

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA**  
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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Hymenaeus and Alexander, Ananias and Sapphira**

**1 Timothy 1:19-20; Acts 5:1-11**

**- A Controversial Typology between Punishment and Divine Pedagogy?**

**- SUMMARY -**

**COORDINATOR:**

**Fr. PhD. STELIAN TOFANĂ**

**PhD STUDENT:**

**Fr. Cristian DRAGOȘ**

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## **Summary**

**Key words:** *Hymenaeus, Alexander, Ananias, Sapphira, pedagogy, punishment, satan, death, heresy, blasphemy, faith*

The word of the Holy Scriptures is a word that is constantly addressed to us and provokes us to discover it always in new and soul-uplifting dimensions of its significance, without ever being able to claim that we have been able to completely understand their mystery. It does not have the purpose of awakening some incessant disputes and polemics, but it is life or a way of life that places on the new principles the meaning of human existence as a connection of love and communion with God.

However, we find marginal situations between the pages of the Holy Scriptures that seem unusual and contrary to biblical principles. Such situations, little or not at all addressed in the liturgical life of the church, can create difficulties or even distract the uninitiated reader of the Holy Scriptures. In front of such contradictions, man, as the recipient and ferment of the divine word, is on the one hand disoriented and confused. On the other hand, these situations have been and have remained for many stumbling blocks and an additional argument to substantiate their repugnant attitude towards biblical values or to justify their own immoral actions.

The example of Ezekiel, whose wife dies, but who is not allowed to mourn her (Ezekiel 24:16-17), despite the habit of mourning (Genesis 37:35); of Jeremiah the prophet, whom was not allowed to marry (Jeremiah 16:1-4), although the prophet Hosea was commanded to marry the whore Gomer (Hosea 1:2-3); of Jacob who steals his brother the right of the first born and shamelessly deceives his father Isaac, taking advantage of the fact that he was blind, contrary to the precepts from Leviticus 19:14 and Deuteronomy 27:18; of David who combines adultery with murder and after a twofold repentance is forgiven and not only so, his dynasty is saved due to his sinful relation with the woman of Uriah (Matthew 1:6) – these are only a few Old Testament situations that can raise question marks to an unadvised reader.

Neither are the New Testament writings devoid of disturbing passages: the killing of innocent infants in Bethlehem of Judea (Matthew, chap. 2), the massacre of the devout Galileans by Pilate, the fall of the tower of Siloam over eighteen people (Luke 12:1-5), the verdict that St. Ap. Paul pronounces against incestuous in Corinth: “to deliver such an one unto Satan” (1 Corinthians 5:1-13); the impossibility of repentance for those who have denied the faith (Hebrews 6:4-8); or the express recommendation made to Christians (1 John 5:14-20) not to pray for those who commit the sins of death, are just as absurd cases, without a religious-moral justification.

Situations like this have led us to try to unravel at least in part the enigma of why God, directly or indirectly, through His chosen, intervenes in history with measures that seem to be traumatizing for both those directly involved and for the witnesses to these events.

In this regard, we have proposed to approach two New Testament biblical episodes that will be the subject of our research.

A first, at least controversial, situation is represented by the exhortation of St. Paul to deliver Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan (1 Timothy 1:20). What intrigues the reader of this epistle is the radicalism and firmness of the judgment applied to the two, expressed by the formulation - “I have delivered unto Satan”-, with the purpose “that they may learn not to blaspheme”. The contextual information regarding the offenses of the two is limited and insufficient to answer many legitimate questions that may arise with such a verdict. The character of the measure applied to the two is punitive or recuperative-educational? Who were the two persons to whom the author delivered such a sentence? In what exactly consisted the gravity of their guilt? May Satan have a role in the purpose of this measure? And if this is possible, what exactly was its role? If the reason for the disciplinary measure involves educational connotations, how is it possible to involve Satan in this approach?

The second situation that is the subject of our research has at its center the sudden death of the spouses Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) as they kept for themselves a part from the sum of money received for a land, which they sold, claiming that they left at the “feet of the apostles” the full amount of money that resulted from the sale. Surprising is in this case also the vehemence of the apostle Peter and the speed of the events. What vexes

the reader in this episode is the immediate death of the two spouses without any prior reprimand to expose their wrongdoing and create the premises for repentance. A brief analysis in parallel with similar events and not only, could generate doubts and controversies under the following aspects: why in the case of other flagrant violations of the moral norms was offered time for reflection and repentance as opposed to this situation?; how relevant is this episode in the context of Luke's writings and especially in the context of the idyllic life of the first Christian community in the atmosphere in which the author places this event?; if the gravity of the sin of the two spouses imposed this measure, what was their guilt?; can the death of the two spouses have an expiatory reasoning?; what is the relationship between divine mercy and love and such a radical measure?; which is the divine logic that gives a higher meaning to the death of the spouses Ananias and Sapphira?

