

CONTEMPLATIVE HERMENEUTICS
ON JOHN'S EPISTEMOLOGY
APPLIED IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE
IN THE CONTEXT OF
ROMANIAN PENTECOSTALISM

СОЗЕРЦАТЕЛЬНАЯ ГЕРМЕНЕВТИКА
ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИИ АП. ИОАННА
В ПРИМЕНЕНИИ К ПУБЛИЧНОЙ СФЕРЕ
В КОНТЕКСТЕ РУМЫНСКОГО
ПЯТИДЕСЯТНИЧЕСТВА

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Abstract: Starting from the reality of Romanian evangelical churches where most of the sermons and Bible messages are directive, which reflect a hermeneutic of the same type (only directives, indications and recommendations are usually presented), we can see that it is necessary to elaborate a comparative study in the domain of practical

Аннотация: Начиная с реальности румынских евангелических церквей, в которых большинство библейских проповедей носит директивный характер, что отражает аналогичную герменевтику (обычно представлены только директивы, указания и рекомендации), можно увидеть потребность в разработке сравнительного исследования в сфере практическо-

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and public theology, which will show the clear superiority of contemplative hermeneutics which is concentrated on God's person. In other words, I propose a demonstration of the fact that a contemplative hermeneutics is more efficient than a directive hermeneutics for Romanian Pentecostalism and for the way the message of the Gospel is addressed in the public square. Our love in action can be seen in the public square by our proclamation, and for a proper proclamation we need a proper hermeneutic, and in my opinion this one is the contemplative hermeneutic. The reason for choosing John's epistemology through the statements "I am" to prove the superiority of contemplative hermeneutics, is the fact that John's perspective offers a complex contemplative (epistemological) picture of the person of Jesus Christ. In the final part of my writing I want to demonstrate that the application of contemplative hermeneutics is actually a homiletics in the same way, and in this homiletics Christ is the center of the message, and not a collection of rules and interdictions reflected by a directive hermeneutics. I consider that through this approach the message of the Church in the Public Square is full of substantial content, which can make a difference in the context of a secularized society on the one hand, and on the other hand a society characterized by the post-modern thinking, in which experience is —very important, and contemplative hermeneutics offers the chance to experience the power of the Gospel in the public square and also at an individual level.

Keywords: contemplative hermeneutics, directive hermeneutics, epistemology, public square, Gospel, "I am" statements.

го и публичного богословия, которое покажет ясное превосходство созерцательной герменевтики, сконцентрированной на личности Бога. Другими словами, предлагается демонстрация факта, что созерцательная герменевтика более эффективна для представления евангельской вести в публичном пространстве, чем директивная герменевтика румынского пятидесятничества. Любовь в действии видна в публичном пространстве через провозглашение, и для должного провозглашения необходима соответствующая герменевтика, которой, по мнению автора, является созерцательная герменевтика. Для доказательства превосходства созерцательной герменевтики избрана Иоаннова эпистемология через речения "Я есмь", поскольку взгляд Иоанна предлагает сложный созерцательный (эпистемологический) портрет личности Иисуса Христа. В заключительной части статьи будет показано, что применение созерцательной герменевтики – это одновременно и гомилетика, центром послания которой есть Христос, а не свод правил и запретов, отражающих директивную герменевтику. Благодаря такому подходу послание Церкви в публичном пространстве обретает весомое содержание, которое может оказать влияние на окружающее секулярное общество, с одной стороны, и на общество, характеризующее постмодернистским мышлением, с другой стороны, в котором очень важен опыт, и созерцательная герменевтика предлагает возможность пережить силу евангелия в публичном пространстве, а также на личном уровне.

Ключевые слова: созерцательная герменевтика, директивная герменевтика, эпистемология, публичное пространство, Евангелие, речения «Я есмь».

