspect requiring a large work in finding a structure to operate as intended.

Finally, an important issue is the need for the church to implement its goals. In implementing of the goal, Warren speaks about the importance of the fact that the church should focus not so much on immediate results, but rather on the progress that is made

during that time. Perseverance in achieving its purpose is the springboard that will propel the Church to the call that it received from God.

Despite the current reality, despite issues of an extraordinary complexity, the Church must be the city that has a holistic view of life. Forming an effective vision for the local church should consider a few challenges.

First, vision is always born amid unfulfilled needs or unsolved problems in a particular field. The problem faced by the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time was one that they, as a nation, had failed to solve for more than a century. All attempts of solution ended in failure. Once Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, he did something that would touch a sensitive chord in their life: “You see the distress that we are in! Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire” (2:17 a). What Nehemiah made here was more than a simple presentation of the situation in Jerusalem, it was more the awareness of the public.

The problems that hit both the believers in the church and the society today are a strong enough reason for the church to form a clear vision that should meet the needs of people. The Church can and should be a haven for a world that is in spiritual, emotional and family decline. Wherever there is a problem in our society, we need a vision in order to solve it.

Secondly, a vision from God is always a solution to a problem. In the present case, the solution proposed by Nehemiah was, “Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:17b). The solution came as an answer to an acute need in their lives. The solution should be practical and respond to a critical situation in the life of the community where the church is. Unfortunately, today the society is looking for answers in the wrong

place. Amid search, however, there is hope: “The Church of Christ is the hope of the world.”

Thirdly, any human action lies behind motivation. A good reason is enough to convince the man to work towards that goal. The book of Nehemiah gives us a very unusual context: people who live in Jerusalem, whose daily scene is a pile of rubble, without seeming troubled at all with everything around them. They resigned so much to the situation there, that each has focused attention on their own interests.

We could say that Nehemiah acted primarily to honor God as both the name and the person of God were closely related to the history of this nation. All actions of the Jews were a spectacle to other nations. In other words, all the nations around Israel were watching them. This is the context in which the action of Nehemiah situates. He never allowed the name God to be dishonored. Therefore, he acts based on the vision that God has entrusted to him. However, Nehemiah's actions are characterized by altruism.

Besides the fact that God was dishonored, their reputation as Jews was at stake also. When they were reminded that they must act not to be ashamed any more, something happened in their minds. If thus far they failed to find anything to motivate them, now nothing could stop them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

There are many similarities between that situation and the reality we see today. Indifference, lamentation, the lack of a vision are specific to a generation of believers who seem to be “doomed” to failure. I dare say, however, that despite the adversely context, every believer has been “convicted” by Christ to victory, to life. Why do we still indulge the luxury of sitting careless and lament? Instead of acting and taking initiative, Christians resigned to accept the present condition, without realizing that these attitudes bring an

offense to God's name. The name of God is linked to us as His people. Having this perspective on life, every believer is called to build the walls of “Jerusalem”, which can be the church, the needy, our peers and so on. Acting in this direction, our society will experience a visible transformation, realized by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, there is a time when the right man comes at the right place; that is the best moment to act under the vision he received from God. If you want to do something for God's ministry, you must be willing and open to pay the price to achieve your vision. You are called for today's generation. Nehemiah acted for the honor of God and for his fellows, in his generation.

God's intervention came amid carelessness and in the context when Israelites' priorities were different. Unfortunately, their vision was characterized by selfishness and idolatry; they put their own interests above the interests of God. They made their priorities in life a goal in itself, spending their time and their resources in the wrong direction. Unfortunately, this reality is found widely in the church today, where the most run after the interests of their own homes. And if they have time, lull their conscience with a good deed or with a visit at the church.

If you are a visionary who follows the welfare of the Kingdom of God, then you should act primarily for the interests of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). When God entrusts a vision to somebody, it is always linked with Him and His work even if it takes place outside the Church. The main goal of every vision is to support the ministry of God in the Church or in society. Practical finality of each vision is that God's kingdom is extended; not least those who take part in it become more like Christ. Judy Wardell Halliday said that for the vision to become reality we must remain committed to it. Be a

visionary, seeking the fulfillment of God's vision just where He has placed you. Be willing to pay the necessary price. The Kingdom of God needs visionaries to give to the Church of Christ a holistic dimension.

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