To provide an answer to these questions we tried to detail as much as possible the context in which these biblical fragments were written, the logic the authors considered and the terminology used by St. Luke and St. Paul.

The content of this paper is structured in three parts which are divided into several chapters and sub-chapters, each chapter being followed by preliminary conclusions. Naturally, the paper is preceded by a section of *Preliminaries* and ends with the *Final Conclusions*, followed by the recording of the *Bibliography*.

The introductory part of the paper – *Preliminaries* – is intended to present the premises from which the research starts, the current state of the research, the way in which the two fragments are approached by the patristic literature, respectively the research objectives and the working methods, followed by a brief presentation of the research structure.

Part I – *The Heresy of Ephesus and the Gospel of the Pastorals* is structured into three chapters that approach, from different perspectives, the problem of defining the heresy of Ephesus whose exponents were Hymenaeus and Alexander. Although St. Paul does not clearly define in the text of his epistle the elements of the heresy of Ephesus, calling it a “false teaching” or “lying science”, however, by analyzing the terminology used by the author, in conjunction with a series of endorsed opinions of the biblical researchers, we have identified as specific to the heresy of Ephesus, Jewish, pre-Gnostic, ascetic, magic



elements, doubled by a strong imprint of a “feminist movement”. The theological theme approached by St. Ap. Paul gives us additional data on the specificity of the heresy. Thus, we have come to the conclusion that the heretical teaching included certain deviations regarding the Christological doctrine, the reality of the Incarnation and the second coming of the Savior being challenged, as well as the universal dimension of salvation. The insistence with which St. Paul emphasizes that the ministers of the gospel were invested through the power and work of the Holy Spirit, can be perceived as a reaction to those who challenged the missionary work of him and Timothy who were under the authority of the Holy Spirit. As the author of the epistles allots a generous space to emphasize the moral principles of a Christian life, one can easily conclude that the heresy was characterized by a certain dose of libertinism or by challenging the moral values in accordance with the gospel.

Part II of the paper – *Hymenaeus and Alexander. Punishment or Divine Pedagogy?* – focuses on establishing the identity of the two vectors of the heresy, Hymenaeus and Alexander, as well as on the tingeing of the apostasy they were guilty of, a special attention being paid to the terminology used by the author in 1 Timothy 1:19-20. To this end, by analyzing the significance associated by the biblical literature to the term “blasphemy”, we have been able to identify enough elements of the heresy of Ephesus that can be easily circumscribed to this sin. The gesture of the followers of the heresy of Ephesus to delimit themselves from the sum of the values of a Christian life by creating a distinct doctrine, was a freely consented one, since they “threw” “faith and good thought” outside any constraint. In order to express as much as possible the fall from the faith of Hymenaeus and Alexander, St. Paul uses an expression (περὶ τὴν πίστιν ἐναυάγησαν - *they shipwrecked from faith*) which recalls the experience of his own shipwreck, a situation he considers the most appropriate allegory to illustrate the apostasy of some members of the community of Ephesus.

Chapter 4 of this part brings to the fore a series of expressions from the Epistle 1 to Timothy, which indirectly refers to the fall from faith. These, intuitively ordered, in a crescendo, demonstrate that the heretic phenomenon progressively, and programmatically evolved and was fully assumed by those concerned, thus making his followers fully responsible for their choice. As a result, delivering Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan

was not a hasty, immediate decision, but an extreme solution after several warnings that were disregarded.

To decipher the meaning of the expression “I have delivered unto Satan - οὐς παρέδωκα τῷ σατανᾷ” and to answer the question regarding the role of Satan in the measure expressed by St. Paul, some eloquent biblical episodes were invoked for our argument (the case of Job, the temptation of the Savior, the incestuous from Corinth). Thus, it has been found that in some extreme situations, God uses Satan's vanity, to which He allows to act within the limits imposed by divine sovereignty, in order to fulfill His oikonomic plan of salvation of the world. The same logic is valid in the case of our text, fact confirmed by the presence of the verb παιδεύω – *to punish, to discipline, to educate, to train using coercive means*, to indicate the purpose of Satan's intervention: “to learn” - παιδευθῶσιν. In all biblical literature, this verb has pedagogical, positive, constructive connotations. As regards its use in the Pastoral Epistles, it aims at the determination towards repentance, the knowledge of the truth (the gospel) and the liberation from the enemy's chase, assimilated to the heretical movement.