Directive hermeneutics vs contemplative hermeneutics in Romanian Pentecostalism

First of all, we have to define what do we understand through directive hermeneutics and contemplative hermeneutics. When we speak about hermeneutics in this article, we refer to the way the Bible text will be interpreted for our daily life and for the proclamation of the Gospel in the public square. When we speak about directive hermeneutics we refer to the interpretation of the Bible just for the extraction of principles and moral rules, in an attempt to answer the question “what do I have to do after I read this text or I listen to this sermon?”. The idea of this hermeneutics centers on the effort of the man in his desire to enter in God's grace through his own power, by following the rules. In order to do this, Christians want to know what they must do, this can become a legalistic approach of the biblical text, but all this acts are rules without a strong and deep personal relationship with God, following rules that did not come from God's character but from man's understanding of the text. In other words, through directive hermeneutics we are interested in what must be done in this world for the common good and in this way a moral and ethical thinking is constructed based on the Bible teaching, but not from a correct hermeneutical activity, actually this directive hermeneutic can be considered a legalistic hermeneutic and this will lead to a legalistic behavior which will not be relevant for the society. On the other hand, contemplative hermeneutics concentrates on God's person, concentrates to discover how is God described in the Bible, how does He act in relationship with man. Knowing God's character we will be determined to act according to God's Word but not motivated by some rules, but motivated by the relationship with God. The applications and the Christian behavior are not motivated by legalism, actually, all the applications and the Christian behavior work like a response to the knowledge of The Living God through contemplative hermeneutic. A major difference between directive hermeneutics and contemplative hermeneutics consists in the motivation of the Christian's behavior, in the first case the motivation is a set of rules, and in the second case the motivation is the personal relationship with God and the knowledge of God's character, it is a motivation that starts from inside of us. Another major difference between directive hermeneutics and contemplative hermeneutics lies in their result. Directive hermeneutics is characterized by selfishness, every individual wants to make sure that he or she obeys the rules and is in the favor of the divinity by his own effort. This understanding will lead to the isolation of the person from the community, and if this is the case, the mission of be the Light of the world comes to a complete failure. On the other hand, contemplative hermeneutic is concert in reflecting God's character in the middle of society. And this reflection includes a participation at the mission of God “*Misio Dei*”, and this means a public engagement for the common good.¹

This dichotomy between directive and contemplative hermeneutics can also be found in the classic authors. David Tracy presents their point of view in these words “Contemplative thinking (wisdom, *sapientia*), as distinct from discursive reason (*scientia*) is grounded in the desire for the good, which even the intellectualist Aristotle implicitly admits by making the contemplative life the highest, that is, the most ‘good’ way of life

¹ Thomas Merton, “Contemplation and Social Transformation,” *Acta Theologica* 23, no. 1 (2016), 185.

dialectically related to ethical and political action for the good of the city.”². Looking at all these reasons I will say that in hermeneutical activity and also in the homiletic activity a contemplative approach is superior to the directive approach. About the homiletic activity Heinrich Bedford sustain the importance of the proclamation in public and this proclamation “must be bilingual, specking a theological and a secular language.”³

This point of view is also sustained by the general perspective of Billings Todd⁴ and Vanhoozer Kevin⁵ who present the concept of reading the Bible in a theological way. Through this concept we must read and interpret the Bible not in a devotional way, or in our perspective using a directive approach, only to extract some principles, but when we have interaction with the text of the Bible we have to produce theology on our own level, which means to have a contemplative approach on our interaction with the Bible.

If we look at Romanian Pentecostalism, we will observe there is a very dynamic activity of preaching the Word of God. And the interest in Bible study is at a high level, because of this there are lots of groups with weekly meetings for Bible study, also in youth ministry studying the Scripture is very important, also at the individual level people are encouraged to study the Bible. So, this is a very good thing in Romanian Pentecostalism, but if we look closer, we will see that all these studies are done from a directive approach. Surely this approach is motivated by the wish of being relevant and is looking forward to seeing how the Bible can be applied to the life of our own times. Willing to be relevant in society is a very good motivation but morality and ethics are useless without Christ. The questions is “what makes a sermon or a Bible study a Christian message?”. To be correct, to be good and kind, to act ethically or to live in harmony with your neighbor can be the content of a sermon, but this message can be conveyed well by a Hindu –priest, or a Muslim-Imam. What makes our message a Christian message? We will find the answer to this questioning the Person of Jesus Christ, His presence in the message gives the message the power of transformation and makes the sermon be a Christian message. That is why in homiletic studies exists the concept of Christ-Centered Preaching developed by Bryan Chapell⁶, which means that the person of Christ must be in the center of the message. Anyway, if we look to the way this concept is applied in most Romanian Pentecostal churches we will see there are just rules and principles, and the name of Christ is mentioned but it is not a contemplative hermeneutics or a contemplative approach.

