

„AUREL VLAICU” UNIVERSITY OF ARAD
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DOCTORAL FIELD: „THEOLOGY”

DOCTORAL THESIS
ABSTRACT

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ARAD

2025

„AUREL VLAICU” UNIVERSITY OF ARAD
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The Role of the Holy Spirit in Cultivating Hope in the
Thought of the Apostle Paul. A Response to the Culture of
Fear and Despair

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SUMMARY OF THE WORK

The present thesis is entitled „The Role of the Holy Spirit in Cultivating Hope in the Thought of the Apostle Paul. A Response to the Culture of Fear and Despair”. This academic research falls within the area of biblical and systematic theology, having as its clearly stated primary objective the highlighting of the role of the Holy Spirit in generating, but also sustaining hope in the theology of the Apostle Paul. The work stands at the intersection of several major fields of research in Christian theology: biblical exegesis, systematic theology, especially pneumatology, but also public theology, through the pastoral applications proposed as an antidote to our context marked by anxiety and insecurity. The present study starts from the observation of a sad reality: the emergence of a dominant culture of fear manifested both at the individual level, but also socially and even ecclesially, which necessitates a theological reevaluation of the concept of hope that must be offered as a response to the aforementioned context. The thesis proceeds from the premise that contemporary society—Romanian society is no exception—is living, therefore, a profound crisis of hope fueled by: global political and economic insecurity, multiple crises – pandemics, wars, terrorism, financial collapse, redefinition of the labor market – fragmentation of human identity, depression and anxiety, isolation and suspicion, and many other factors. This culture of fear, once installed, has led to a deficient anthropology, an anthropology that has come to be marked by insecurity both for the present, but especially regarding the future. In contrast, as we will demonstrate in the content of the thesis, Pauline theology offers a radically different orientation; the future is not uncertain but guaranteed by the resurrected Christ and by the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of new life, in the believer's life. The thesis proposes to demonstrate the fact that the theology of biblical hope is a theology in which the future promised by God becomes a present reality through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Starting from this reality described succinctly, our study proposes: 1) a rigorous exegetical analysis of the concept of hope – *ἐλπίς* – in Pauline theology, especially in the epistle to the Romans; 2) highlighting the pneumatological character, the significant contribution of the thesis especially for the Romanian space, of hope, highlighting the inseparable relationship between hope and Spirit; the premise of the thesis is that in the theology of the Apostle Paul, hope is inseparable from pneumatology; 3) to offer concrete and coherent theological responses to the culture of fear that marks our contemporary society, to articulate a theology of hope for the current context.

The originality of the thesis consists in the reformulation of Pauline hope in an explicitly pneumatological key, an element insufficiently explored in modern theology dominated by christological perspectives (see Moltmann) or anthropological ones. As we were stating, in Moltmann, the theology of hope is constructed predominantly in a christological key and pneumatology sometimes appears subsidiary. Through the present thesis we have proposed to shift the emphasis placed only on eschatology when we approach the idea of hope and to place the emphasis on pneumatology, because the Holy Spirit is not only the context of hope but also its direct agent, that is, the source and guarantor that Christian hope is not just emotion, but it is the force that completely marks and impacts present and future existence. Therefore, through exegetical interaction with Pauline texts and dialogue with contemporary theology, the thesis proposes what can be called a pneumatology of hope. We consider that the present thesis fills this gap that has been highlighted following the interaction with the great modern theologians, demonstrating biblically that Christian hope, especially from the perspective of Paul's thought, is fundamentally pneumatological.

