

MISIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MATTHEW'S ECCLESIOLOGY IN CHAPTERS 10 AND 18

Doctoral Thesis

Abstract

Key Words: *apostle, apostleship, Church, community, confession, disciples, disunion, forgiveness, healing, Israel, Kingdom, mission, poverty, suffering.*

In recent years, the European Christian Churches have become more aware of the fact that the interaction between globalization and pluralism needs not only a deep theological reflection but also a concrete and coherent initiative that restates the Christian identity and the part that the Gospel of Jesus plays in today's society. A very good proof of these preoccupations is the increasing number of studies that deal with the theme of the Church's mission in today's society.

However, we must say that, despite the diversity of the tackled subjects, of the zeal of the theologians involved in these manifestations, there still are many attempts to be made in order to exhibit in a coherent and credible system the constructive and creative part of the redeeming Gospel within the new social, political and cultural conditions of the European pluralism.

The Orthodox Christians think that the mission involves the very being of the Church (Anastasios of Androussa). The ecclesiastic character of the mission shows that "the Church is rather the purpose and the fulfillment of the word of the Gospel than the instrument or the means of the mission" (David Bosch). "The ecclesiology is the one that determines the mission" (I. Bria). That is why the main elements of the answer to the question regarding the mission's Orthodox definition must be sought in the "doctrine and experience of the Church".

The purpose of this work is that of identifying and analysing the Matthean ecclesiology's mission traits as these are reflected in the first sending of the disciples (Mt. 10) and in the Ecclesiological Discourse (chapter 18), both having the same topic: the Church. If in chapter 10 the mission, the authority, the sending of the apostles and the experiences of the disciples are underlined, in the 18th chapter the inner life of the

community is presented. We can say that in the 10th chapter the external dimension of the Church is presented whereas the 18th chapter presents its interior dimension, namely the duties of the apostles in regard to the foundation of the Church and the development of the community's life.

The Matthean reflections on the Church's mission characteristics have a very important starting point: the apostleship. Preaching is inseparable from the apostles' lives since the truth of the preached words is always supported through their lives. Their own life becomes the word of the sermon for others. From this point of view, for Matthew, a steadfast faith is a characteristic of the Church. Other such characteristics are *poverty* (Mt. 10: 9), *lack of defence* (Mt. 10: 10), *kindness* (Mt. 10: 16), *suffering* (Mt. 10, 17-28), *humility* (Mt. 18: 1-5), and *forgiveness* (Mt. 18: 18-35). For the Evangelist, the consequences of these facts which came as reaction of the "world" are also characteristics of the Church: *hatred, rejection, suffering* and even *death*.

In regard to the methodology of the research, we opted for a three part structure of the paper which in its turn has chapters and subchapters.

In the first part of the paper, the overview of the Matthean ecclesiology with a stress on the communitarian literary genre of the Gospel brings evidence of the way in which the evangelist constantly alludes to the life of the Christian group amongst who the Gospel was elaborated. All the nations are called to become Disciples of Christ through the baptism and the respect the advice Christ gave throughout His life on earth. Christ stays with His Church: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Mt. 18: 20) – until the end of times. What is emphasised here is the fact that Matthew has a vivid interest for ecclesiology in connection to its written form, its style and composition, as well as its theological orientation or perspective.

The identification of the members of the "Matthean community" in the context of the Judeo-Christian primary relationships has helped us clarify who they were, where and when they lived and what the social-religious context in which they lived was. Despite the modern controversies, we have come to the conclusion that the Gospel was woven in a Judaic environment. In favour of this thesis we presented a few arguments:

- a) The fundamental acceptance and the preservation of the Law (Mt. 5: 17-20,23,3).
- b) The permanent referral to the Old Testament and the accentuation of the idea that the things that had been written were fulfilled (compare Mt. 1: 22; 2: 5, 15, 17; 3: 3, 4: 14-16, 17, etc.).
- c) The confinement of the space of Jesus's mission to Israel (compare Mt. 10: 5 a.s.o; 15: 24).