To prove all these affirmations, I made a case study in the church where I serve as a preacher and youth minister. Last year, 2018, was declared by the senior pastor and by the board of the church “The year of holiness”. Most messages and Bible studies were about this subject, a lot of questions were addressed, “What does it mean to be holy?”, “How can

² David Tracy, “Three Kinds of Publicness in Public theology,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, (2014), 330-334.

³ Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, “Poverty and Public Theology, advocacy of the Church in Pluralistic Society,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 2, (2008), 144-162.

⁴ J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2010), 65.

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 52.

⁶ Bryan, Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching – Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Ada: Baker, 2005), 25-36.

we become holy?" and many others. There were a few serial sermons like "The example in holiness of Israel's leaders", or "Holiness in Israel rituals, a study on the book of Leviticus" or "A Study about sin". All these serial sermons had the objective of determining the church to live in holiness. But even the titles reflect a directive approach of the subject, so in my personal opinion this approach limited the effect of the study upon the church. A contemplative approach would have been more efficient because holiness is an essential part of God Himself and looking at God's character can determinate a church member to live in holiness, not just rules, or a directive hermeneutic or homiletics.

Another situation that proves that the directive hermeneutics is more widely spread than the contemplative one can be illustrated by the Pentecostal Theological Institute from Bucharest, Romania. Consulting the archive of this Institute regarding the situation of the final exam which included a sermon, I found than more than 80% of the students had a directive approach in their sermons. This situation means that these students will most likely go in their churches and will serve using a directive hermeneutics, and as I showed before that this approach is limited in efficiency for the life of the church. And for the influence of the church in public, our love in action must be characterized by a proclamation of the Gospel with a contemplative hermeneutic in the background, not with a directive approach which is inefficient.

Because of this directive approach in some cases the Pentecostal Church seems to be a legalistic church and the level of relevance in the public square is limited. If we could have an ethno-graphic study about the perception of the Pentecostals in society, we could observe the fact that the Pentecostal Church looks like a legalistic religion organization with a lot of interdictions and rules, even the ex-president of Romania, Trăian Băsescu, in "the case of Botnariu"⁷ affirmed that the Pentecostals are a category of people in society with a lot of rules. Why is the Pentecostal Church considered in this way? In my opinion, the directive hermeneutics which leads to a legalist approach is the main factor for this perception. In this case, it is absolutely necessary o make a change in the paradigm, and the viable alternative is to embrace a contemplative hermeneutic for the representation of God in the public square. And with this change of paradigm, with a proper engagement (with contemplative hermeneutics in background) Christians can have a major contribution for the good society, or as Max Stackhouse sustain, for the good of humanity.⁸

Perspectives over John's Epistemology

The next section of this article will be about how the contemplative hermeneutic can be applied on John's epistemology. I choose to demonstrate the superiority of contemplative hermeneutics using John's epistemology through the statements "I am" because here we

⁷ Botnariu case is about that case in which children from Botnariu family (a Pentecostal family) was taken by Barnevernet (Child Protection Service) in Norway, because they educated in a Romanian way, and this education was considered a abusive education. In Romania, the Pentecostal community had a very big response with a lots of manifestation of protest. Finally Barnevernet returns all 5 children to the family. For more information see <https://www.romaniajournal.ro/society-people/top-european-court-to-hear-child-welfare-case-bodnariu-family-forced-to-flee-norway/>

⁸ Max Stackhouse, "Reflections on How and Why We Go Public," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1, (2007), 421-430.

will find a complete picture of the Person of Jesus Christ in an epistemological way. In the context of proclamation the Gospel in the public square, the contemplative hermeneutics works like a tool for understanding God's Person and His character, applications will come like a response from the believers. Because we speak about knowing and understanding God's Person we can consider that an epistemological activity. In this article I'll use the term epistemology to definite knowledge of God by the human being, and when I use the phrase John's epistemology I refer to the way of how can be God known in John's letters, especially in this article, how can be known God in John's Gospel. Before to have in attention the statements "I am" it is necessary to see a few perspectives over John's epistemology.