Before highlighting some methodological elements that have been used in the drafting of the work, we must also mention some aspects that pertain to the motivation for choosing the theme and the theological relevance of the theme. We briefly mentioned the complicated context of the lack of meaning and despair in which today's world lives, but we must also highlight the biblical motivation behind the thesis. In analyses carried out, it emerged that Christian hope occupies a central place in Holy Scripture. Both in the Old Testament, but especially in the New Testament, the authors made constant references to this cardinal virtue. We focused on Paul, whom we have called, due to his numerous references to hope, the **theologian of hope**, because in him hope occupies a central place in his writings, and especially in the epistle to the Romans, he analyzes, as no other biblical author does, the powerful relationship between hope and Spirit, this relationship representing a key element in understanding his soteriology, anthropology and eschatology. Not lastly, as a pastor actively involved in the life of the community, I have observed the increase in the number of Christians marked by depression, anxiety and fear of the future. This reality has motivated even more strongly the need for a pneumatologically founded theology of hope that offers a different vision and spiritual framework than any other field offers for healing and resilience.

The present work proposes, therefore, to explore a central theme of Pauline theology, namely the relationship between the Holy Spirit and hope, with a very clearly stated purpose, namely, that of highlighting the fundamental role that the Holy Spirit plays in cultivating Christian hope. The principal approach of the work is exegetical, which will target especially

the Pauline texts relevant to the proposed subject with particular emphasis on those that treat the role of the Holy Spirit in cultivating hope, but in the thesis we will interweave both historical argumentation, especially chapter 1 and 2, and theological synthesis, chapter 3 and 4 where we will make an excursion into the principal passages from the Old and New Testament that will outline a biblical theology of hope. We will therefore use textual criticism, semantic analysis of key terms from Hebrew and Greek, but the work will carefully follow the presentation of the evolution of the concept up to the Apostle Paul. To be as accurate as possible in our analysis, the historical-contextual method will play a decisive role in the present thesis. We will take into account both the Greco-Roman socio-religious context but also the Jewish one, even how hope was perceived in the secular context of the ancient world. Likewise, we will interact with specialized literature not in the introductory part, but we will dedicate an entire chapter because there are several authors who have made a major contribution to the theology of hope and to the concept itself. Because we also propose a practical dimension of the thesis, the final part will be dedicated to dialogue between hope and various other fields that can help extract conclusions that bring the most appropriate response to the current context – pastoral ethics, psychology, sociology, etc.

The present research proposes an extensive, coherent structure through which it has succeeded in constructing a pneumatological theology of hope biblically founded, especially on Pauline texts, anchored in Christian tradition and relevant to the contemporary context. The work is composed of seven chapters plus the introduction and conclusions parts. The structure of the work is conceived so as to offer a coherent argumentative course, allowing the reader a progressive and deepened understanding of the theme. This organization is not arbitrary, but derives from the requirements of a systematic analysis, which combines the theoretical dimension with the applicative one. The first chapters establish the conceptual framework of the research, through an excursion into the historical-philosophical and biblical sources of hope, thus offering the necessary premises for subsequent deepening. Subsequently, attention will be directed toward analyzing the theological dimension of hope, with a particular emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in sustaining and orienting it. Finally, the work will explore the practical implications of hope in the believer's life, showing its relevance not only on the spiritual plane, but also in relation to existential realities. This argumentative progression ensures methodological clarity and allows the articulation of a balanced perspective on the subject.

After drafting a rigorous introduction in which we tried to motivate the importance of our study, we presented the methodology and a brief account of the semantics of the term hope, the thesis proposes several chapters that support our entire endeavor.

In chapter one we proposed to demonstrate the fact that contemporary society has entered what we call the culture of fear and despair, a culture that affects not only individually but collectively society. The present thesis brings into discussion sociologists such as Frank Furedi and Zygmunt Bauman who have argued and declared that fear has become somewhat a defining characteristic of today's post-modern society. People come to interpret everything that happens today through the filter of fear. One starts from this premise from the beginning and already the common mentality has begun to accept this as a new reality. It was very interesting to observe an evolution of the idea of fear in society: if in the past, the philosopher Jean Delumeau in his work *Fear in the West* demonstrated that fear was specific to disadvantaged categories of society, today fear is present in all structures of society as something self-evident. Mass media and the entire digital environment amplify and even contribute to a state of perpetual fear, so that, in some contexts, fear has become a strategic resource – see, marketing campaigns, political campaigns, the media system and many others. Due to this culture of fear and despair, we are witnessing today accentuated forms of withdrawal, social isolation, suspicion and distrust, and people are becoming increasingly reticent to offer trust, both to institutional structures and in the relational context. Society promotes a culture already of an overly exaggerated caution in which there is no longer room for courage, assumed risk, boldness, long-term planning. All these have slowly led to major psychological consequences – severe depressions that are increasingly present, chronic anxiety, cynicism and paranoid reactions. We considered this chapter essential for the present thesis which proposes an analysis of biblical hope as a response to society's crisis.