- d) The keeping of the Sabbath in the “Matthean community” (Mt. 24: 20).
- e) The Judaic “Matthean community continues to live in a Judaic “union” (compare Mt. 17: 24-27; 23: 1-3).
- f) The typology of “Moses” in Mt. 2: 13 a.s.o.; 4: 1 a.s.o.; and the five discourses from the Gospel which present Jesus as having considerable affinity to Moses.
- g) The language, the structure, the arguments of the Gospel and how this was received.

All these lead to the conclusion that the author of the Gospel was a Judeo-Christian who, according to the external and internal exegesis, could be none other than the Apostle Matthew, the former publican, a Jew.

After an analysis on the “stereotypical words” about “their” and “our” synagogues in regard to the relationship between the “Matthean community” and the synagogue of those days, we have come to the conclusion that this “community” did not belong to the Judaic synagogue since it was characterized by a “fracture” with Israel which lead to oppressions and persecutions from the Jews. (Stelian Tofană)

Since the Gospel according to Matthew was addressed in the first place to a Judaic community, we have tried to see if this is mainly a Judaic Gospel having as fundament one of the most difficult evangelic passages: “only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Mt. 10:5; 15: 24). By analysing this matter, we have come to the conclusion that the Saviour’s command to the Apostles, who should carry their mission only to the people of Israel, reflects the history of the Matthean Christianity which in its early stage had solely a preoccupation for the Jews, thus keeping the promise that God had made to the patriarchs. Only later, after Jesus’s Resurrection, this became a mission to the other nations: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28: 19).

In the second part of the paper, we opted for an analysis of the “theological-missionary dimension of the 10th chapter” in which we firstly attempted to see what the position of this chapter within the Gospel is by bringing forth its careful placement and its didactic and systematic character. We could clearly notice the close connection between this discourse and the other parts of the Gospel, especially with the Sermon on the Mountain.

Secondly, we have approached new exegetical perspectives, attempting an exegetical-theological patristic and contemporary analysis of each of the sequences in Chapter 10, according to the following pattern:

- 1) The context of the sequence;

- 2) The exegesis of the sequence;
- 3) The theological interpretation.

We came to the conclusion that Matthew had understood the calling to the mission (Mt. 10: 1-5) as a task of the entire Church, and the life of the itinerant missionary as a calling to obedience addressed to every Christian. In this way, the apostolic Discourse is a meaningful part of the fundamental ecclesiological text of the Gospel according to Matthew (Chapter 18). This text proves the way in which their lives are influenced by the fate of the Saviour and by the Sermon on the Mountain.

Based on Christ's model, the Church is an extension of the life and teachings of the Embodied Christ. Hence, for Matthew, the Church is the Saviour's model as we find it expressed in verses 24-25: "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" (Matthew 10: 24-25).

In this chapter, the Church concept, as it appears in the work of Matthew, was presented through a series of examples:

- 1) Christ's mercy and grace are primordial to the Church (Mt. 9: 36) and in order for it to receive these, the Church is asked to pray (Mt. 9: 38).
- 2) The Church perpetuates Christ's mission in the world through its teaching power (Mt. 10: 7, 23, 32; cf. 4: 17) and its healing power (Mt. 10: 1, 8, cf. 4: 23; 9: 35). This mission of the Church is also visible in its characteristic of being *sent*.
- 3) Christ's model of life is reflected in the Church. This characteristic is probably the most important manner in which the Evangelist understands the Church. It is remarkable how Mt. 10 is almost entirely a discourse on the behaviour and the faith of the disciples who are in accordance with the Matthean Christology.
- 4) In this manner, the apostolic discourse accentuates the following traits: *mission* (Mt. 10: 5-6, 11, 14, 16, 23, 40-42), *poverty* (Mt. 10: 8b-10, cf. 10: 40-42) and *the lack of defence* (Mt. 10: 10, 16: 38-39).
- 5) Another characteristic of the Church is how this shares Christ's *suffering*. As proved before, the faith of the disciples is the same with the faith of their Teacher (Mt. 10: 24-25), and their sending out to teach the nations will put them in serious danger (Mt. 10: 28-31). In the verses from Mt. 10: 17-19, 38-39 the steps of the passions are mentioned and anticipated and these are nothing else than a mirror of the oppressions through which the apostles will undergo. One of the effects that following Christ has is the separation of families (Mt. 10: 34-37). Certainly,