We will start with the perspective of Karl Barth which sustains the idea that the Holy Spirit is the agent of knowledge, of revelation.⁹ Through this idea we understand that the Holy Spirit has a significant role in knowing and understanding God's person. Specifically in John's Gospel, according with Jesus discussions at the Last Sapper, we find the epistemological role of the Holy Spirit in following statements: First, the Holy Spirit will come in the life of believers and will have a representative role of the Father and the Son (14:15-18). Secondly the Holy Spirit will remind the believers what Jesus taught them (14:26). The third statement we find in chapter 15 verse 26, where we find that the Holy Spirit testifies about the Person of Jesus.¹⁰ In the last statement we will affirm that the Holy Spirit will make known the Person of Jesus to the world and His Person will be glorify (16:12-15).¹¹

Another perspective over John's epistemology is about analyzing how the characters from the Gospel know the Person of Jesus and part of them became believers. In this paradigm we can refer to Nicodemus who is one of the leaders of Israel and he is interest about Jesus teaching and salvation, but after discussion with Jesus (chapter 3) he not has a statement of accepting Jesus as Savior or had faith for salvation. But from discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus we find an important role of the Holy Spirit in epistemological activity, which is interpreted to be the subject of how can someone be "born again".¹² Another character from the Gospel of John who had a significant role in this type of epistemology is the woman from Samaria (chapter 4). This woman with moral problems, had the chance to meet Jesus and after they had a discussion, she became a believer and in her town many people believed in Jesus. This discussion had a deep epistemological content about how to worship the true God in the context of syncretism which characterized Samaria in that time. Also, in this discussion, like in Nicodemus case, Jesus affirms the epistemological role of the Holy Spirit, but in this case in the activity of worship, offering the certitude of the true worshiper. Another point of view in the epistemological character of this meeting between this woman and Jesus is progress in understanding how Jesus is. If in the beginning of the discussion she speaks to Jesus like to an ordinary Jew, after a few words she

⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume I, Part 1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 513-515.

¹⁰ William Barclay, *The Promise of the Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 36.

¹¹ D.A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (1979), 548.

¹² Jouette M. Bassler, "Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 4 (1989), 634-636.

considers Him to be a prophet, and in the end of discussion she understands Jesus is Messiah.¹³ At this point it is enough to present this two cases, but in a deeper approach of this type of epistemology we can analyze more characters like Nathanael, or the relationship with the twelve disciples.

The last perspective over John's epistemology is the one developed by Alister McGrath, who takes the principles of contemporary epistemology and applies them to the Gospel of John.¹⁴ We can find the characteristics of the contemporary epistemology in the introduction offered by Robert Audi¹⁵, and these characteristics are perception, reason, introspection, memory and testimony. Starting from these characteristics, Alister develops a fascinating perspective over epistemology in the Gospel of John. It is presented each characteristic and how it is applied by some characters of the Gospel in relation with Jesus, and the result is a deeper knowledge about the Person of Jesus.

So, if we look at all this perspectives, we will observe the fact that all this epistemological approach is about how a person, or character from the Gospel had known Jesus from the interaction with Him, and can be also observed the significant role of the Holy Spirit in epistemology. All these types of epistemology can be very useful for the life of the church, but for this study we need another perspective for John's epistemology. We need a perspective where God Himself through the Person of Jesus offers a epistemological approach on His Person, so my proposal for this perspective over John's epistemology is the analyzation of the "I am" statements in the Gospel of John.

John's Epistemology in the 7 "I am" Statements

First of all we have to mention that the fact that Jesus presents Himself using the statement "I am" lead to a connection with the concept of how Jehovah (YHWH) presented Himself to Moses and to the people of Israel. When Moses was called by YHWH to go to Egypt to set Israel free from slavery, God recommended Himself as "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). So after this episode the collective perception of the people of Israel when it came to the personal pronoun at the first person, singular was always associated with God's person, because through this statement he character of God is reflected, He is unchanged and He is also eternal.¹⁶ So when Jesus presented Himself using the statement "I am" He wanted to transmit a perfect identification with God the Father. Even this statement alone, used by Jesus is a very powerful epistemic activity, through the Person of Jesus, people from the entire world is able to know God, the Great "I am" from Exodus and from all The Old Testament in Scripture.

