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Școala doctorală „Ecumene”

**Roluri ale conducerii bisericești în
păstrarea și transmiterea tradiției
apostolice, conform Epistolelor Pastorale**

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τὸ δὲ τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας ἐστὶν ἀγάπη ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας καὶ συνειδήσεως
ἀγαθῆς καὶ πίστεως ἀνυποκρίτου

1 Tim. 1:5

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Conclusions

The present study – *The role(s) of church orders in keeping and passing on the apostolic tradition, according to the Pastoral Epistles* – puts forward several important conclusions regarding church orders (leadership) in Christian communities in Ephesus and Crete. First, our examination of available studies on the Pastoral Epistles has revealed two distinct lines of inquiry: one in which scholars have used socio-cultural methodologies to interpret the Pastoral Epistles and another in which the Pastoral Epistles are approached as solely parenetic texts, that is, as texts that only address Christian ethics and the believers' behaviour, and therefore do not have an inherent theological character. There are only a few studies which approach the Pastoral Epistles as theological texts, identifying in them coherent and important theological themes. As for ecclesiology, this has not been regarded by scholars an important theological theme in the Pastoral Epistles. This theme is usually explored only in connection with the new leadership roles and the increased interest the author of these epistles has for church organization and church orders, as well as the unique conditions (they appear nowhere else in the New Testament) regarding bishops/elders and deacons.

The study has argued that, first, a new hermeneutical approach to the Pastoral Epistles can provide for a deeper understanding of these texts, especially their take on church orders. This hermeneutic focuses on the way the author of the epistles describes the Church because out of this understanding comes the view on church orders and their mission. I have demonstrated that, for the author of the Pastoral Epistles, the church is the *House of God*, that is, a community within which God dwells, that lives and acts in the public space (1 Tim. 1:15; Titus 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:20-21). This community is led and administered by specific church orders (bishops/elders) who are charged with fulfilling specific ethical and educational criteria (1. Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9). This ecclesiological perspective is deeply rooted in the Greco-Roman

context, but given new meaning and reshaped according to the author's theological vision regarding the mission of the Christian community to preserve and pass on accurately the true teaching of the apostles to the next generations of believers.

In order to demonstrate this thesis several study hypotheses were introduced and used to give direction to the research. The starting point was the premise that the Pastoral Epistles reveal a Christianity that finds itself at a cross-roads in regard with the organization and the structure of the church, especially the church orders, and these in the context in which its founding authority, the apostles and their co-workers (in some cases) were no longer present. Within this authority vacuum, different teachers, promoting messages that were not in harmony with the apostolic teaching, have appeared and were attempting to impose themselves to the leadership of Christian communities.

The study proper began with a short analysis of the socio-religious life of the communities addressed in the Pastoral Epistles. I have shown here that previous proposals regarding false teachers within these Christian communities are inadequate. The false teachers in the Pastoral Epistles were analysed using four clarifying criteria: (1) their teaching; (2) their character; (3) their actions; and (4) the author's attitude toward them. The analysis has shown that proposals putting forward the apparition of false teachers as the main reason for these writings do not have good arguments in the letters. Within the entire Pastoral Epistles corpus there are only three teachers whose message is not in harmony with the correct teaching (interdiction of marriage and food abstinence in 1 Tim. 4:3, and the proclamation of a realised eschatology – the idea that the resurrection had already taken place in 2 Tim. 2:18). Regarding the first two teachings the author has a positive reaction, namely, Timothy is ordered to continue to be a good example of behaviour and in his teaching. Regarding the third teaching, the false teachers are to be further taught, in the hope that God will bring them to repentance – thus the author leaves open the possibility of their rehabilitation. The only decisive act is the excommunication – an extraordinary measure reserved for specific situations – mentioned by the author in connection with Hymenaeus and Alexander, both accused that they neither kept the faith (here understood as good doctrine) nor (consequently) did they keep a clean consciousness. Having analysed these in light of the four criteria mentioned earlier it was shown that they did not have a clearly defined (theological) identity and a complex doctrine, but more likely were accused because of misinterpretations of Apostle Paul's theology, coupled with problems in terms of character and behaviour. These conclusions show that the problems caused by false teachers are specific and connected to communities in transition, which in the case of

the Pastoral Epistles is the transition from charismatic, itinerant apostolic authority to an authority based on specific leadership criteria that takes shape in these writings. Thus the problem of false teachers in the Pastoral Epistles is not the main issue of the writings but merely a secondary one. The confrontation between true and false teaching is real, but it is of minor importance.