Matthew does not doubt the fact that the mission in the name of Christ leads to suffering, but he is referring to the *suffering that derives from not accepting Christ* (Mt. 10: 22). The Church assumes this suffering as unavoidable because of the rejection of Christ's teachings: "If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" (Mt. 10: 25). This is underlined by the Evangelist through the close connection he presents between suffering and the term $\kappa\omicron\lambda\omicron\upsilon\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$ - "to follow" (Mt. 10: 38).

- 6) The most important ecclesiological term of the discourse is μαθητής (disciple) and it appears at the beginning (Mt. 0: 37; 10: 1), in the middle (Mt. 10: 24-25) and at the end (Mt. 10: 42; 11: 1) of the discourse. Christ's disciples are becoming very important to the "Matthean community". The words $\alpha\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ (apostle) and μαθητής (disciple) are meant to identify these categories. The readers can identify themselves with the apostles and the disciples through their own experiences in the history of Jesus's life and through the experience and the council of Christ they can receive council for their own situation (U. Luz).

An analysis of the "mission topic of the 10th chapter in the theological context and in the dynamics of the Gospel" has brought light on the phrase "heavenly Kingdom". In this respect, it was necessary to define the concept of "heavenly Kingdom", the various names that the "heavenly Kingdom" has in the Scriptures, the coming of the Kingdom of God into the world and the relationship between the Church and the heavenly Kingdom in the New Testament. Based on these, we have reached the conclusion that, on one hand, the Kingdom of God came in the world through the Embodiment of the Son of God and, on the other hand, it is heavenly and it is to come in the future. Before reaching the stage of full development, the Kingdom of God undergoes a series of inaugurations and developments which began with Christ's Embodiment and which coincides with what is Christ's Church on earth, and that is a well developing Church. However, the completion of the heavenly Kingdom inaugurated by the earthly existence of the Church will take place after the second coming (Vasile Mihoc).

We essayed to do an analysis of the "missionary therapeutics of the miraculous healings" from Matthew's Gospel noticing that the introduction to the "Apostolic Discourse" (Mt. 9: 35; cf. 4: 23-25) offers the readers the image of the missionary activity of Jesus Christ in Israel. To record this image, Saint Matthew uses three verbs: διδάσκων (to teach), κηρύσσω (to proclaim), and θεραπεύω (to heal) - Mt. 9: 35. Therefore, the essence of His proclamation was the announcing of the coming of the heavenly Kingdom identified with Himself, and this coming was accompanied by miracles which made tangible the presence of God in Christ. In the sending of the disciples as it appears

in the “Apostolic Discourse” there is an amazing correspondence between the Apostles’ mission and the mission of Christ Himself. Their mission is only an extension and a perpetuation of the Teacher’s mission, a mission for which they have been empowered (ἐξουσία) with His authority (Ulrich Luz).

What is noticeable in the sending of the Apostles as it appears in the Gospel according to Matthew is the double dimension of Christ’s pre-Easter mandate:

- a. the kerygmatic dimension – that of proclaiming the Gospel,
- b. the therapeutic dimension – that of healing the sick.

As an integrant part of the proclamation, the background of the healings has been analysed under three aspects: *Christological*, *eschatological* and *soteriological*, as they are reflected in the Matthean writings. We consider that the purpose for which the evangelist writes about the healings is, firstly, that of emphasising the messianic authority of Jesus Christ and, secondly, that of provoking and finding out more about the universal disciples’ faith in the divine person of Christ. Accordingly, the *Christological* aspect of the healings regards the fact that the healings reveal Jesus as Christ who brings the fulfilment of the messianic times as the Scriptures foretold; the *eschatological* aspect of the healings is seen in the presence of the Kingdom of God which was inaugurated on Earth through the activity of Jesus Christ; and the *soteriological* aspect of the healings is noticed in the fact that, through their faith, the healed ones experienced in their own lives the saving power of Jesus Christ. The person is released from the bond of the devil and it is transferred towards the sphere of the grace of the heavenly Kingdom.