¹³ George Raymond and Beasley-Murray, *John, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary 36* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1999), 62.

¹⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *The Science of God: An Introduction to Scientific Theology* (London, T. & T. Clark, 2004), 136-141.

¹⁵ Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge, Routledge Contemporary Introductions to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 36.

¹⁶ Scott M. Langston, *Exodus through the centuries, Blackwell Bible commentaries* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 61-62.

I am the Bread of Life – John 6

We have to mention that Jesus not only identifies Himself with God but after that He adds some appellatives to describe His character. So, the first statement through which Jesus has an epistemological approach about His person is in John chapter 6, when Jesus presents Himself as the bread of the life. The context for this statement is the miracle of multiplying the bread and the fish when He feeds over five thousand persons (v.1-14). We have to mention that verse 6 shows us that the miracle was the intention of Jesus. The intention was not just for feeding the people, but also to talk about a new topic “the real bread, the bread of life”.¹⁷ So that means Jesus uses the miracle like a trigger factor for the epistemological reveals about His person. Another approach of the text is the interpretation in an Eucharistic manner, sustained by Mark Edwards who observes in the act of the miracle two components which lead to this interpretation, when Jesus makes his miracle happen he breaks the bread and He prays to Heaven¹⁸. It is true, this element can be found in the act of the Last Supper and in the end of the text we will make also a parallel to the Supper of the Lord, but the miracle of multiplying the bread can't be interpreted as a public Supper. In my opinion the role of the miracle was to introduce the subject of knowing Jesus as the Bread of the Life.

The first understanding of the miracle by the people is a very logical reaction, they want to make Him king (v.15), and they follow Him to the next side of the sea, in Capernaum (v.24). But Jesus takes this misunderstanding of the people and He offers a spiritual understanding for the food, which will represent eternal life. In order to explain what this spiritual food means He uses a parallel with the mana given to the people of Israel in the desert, the idea of this parallel is that like the mana had as a source the Father from Heaven (v. 34) also “the Bread of God” has the same source.¹⁹ And right after that Jesus utters the statement “I am the Bread of Life” (v.35), and He continues by explaining His source and purpose, He was send by the Father (v.36-40) to complete the Father's will, and bring eternal life for everyone who believes in Him.

The next section of the discussion between Jesus and the leaders of Israel (v.41-51) reveals in a deep way the epistemic activity of Jesus, He is The One who makes the Father known to the world, and only through Him it is possible to have eternal life (v. 46-47), and the statement is repeated “I am the Bread of life” (v.48), or “Living Bread” (v. 51). But Jesus also mentions that the Christian needs to identify himself with Him in His suffering and to accept His salvation through faith. This is why Jesus told to the people that they must eat His body and drink His blood (v.52-59), there is no call to cannibalism here as some people of his time believed and because of this they left Him (v. 60,66), but it is also a parallel for what will later be the Supper of the Lord.²⁰ In front of this epistemology, in which Jesus reveals Himself as the Bread of Life two reaction are possible, one of rejection

¹⁷ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The new International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010), 341.

¹⁸ Mark Edwards, *John through the Centuries, Blackwell Bible Commentaries* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 74.

¹⁹ Mark W.G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (London, Routledge, 1994), 33.

²⁰ Mark Edwards, *John through the Centuries*, 78.

and most of His disciples had this reaction, or one of acceptance of the new life in Jesus, the reaction that the twelve disciples had.

In a contemplative hermeneutics when we look at the statement "I am the Bread of Life", we can observe that Jesus is the source of eternal life, and He was sent by The Father to bring the opportunity of entering in this eternal life for everyone, but only those who accept, and consume His body, will in reality have the salvation and enjoy the eternal life in the presence of God.