The next chapter, offers a succinct and structured analysis of the way in which secular philosophy and psychology have conceptualized the idea of hope, but without a religious, biblical foundation. Philosophy oscillates between presenting hope either as an essential virtue for our human existence, or as a feeling or emotion, a self-deception projected by the human brain as a response to the existential dramas or problems it faces. For psychology, hope is most often viewed from a motivational and cognitive perspective. Psychologists are concerned only with emphasizing the role that hope plays in maintaining mental health, especially when we speak of contexts of acute crises or traumas, etc. Psychology specialists concentrate on the adaptive function of hope. Hope is more, however, than a passive emotion; it is an active resource that functions as a factor of emotional, social

and even cognitive support for the individual. In this framework, the chapter briefly goes through the thought of Plato and Aristotle about hope, underlining the fact that although both philosophers grant space to the concept, their perspective on the importance of hope is limited. Then the chapter interacts with several reference modern philosophers and concludes the philosophical approach with the analysis of Ernst Bloch's thought in his work *The Principle of Hope*. In the context of psychology, the work focused on the analysis of Erich Fromm and Charles R. Snyder. The role of the chapter is to highlight the fact that philosophy and psychology can offer useful descriptions of the mechanisms of hope, but remain insufficient to capture its ontological and theological dimension, which justifies the need for the biblical and pneumatological approach developed in the following chapters.

Chapter three from the content of the thesis offers the general conceptual framework of the study, having the role of introducing the reader to the complexity of the theme and highlighting its relevance in the theological sphere. The principal purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the complexity of the subject, as well as to highlight the way in which the idea of hope has been defined, nuanced and reinterpreted throughout the history of Christian thought. Such a historical and analytical excursion allows not only a more nuanced understanding of the theme, but also a rigorous foundation for the theological approach that will follow in the subsequent chapters. It is the chapter that best helps in the academic endeavor of the research because it offers the necessary foundation for the biblical and especially pneumatological approach from the following chapters. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the great thinkers of the Christian tradition, Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who identified hope as an indispensable virtue of moral life and community. Continuing the dialogue, follows the analysis of one of the most representative theologians who reflected on hope, Jürgen Moltmann. In his work *Theology of Hope*, the great thinker repositions hope in the center of Christian existence, presenting it as a force capable of shaping history and transforming present reality in the light of God's future. In him, hope is strongly linked to the Crucified and Risen Christ and has a pronounced eschatological character; Moltmann restores to eschatology the importance lost throughout history. Wolfhart Pannenberg is even more dedicated to the eschatological dimension of hope, arguing that the future is definitive for understanding the divine will but also for the identity of the church. Among the contemporaries, the chapter analyzed the contribution of N. T. Wright, Miroslav Volf and Amos Yong. If Wright emphasizes that hope is founded on the historical reality of Christ's resurrection and thus becomes the motivating force of the Church's mission, but also of Christian life, Volf and Yong are among the authors who offer

pneumatological perspectives on hope. To conclude, through this chapter we have also systematized the principal theological perspectives on the way hope has been studied and perceived, but at the same time, it delimits Christian hope in relation to secular or philosophical approaches.