The argument continued with a comparative analysis of οἶκος in the Greco-Roman world, in which we examined its composition and character, as well as its structure and significations within the Pastoral Epistles. The comparison led to the conclusion that the author of the Pastoral Epistles borrows significantly from the use of οἶκος in the Greco-Roman world, where the concept was understood metaphorically, to mean a large social entity made up of several social groups. This was demonstrated through an analysis of οἶκος in the Pastoral Epistles, where the author does not see the church as any οἶκος but as an οἶκος that receives new significance, theologically enriched. The heart of the argument is contained in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, where the nature of the Church and the implications this has for the understanding of the Pastoral Epistles as a whole is described. The Church is God's οἶκος, seen radically different than the metaphorical description of the church available in Apostle Paul's letters, a public community within which the ultimate authority belongs to God (the apostles and Christ are not included in this hierarchy). The bishops/elders (two designations that describe the same office) responsible for administering and leading the church, and the deacons in specific situations, are charged with preserving unaltered and passing on the apostolic tradition they have received. Also, as we have seen, within this ecclesiological vision the organization and structure of the church are natural occurrences. In the Pastoral Epistles the author exhorts all social groups toward good character and worthy witness in the church and the society. As for leading and teaching roles specifically, we have seen that in the Pastoral Epistles these are to be interpreted in light of the author's view of the church. The strict separation of roles in the Pastoral Epistles is not caused by a specific anthropological theology (1 Tim. 2:11-15), but by the fact that the then model of church organization and structure did not permit that women fulfil the roles that were specifically fulfilled by men. Also, candidates for leadership offices, who were to lead and teach the communities, had to fulfil specific conditions: adherence to true teaching; administrative and leadership abilities; loyalty and fidelity in the family; unapproachable ethical behaviour; and a good reputation within the society outside of the church.

The analysis of the apostolic tradition undertaken has shown that this is a complex concept that includes both known practical and doctrinal aspects as well as specific elements

added by the author in order to communicate his vision within the context. This is seen first in the terminology used to describe the apostolic tradition. The author uses technical language (*παραθήκη*), by which he intends to show that the apostolic teaching is already known within the community and is perceived as doctrine. The author's use of particular concepts such as "faith", "truth", "commandment" is meant to define, in specific contexts, the content of the teaching, of the doctrine (objectively speaking), and not as a description of faith and truth as personal experiences of/with God. Furthermore, regarding the theological content of the apostolic tradition we have seen that the author operates with specific concepts (God as Saviour – *σωτηρ*), which are used in accordance with his view of the church. The Living God desires for all humans to be saved and to come to know the truth; this epistemological process takes place within the *House of God*, through the learning of correct doctrine, under the leading and renewal done by the Holy Spirit – this represents the fulfilment of God's plan. As for the liturgical manifestations of the community, the author emphasizes the public prayer of the Church for the secular authorities (1 Tim. 2:1-2), which is a unique occurrence in the canonical New Testament writings. This community experience – the prayer for authorities done with the purpose of living a peaceful dignified life – is the expression of a Christian community that is deeply engaged in the life of the city and responsible for a harmonious living. The intercession of the church in the world and for the world is closely connected with the revelation of God as Saviour, through the Man Jesus Christ. Another aspect, regarding the inner experience of the church, is the regulations regarding the assistance given to, and provided by, widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16). This assistance is not limited to helping widows in need (as it is generally argued) but also as the function of the organised group of widows who are to be, according to the author, models of behaviour and good character. Together with widows, are included deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:11) and elderly women, as well as Lois, Eunice and Priscilla. At the opposite pole, Eve is given as a negative example, a behaviour Christian women ought to avoid.

Included in the author's vision for the ethical and moral behaviour within the community are also the ethical requirements to be fulfilled by those who are candidates for leadership roles. This is a novelty, solely presented in the Pastoral Epistles, and it is the likely outcome of how the author describes the nature of the church and her mission in the world. Given the complexity of these ethical demands, in the analysis these were organised in three categories, according to the specific areas addressed: (1) family; (2) Christian community; and (3) society. Together with these categories, specific ethical and behavioural elements pertaining to the leadership roles occupied are added. These elements are drawn from the concepts used

frequently in the society with reference to those who performed various leadership roles. Also, we have seen that within the ecclesiological model developed, the family is again in view exactly because the new ecclesiological model has the family at its core. Leaders (bishop/elders) ought to have good standing with non-Christians, which again shows the public dimension of the church and her new, specifically outward, orientation. By listing such demands the author is decisively contributing to the shaping of church orders and the validation process of those aspiring to such roles. As with women, the author presents Timothy and Titus as models of faith, ethics and good behaviour to be followed by future leaders. The formation of such church orders in the Pastoral Epistles is yet another indication that the churches addressed are historically after the apostolic epoch, a period in which their organization becomes an acute issue. The way this came to be must be understood in light of the ecclesiological vision of the author.