I am the Light of the World – John 8:1-20

The context of the statement of Jesus, *I am the Light of the world* is in direct interference with the woman convicted of adultery (v.1-11). The Pharisees wanted to have something to condemn in the person of Jesus, and for that they put Him in a difficult situation where He had to condemn a woman who was accused of adultery or to disrespect the Law of Moses from Leviticus 20:10 which gives the directive of death penalty for adultery, and show mercy for this woman. Here we have a conflict between love and justice.²¹ In an interesting way Jesus does not enter their game, but after they persevere in order to get an answer, Jesus invites them to have an introspection and He tells them that only after looking at themselves and only if they had no sin, only then would they be entitled to judge the woman. (v.7). Nobody was able to apply the judgment, because all people had to admit they were sinners.

After Jesus offered forgiveness to the woman, He made the statement "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (v.12). At a first look it seems that Jesus presents Himself like a moral example to the world, in a world full of darkness there is Light, and who wants to get out of this darkness can go to Jesus. Or in Adam Clarke's words "without Jesus all is darkness, misery and death"²² and also those who came to Jesus "shall be saved from ignorance, infidelity and sin"²³ In the same way the statement that Jesus made to the disciples, "you are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14) is interpreted. If in the case of the disciples it was clear that the reference was to the fact that they were called to have an influence in the world through their example and testimony, in the case of the statement of Jesus it is more than just a simple example, like Adam Clarke suggested. In my opinion, according to the context, Jesus brings all things to His Light. He brings Pharisee's sin into the light and they are no longer able to judge anyone else around them. The only One able to judge the woman was Jesus Himself and He refuses to use this prerogative (v.15 16).²⁴ In this interpretation which includes a contemplative hermeneutic the response of those who came to Jesus "will never walk in darkness" means they will not consider themselves good enough to judge anybody else, the Pharisees were those who walked in darkness and for that reason they believed they were in a position to judge the woman, but those who will come to

²¹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 478.

²² Adam Clarke, *John – Acts, Clarke's Commentary NT, vol. 5B* (Chicago, Books for the Ages, 1997), 160.

²³ Clarke, *John-Acts*, 160-161.

²⁴ The same idea is present by the author of Hebrews in 4:13. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Jesus will not judge anybody. So this contemplative hermeneutic which presents Jesus to be the Light of the world is more than just a moral example, His light reveals what must be changed in our lives, and the way for changing is to come to Him and then we will be able to love and accept everyone, and we can have “the light of life” which means we can be a guide for others to the real life in Jesus Christ. In front of this epistemological approach of the character of Jesus, the Pharisees tried to deny the testimony of Jesus, but using the Scripture, Jesus proved that His testimony is true, and the leaders of Israel have failed in understanding and knowing God because they refused to accept the testimony of Jesus (v.13-20).

In a contemplative hermeneutic, when we look at the statement “I am the Light of the world” we can find another characteristic of Jesus, He is an example and a standard of morality in the world, but more than that, and most importantly His light can discover all the sin and all the bad intentions in our life. And through this understanding, those who belong to Him will not judge anybody else, but they will show love and passion for the lost ones.

“I am the gate for the sheep” and “ I am the good shepherd” - John 10

I chose to present the next two statements together because they reveal another dimension of the character of Jesus and because Jesus used them in the same context. It is the context of the debate between Jesus and Pharisees after the healing of the blind men (chapter 9). For this testimony about Jesus, the blind man was excommunicated from the community of the synagogue, and in the end of the story he discovers the identity of Jesus, but in contrast with him, the Pharisees failed again in recognizing Jesus as the Christ. Because of the excommunication of those who recognized Jesus (chapter 9 verse 22) the situation became more complicated, for this reason two communities were created, one of the Pharisees and one of the followers of Jesus.²⁵ If until then Jesus was part of the community of Jews, and He had just argue with the Pharisees, here was the first time in the Gospel of John when those who accepted Jesus were excluded from the community of the synagogue. In my opinion in this context it is absolutely necessary to define which community is the true community of God, in which community can the truth be found? So, the epistemological statement of Jesus, I am the gate for the sheep, and I am the good shepherd was told to demonstrate and affirm the superiority of the ministry of Jesus and the fact that His community is the true community of God.

To demonstrate the nature of His community, Jesus used the image of the sheep and the shepherd, a very usual image for the people of those times (v. 1-6). When Jesus was identifying Himself with the gate of the sheep (v.7-10) He wanted to transmit the idea of the exclusivity of His person for accessing salvation, and He also presented the fact that the members of His community have liberty and full life.