In the last part of the second chapter, we have mentioned the main characteristics of the Matthean ecclesiology as they appear in the 10th chapter. An analysis of the “money” in the meaning of the technical terms used by Matthew brought a better understating of Matthew’s explanation about poverty in Chapter 10. The idea of poverty and the idea of simplicity are much more important to Matthew than to the other evangelists. Both the entire 10th chapter and the section that follows after the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt. 6: 19-34, which needs to be interpreted as a coherent section about the problems connected to poverty and the devil) are dedicated to this matter. A life of poverty means assuming the life of the Son of Man whom Matthew mentioned in Chapter 8.

Suffering is important to Matthew. In the centre of the discourse there is the Christological declaration from the 24th and 25th verses: “The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master”. The Christological allusion shows that the apostles must suffer since He will suffer and they are the “members” of Master’s

household. Consequently, for Matthew, suffering is a characteristic component of the apostleship.

Being a *disciple* means living according to the model of Christ. For Matthew, the history of Jesus's life is the key of the apostolic Discourse. For Matthew, living and suffering after the model of Christ is the most important characteristic of the Church. Accordingly, a discourse that tries to understand the mission of the disciples speaks only of their lives, of their obedience and their sufferance. The suffering of the students is a reflection of the Teacher's suffering and a servant cannot expect anything better than his Master (Mt. 10: 24).

The third part of the paper includes the reflection upon the "Eschatological Discourse: about the life of the community (Mt. 18)". Following the same pattern as the exegesis of Chapter 10 we have shown the main eschatological characteristics of Chapter 18. These very clear characteristics can be applied to the life of the Church regardless of a time or a place:

- 1) For Matthew, one of the most important attributes of the Church is that of being a living and experienced *community*. The same point of view is encountered in most canonical books of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, by centring a certain discourse round the topic of community, Matthew focusses his attention especially on this fundamental trait: *the Church cannot be considered a Church if it not a community*.
- 2) The only way of accessing the heavenly Kingdom is through *humility*. The child in Mt. 18: 2-3 is an example of this. Christ asks us to go back to this life (στραφίτε), to become purer, to purify our hearts and to regain the state of primary innocence (Mt. 18: 3-4). In other words, that στρέφω - "going back, changing" means changing the will of man, giving up the power, the glory and the vanity, recognizing the lack of security and the meaningfulness of the person, taking seriously the other members of the family, helping them and communicating with the others.
- 3) The text contains the terrible threat to those who lead into temptation the "little ones" (vv. 6-7). The latter ones are the ones that the heavenly Father "favours" (v. 10) and for whose redemption the Son of Man came into the world.
- 4) The parable of the lost sheep (vv. 12-14) shows how the fundamental laws of an institution are defied. The principle that stresses out the importance of the majority in respect to the importance of the minority in reversed. In this way, happiness in the Kingdom of God will mean that everyone will enjoy each other's company. (Dumitru Staniloae)

- 5) The improvement of the one who did a wrongful deed must follow three stages. In the first stage the method of the personal lecture or the one in the presence of two or three witnesses is applied; and if these efforts are fruitless, the last stage, in which the efforts of regaining and improving the one who committed a sin, is inside the Church. It is only here that the complete *forgiveness* of all its members is achieved. If, even after all the stages above have been respected, the brothers who have committed the wrong deed still do not obey, calling them “pagans or tax collectors” is a sentence that would express the separation and the exclusion from the Church (Raymond Brown). The fact that the Evangelist Matthew does not mention the moment in which in the eyes of the Son of Man and of the Judge of the world a sin implies leading someone else into temptation (σκανδαλιζεσθαι) to such an extent that there is no return means that **the limits of forgiveness are annulled** and finding the lost (vv. 12-14) ones is much more important than their exclusion. The search and not the exclusion; forgiveness and not the “binding” are the divine attributes that need to be assumed because they pertain to the fundamental model of perfection: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect!” (Mt. 5: 48). (Stelian Tofana)
- 6) “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Mt. 18: 20). By including this verse inside the discourse about the solution to the conflicts inside the Church, Matthew underlines the authority that the community has in solving these conflicts: they act under the authority of God who is present in the middle of them. (D. A. deSilva)
- 7) The sin is understood by Christ and by Judaism in the same way: not as an error but as a “debt” (cf. Mt. 6: 12; Lk. 7: 41-43; 16: 1-8; Mt. 18: 23-35). In the parable about the unmerciful debtor (vv 23-35) the effect of God’s action is connected to the action of man, but it precedes the latter. In this respect, Saint Gregory of Nyssa says so beautifully that: “We dare to hope that in the same way in which we do good by imitating God, in the same way God imitates us when we do good so that you can tell God: You also do what I did; You, the Master, imitate Your servant, the poor and needy, You, the King of all; I forgave, so do not reject my prayer... I unbound, unbound me; I forgave, forgive me.”