After the development of this new hermeneutical approach to the Pastoral Epistles, from the perspective of the nature of the church, the second part of the study follows logically with an analysis of the roles the author ascribes to the leaders in order to preserve and pass on unaltered the apostolic tradition. We have shown that the most common role ascribed to the bishop/elders in this specific ecclesiastic vision is didactic, to be teachers, communicators of correct teaching. The vast vocabulary that describes this activity and its contents indicate that the inner situation of the church is significantly different and that the passing on of the apostolic tradition to the next generations involves didactic (and adjacent) activities. Because this didactic activity is ascribed exclusively to church orders, the ministries in the church are revolving around specifically validated persons, people who are charged with the responsibility to pass on to the next generations of Christians the correct teaching (rather than the office or charisms). The second important activity of church orders is to lead/administer (Titus 1:7); by this the author connects the activity of church leaders to his ecclesiological vision. The bishop/elders administer the *House of God* under the direct authority of God. We have seen that the elders responsible with the teaching and leading of the community are to be remunerated (financially) by the community. As teachers and administrators, the bishop/elders were also responsible with appointing other elders (and probably deacons) through ordination and laying of hands, in order to ensure the passing on of Christian tradition. Thus, the appointment and laying of hands receives in the Pastoral Epistles the value of *validation* for those in leadership offices. In line with this role, church orders are also responsible with disciplining elders according to specific criteria, as well as disciplining Christian believers in general. This activity is the foundation of

disciplining criteria for elders in the teaching of the New Testament. All the roles identified and analysed are specific to the author of the Pastoral Epistles and are designed to ensure the fulfilment of the mission the church has in that specific context: the preservation and passion on of the apostolic tradition, unaltered, to the next Christian generations. In this way, the Pastoral Epistles present the most advanced leadership structure for the church in the New Testament, having well defined criteria for candidates, well defined roles and attributes and a specific mission.

In the final part of the study I have explored further how the form and leadership structure of the church have evolved, on the basis of the following post-apostolic writings: 1,2 Clement and Ignatius of Antioch. The analysis was done by looking at four criteria: (1) the composition and structure of church leadership; (2) the specific roles fulfilled by church leaders; (3) the relationships between church leaders; and (4) the responsibilities communities had toward their leaders.

Regarding the situation behind 1 Clement, we have shown that the author promotes to the community the benefits leaders have in fulfilling God's will for the community (restoration of peace and harmony). In doing so, he is giving to the leadership of the church divine legitimacy within the church – the elders (the only office mentioned) receive their authority from God. In terms of leadership structures, 1 Clement is similar to the Pastoral Epistles. Similarly, in 2 Clement the author does not bring any novelty, neither in terms of leadership structures nor in terms of roles ascribed to those in leadership positions. The only one mentioned are the elders (always plural), who are charged with teaching and exhorting the community. Given the lack of other offices in the letter, we can assume that the elders were both administering/leading and teaching the community. Even though neither 1 Clement nor 2 Clement mention the existence and role of deacons, we can assume that deacons were also present in these communities. The author of these letters however does not consider important to mention them because deacons are not part of the argument developed.

Regarding the communities addressed by Ignatius of Antioch, a significantly different situation is evident here. Changes are present both in terms of leadership structures and roles, as well as in terms relationship patterns amongst leaders and between leaders and believers in the churches. According to Ignatius of Antioch, the church is led/administered by a bishop (always singular), elders (mostly plural) and deacons. The bishop is always first in this hierarchy, occupying a central role in performing liturgical acts and being given priority in

leading the church. Although it has been argued that in these epistles elders are not given as much importance as the bishop, we have shown that they play an active role in leading and teaching the church and are sometimes placed on an equal hierarchical level with the bishop. Deacons, the lowest category in this hierarchy, are also actively involved in leadership. They are given teaching responsibilities, thus their social roles are eclipsed. Another novelty in these writings is the relationship between the bishop, elders and deacons. Given the primacy of the bishop, elders and deacons are expected to act under his authority. However, several references suggest that the relationship between the bishop and elders is not always hierarchical, of submission. Sometimes, they are seen as equal. This indicates that the model of moniscopacy is not yet fully developed; here we see only an incipient phase. Generally speaking, the leadership of Christian communities according to Ignatius of Antioch has divine legitimacy – the bishop, the elders and the deacons as representatives of God, Christ and the apostles are to serve in order to strengthen the churches in their struggle against heresies.

In the end, it is important to mention that within the hermeneutical approach used in our analysis of the Pastoral Epistles other venues of inquiry remain open for exploration. For instance, another area in the study of the Pastoral Epistles that has not been sufficiently addressed is the ethic promoted by the author. We have shown in this study that the main theological themes of the Pastoral Epistles are articulated in close connection with the way the author of the epistles defines the Church. In similar fashion, the mode in which the author conceptualizes and systematizes ethics in accordance with the nature of the Church could also be explored. Also, another theological theme little explored from an ecclesiological perspective is that of God as Saviour (σωτηρ), a theme which, I suggest, is closely connected with the mission of the Church. Both, the mission of the Church and the ethic put forward by the author should be analysed from an ecclesiological perspective in order to discover the implications these have for Christian theology and for the daily praxis of the Church.

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