Chapter four occupies a strategic place in the content of the thesis, because it offers the biblical foundation necessary for understanding the concept of hope. The chapter is also an excursion, but this time a systematic excursion into the way Scripture outlines and develops the concept of hope beginning with its roots in the Old Testament and culminating with the eschatological dimension of hope specific to the New Testament. This section sits naturally in the body of the thesis after the analysis of how philosophy, psychology and specialized Christian theological literature have conceptualized hope. In the Old Testament we observed that the principal terms used are: **קָוָה** (qavah) and **תִּקְוָה** (tiqvah). The terms describe a persevering but forward-oriented expectation toward a certain future, an expectation linked to the total trust that God's people have in God's character. Hope is a human dependence on divine promises sustained by God's faithfulness toward His people. It is not contexts and circumstances, most often uncertain, that sustain hope, but it is anchored in the divine covenant, the promises made by God and the divine character. In the New Testament, the term **ἐλπίς** (elpis) undergoes several substantial modifications compared to the Old Testament context. Hope acquires a pronounced eschatological nuance and then we can affirm that according to the New Testament, hope is not just an expectation of the fulfillment of promises, but it is a certainty inaugurated and assured by Christ's Resurrection. Thus, hope acquires much more dynamic valences in the thought of New Testament authors; it becomes one of the defining theological virtues for the life of faith, modeling the orientation of life toward the certain and perfect future promised by Christ: it is the new life that the Christian already lives in anticipation of perfection through the work of the Holy Spirit. A particular element observed following the analysis is also the communal character of hope; it is not offered only to individuals, but becomes a common good of Christ's Church. The chapter demonstrates through the proposed analysis the semantic continuity of the concept of hope in the two Testaments, but also presents the progressive development of the concept from the idea of waiting for the promise to the certainty of the fulfillment of promises in Christ. The Bible is the only one that does not treat hope as an emotion or psychological projection but highlights the fact that it is founded on God, and the word promise becomes the key term in understanding the idea of hope.

The fifth chapter has the role of deepening the Apostle Paul's contribution to developing the theology of hope, offering a detailed analysis of this concept in his epistles, with the exception of the Epistle to the Romans, which will be the object of a separate chapter. This methodological delimitation underlines once again the importance and complexity of Pauline theology of hope, as well as the necessity of treating the Pauline corpus in two ways regarding the idea of hope: one general and one focused on Paul's most elaborate presentation, as we find it in Romans. The analysis demonstrated that hope is in Paul's thought a theological certainty derived from God's promises and from the eschatological reality already inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Christ. Seen in this way, hope becomes a fundamental trait of the life of faith. The chapter carried out a detailed review of Pauline writings – Galatians, Thessalonians, Corinthians, the captivity epistles and the pastoral ones – demonstrating that hope is not, in Paul's thought, a simple affective state or a utopian projection about the future, but an objective reality, founded in divine promises and in the saving work of Christ. This certainty not only structures the life of believers, but also offers a horizon of interpretation on history, suffering and human destiny.

Chapter six, suggestively entitled "*The Relationship Between the Holy Spirit and Hope: An Analysis of the Epistle to the Romans*", represents the most important chapter of the present thesis. The present chapter investigates the pneumatological dimension of hope and demonstrates that it is not the result of a psychological construct or subjective projection, but an ontological reality generated and sustained by the real work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. The choice of the epistle to the Romans as the principal text for analysis is fully justified by the fact that in this writing Paul uses the noun *ἐλπίς* approximately 10 times, and together with the occurrences of the verb *ἐλπίζω*, the corpus contains in total 13 references to hope, the greatest theological density of this concept from the entire Pauline corpus. The analysis concentrated on the most important passages of the Epistle, such as: *Romans 4:18*, *Romans 5:1-5*, *Romans 8:18-25* and *Romans 15:4, 12-13*, which together offer a clear perspective on the way Paul sees the connection between hope and the work of the Holy Spirit. The exegetical analysis of these texts demonstrates without equivocation that in the Pauline vision, Christian hope is founded on God's promise, but is continually sustained by the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the justified believer. Through the rigorous exegetical analysis of the paragraphs mentioned above, the chapter demonstrates that in Pauline theology hope cannot be seen except as a profoundly pneumatological reality. The implications of this definition are of major importance: hope can never be the fruit of human effort, but it is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the one who made

the new life in Christ possible. The Christian can live in and with hope regardless of the context in which he finds himself due to the real transforming presence of God's Spirit.