Prior to the issuance of this disciplinary sentence (1 Timothy 1:12-16), St. Paul considers it necessary to reiterate the moment of his conversion as a paradigm of divine mercy for those guilty of blasphemy, this being further proof that the purpose pursued by the author in formulating the sentence was a pedagogical one, and not a punitive one. The same conclusion also emerges through the typological interpretation of the episode, starting from the pedagogical and saving role of the Babylonian bondage experienced by the Jewish people.

Part III of the paper, *Ananias and Sapphira - Exponents of the Punishment or Reason of Divine Pedagogy?*, begins by framing the episode of the death of the spouses Ananias and Sapphira in the series of biblical events in which the guilt of the protagonists is associated with the adversity or hostility towards God. Relevant in this regard are the disciplinary practice of the community of Qumran, the sin of Acan, the archbishop Menelau and the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abiud.

The death of the spouses Ananias and Sapphira are part of the logic of Luke's writings as: the indictment to which the Savior submits the scribes and Pharisees (Luke 11:34-44); the dialogue with the rich governor (Luke 18:19-23); as a positive example,

Zacchaeus' repentance (Luke 19:1-10); then, the rebuke of Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), the rescue of the maid possessed with a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16-40) and the revolt of the silversmith Demetrius from Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). All these situations have as common denominator the fact that the hostility to God of the protagonists originates from the unnatural attachment to money or material goods, which the biblical writings associate with demonic ministry. The association with these episodes from Luke's work frames the gesture of the spouses Ananias and Sapphira in a confrontation of a spiritual nature. This meaning is supported by the two antithetical images created by the author in which the action is dominated by the verbs πληρόω and πίμπλημι – to fill. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit fills (πίμπλημι) the community with His presence (Acts 4:31), and, on the other hand, Satan fills (πληρόω) Ananias' heart with cunning and enhances his immoral inclinations (Acts 5:3).

The third chapter of this part presents the gesture of the two spouses in contrast with the life of the community they were part of. The fundamental elements characteristic to the Christian community such as the apostles' teaching, the spiritual and material communion, bread breaking and the community prayer are presented by St. Luke as a fruit of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit within the community. In this context, the two spouses become the tools through which Satan attempts to the work of the Holy Spirit for the building of the new people of God. Therefore, we can conclude that God ends the lives of Ananias and Sapphira as they tried to compromise the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's oikonomia. This idea is repeated in the following chapter, by emphasizing the semantics of the verbs ψεύδομαι, νοσφίζω and ἐκψύχω, which in most cases denote actions that are against God or refer to the loss of life by those who are opposed to Him. Also, the way in which the death of the two spouses takes place, the rush with which they are buried, the vocabulary used by the author, gives this denouement an equally punitive and protective dimension.

Punitive, because the two spouses were fully aware of the connotation of their gesture and to the same extent responsible for it. “Ananias (σὺν) with Sapphira, his wife” (5:1); “his wife also being privy to it - συνειδυίης καὶ τῆς γυναικός” (5:2); “Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? - τί ὅτι ἔθου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο;” (4, 5b); “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, for so much.” (v.

8); “How is it that you have agreed (συμφωνέω) together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.” (v. 9a) As the vocabulary used in this excerpt suggests, Satan did nothing but intensify the spouse's unnatural attachment to material goods, as well as their concern for a flawless image within the community. Thus, the guilt of Ananias and Sapphira consisted in the fact that they consciously opposed God, they became θεομάχος – *fighters against God*. Therefore, God removes them from the Christian community not for reasons of revenge or divine satisfaction, but because of their inability to repent.

On the other hand, the loss of the lives of the two spouses is also protective because their sin represented a real threat to the unity of the community as a people of God. If their gesture had not been amended in this way, at that time, such a practice could have become commonplace in the community, but the punishment applied to both spouses legitimizes the community as ἐκκλησία - the new chosen people of God.

Such an understanding of divine intervention is also supported by the typological interpretation of this fragment, starting from the episode of temptation in the Qudeis desert, in favor of which sufficient plausible arguments have been identified.

Thus, God's intervention in the history of humanity, even through extreme measures that involve traumatic experiences for those directly or indirectly involved, is a final solution He uses to ensure the continuity of the eternal plan of salvation of the world. Divine discipline always has pedagogical values, even in situations where it has punitive nuances, yet it can be understood as a providence gesture towards those who have not been contaminated by sin.