The conclusion of the ecclesiological discourse, which sketches the Church’s guiding life lines, is simply the one that Jesus drew: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Mt. 18, 20) and this conclusion defines the existential unity between Jesus and those who follow Him. (Stelian Tofana)

In the last part of the third chapter: “Discipleship and community. An ecclesiological-missionary perspective of the 18th chapter,” we attempted to define the term ο μαθητα in order to understand correctly who the people that have the power to “bind” and to “unbind” in Matthew 18: 18 are. Then, we outlined the topic of forgiveness and more precisely: the nature and the meaning of forgiveness; forgiveness as mystery and as a service, the foretelling and the promise of the Mystery of the Confession – the power of “binding” and “unbinding” that was given to the Church.

Because of the numerous controversies and of the ambiguous understanding of the text in Mt. 18: 18, we opted for a minute analysis of the term ο μαθητα as it appears throughout the Gospel according to Matthew. The conclusion we reached is that it cannot be clearly proved that Matthew used the words ο μαθητα before Chapter 10 to name the twelve Apostles. It is only at the beginning of the 10th chapter that he mentions the group of the Twelve people chosen by Christ by using the word μαθητα together with the article ο. However, whenever he refers to the group of disciples in general, understood as an undefined majority, the evangelist uses the words ο μαθητα ατο (σου or μου) – His disciples (or my disciples). According to the instances in which the defining article is used in Greek, the term ο μαθητα – “the disciples” designates a specific group mentioned in the 10th chapter. These are mentioned as a clearly defined group, very well known by the listener or the reader (Mt. 10, 1-4). Consequently, the exclusive use of the word ο μαθητα is specific to the Gospel according to Matthew since the disciples are described as a better defined group than in all the other Gospels. (Vasile Mihoc)

Even if the term disciple and the term Apostle work in the Gospel according to Matthew as models of missionary identification for the Church by representing for all of us the paradigm of the authentic Christian, we must not make a confusion between the two terms. Ο μαθητα ατο designates the disciples’ majority and, thus, it designates all the Christians as followers of Christ, and through the use of ο μαθητα the Twelve who received the mission as Apostles are designated. It was only them who possessed all the spiritual gifts which made them heads of the Church (cf. I Cor. 12: 28-30; Efes. 4: 11). It was only them who received the gift of apostleship, of the special service from our Saviour, according to the words: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’” (John 20: 21-23).

By developing the topic of forgiveness, the “cement of our messianic community” and by analysing the expression “seventy-seven times” (Mt. 18: 22), we came to the

conclusion that forgiveness is a more frequent topic in the Gospel according to Matthew than anywhere else in the New Testament (P. Bonnard). There are no limits in forgiving the other: "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Mt. 18: 21-22). This is emphasised by both the numbers used: "seventy-seven times" and "ten thousands talents." These numbers denote immensity and infinity by emphasising the fact that Christian forgiveness must follow the example of God's limitless forgiveness, a forgiveness which is, at the same time, conditioned by the forgiveness of one's neighbour.

The forgiveness of our sins and the conciliation with the Church is granted through God's will who establishes an order, a measure and a law in our spiritual life (Serghei Bulgakov). Through this order, Christ's primacy and the communion between man and God in the Holy Spirit through the priest's service and work are manifested.