Chapter seven represents in a way the major theological conclusion of the thesis since it deepens the systematic dimension of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and hope. If in the previous chapter the analysis had more of an exegetical character of the principal paragraphs that observe the connection that Paul sees between hope and Spirit in the epistle to the Romans, here the academic approach aims to clarify the way in which the Holy Spirit not only generates hope but also functions as the sustenance and guarantee of the fulfillment of God's promises. The chapter also dialogues with a series of important theologians from the area of contemporary pneumatology: Jürgen Moltmann, Gordon D. Fee, Anthony C. Thiselton and James D. G. Dunn. All were chosen due to their major contribution to articulating a complementary perspective on the role of the Spirit in cultivating hope. Moltmann very much emphasizes the eschatological dimension of the Spirit seen as *the power of the future* active in history, while Fee and Dunn highlight the soteriological and transforming role of the Spirit, conclusions that came to support the affirmation that authentic hope is inseparable from life in the Spirit. Another important aspect in this chapter was the analysis of the Greek terms used by Paul to describe the special role of the Holy Spirit in developing hope: ἄρραβών, ἀπαρχή and σφραγίς. These terms best express the relationship between the Holy Spirit and hope. Through this chapter an attempt was made to demonstrate and solidly argue the fact that the Holy Spirit is simultaneously the source and guarantor of Christian hope. On the one hand, He generates hope in the hearts of redeemed believers by revealing to them the reality of complete future salvation, and on the other hand, His presence in the life of the believer and of the Church community ensures the certainty of the fulfillment of divine promises. This analysis leads to the conclusion that Christian hope is a lived certainty, theologically founded on the transforming and continuous work of the Holy Spirit.

The last chapter explores the practical dimension of hope, demonstrating that this is not a marginal aspect of theology but a transforming principle with direct and immediate implications on personal, communal and ecclesial existence. If until now hope has been analyzed in its philosophical, biblical registers, the present chapter aims to demonstrate how this hope anchored in God's promises and sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit becomes a shaping force of Christian life lived in the context of the culture of fear and despair. Hope is not an escape from reality and neither a psychological refuge in the face of suffering or trauma, but it is certainty founded on God's faithfulness. The presence of hope in the

Christian's life does not necessarily redefine the context and neither does it cancel suffering, but it reconfigures the idea of suffering by offering it an eschatological perspective. Regarding the ecclesial and missionary dimension of the Church, the chapter demonstrated that in this context marked by anxiety and polarization, by uncertainty and moral crises, the Church is called to become a *space of hope*. The Church has the mission to offer an articulated and credible response to contemporary cultural and social challenges. Christian hope offers an alternative paradigm for interpreting reality; in this way it becomes a defining element of Christian life. Therefore, the pneumatological theology of hope must not limit itself to being only an analytical exercise but must become a living resource capable of shaping life and why not, even society gripped by fear and despair.

Through the entire proposed endeavor, the present thesis brings several original contributions in the field of biblical and systematic theology, especially regarding the articulation of a pneumatological theology of hope. The present work thus launches an original model of interpreting hope, the real connection between Spirit and hope, this model being important both for theological research and for the life of the contemporary Church. The thesis also proposes one of the most detailed analyses in the Romanian context on the way in which the Holy Spirit generates, sustains and guarantees hope in Pauline writings, especially in the epistle to the Romans. This entire analysis highlights the fact that hope is not just a projection toward the future, but an active presence of the future in the life lived now in the present through the Holy Spirit. Seen in this way, hope also shapes the Church's mission, highlighting the fact that the Church has the duty to present a real solution through hope to the culture of fear and despair.

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