The other statement used in this context presents Jesus as the good shepherd. Through this image three important characteristics are transmitted about the character of the person of Jesus. The first is the great sacrifice of Jesus for His community (His sheep)

²⁵ Gary M. Burge, *John, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000), 516.

(v. 11 and 18). The community of Christ is a community born through the suffering and through His death on the Calvary. It is mentioned (v.18) that this was the plan of God for Him to suffer for the people and the result will be a community characterized by multiculturalism, because Jesus will bring in His community people from all nations (v. 16). Another characteristic transmitted by this image is that the epistemology of Christ is exclusive, it is just for those who belong to Jesus (v.14-15). This situation can be explained through the relationship of the believers with the Lord. Someone can know Jesus only if they enter in a personal relationship with Him. In this relationship between the sheep and the shepherd, or Jesus and the believers there is the dimension of leading, guidance (v.16b), and this is the third characteristic of the character of Jesus presented here. Through this guidance we understand that Jesus can, and He will lead the believer in his own life and Jesus offers protection for him.

In a contemplative hermeneutic when we look at the statements "I am the gate for the sheep" and "I am the good shepherd" we will discover that Jesus is the access to salvation and in relationship with His community He offers liberty and an abundant life. It is also revealed that this community is born through the suffering and death of Jesus. The privilege of knowing Jesus plenary is just for those who are in a personal relationship with him, and He promises guidance in life for them.

The last three "I am" statements

There are three more I am statements of Jesus: I am the resurrection and the life (John 11); I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14); and I am the true vine (John 15). All these images used by Jesus in His statements complete the portrait of Christ in John's epistemology. I am the resurrection and the life present Jesus as the only one who can bring hope in front of death, at the grave of Lazarus He is presented as a Master over death and Lazarus is resurrected. With this perspective the believers are full of hope for the resurrection day. In the statement I am the way and the truth and the life we find a very powerful epistemology because Jesus is present like the exclusive way to find the truth and also He is the true way for life, for eternal life. This statement is made in the context of the discussion between Jesus and the disciples about the way they can come to know God, and Jesus presents Himself as the only way to this epistemology. The last statement I am the true vine, is also made in the context of a discussion between Jesus and the disciples, at the Last Supper. Jesus presents Himself as the source of power for the mission of the disciples, for this He uses the image of the vine. Through this image the dependence of Christians to Jesus is showed, because without Him, nothing can be done.

So through all this seven "I am" statements a complex and epistemological picture about the person of Jesus Christ is presented. From this perspective He is presented as the source of eternal life for those who accept Him (the bread of life), also in front of Him all things are discovered (light of the world), and He can offer access to eternal life and to a new community of God formed as a result of His sacrifice (The gate of sheep and the good shepherd), and in this community there is hope in front of death because He is The Master over death and He is the Lord of life (the resurrection and the life), and He must

be presented to the world like the unique way to make God known on earth (the way, the truth and the life), and for this presentation the believers dependent on Him because He is the source of power (the true vine). This perspective over the person of Jesus seems to present Him as everything a person needs in order to be saved, to have knowledge about God, and to be efficient in the mission which He gives to people.

Applying Contemplative Hermeneutics in the Homiletical Activity.

In the previous section I showed how the contemplative hermeneutics in John's epistemology can be applied and how it can function. Now, in this last section it is time to demonstrate how this contemplative hermeneutic works in the homiletical activity. First of all, the homiletical activity takes place in the church and secondly in the public square. The homiletical activity in the church with a contemplative hermeneutic in the background must concentrate on God's person, and after understanding His character the application will come to us. The correct question is what does this text or this sermon speak about God's character, and after posing the question the application comes, how should I respond in front of this characteristics of God, what should I do? In this perspective, God is in the center of the sermon and the applications are not just simple rules.

In the public square the homiletic activity is in some degree more complicated because of the characteristics of the society. In the postmodern thinking the rules are not valuable, nobody wants to respect some rules without understanding the authority behind the rules, or without understanding the reason of the rules.²⁶ So if the Church wants to address the message of the Gospel using a directive approach, the impact will be very limited or will be a complete failure in that testimony. The proper way to address the message of the Gospel in the public square in the postmodern world is using a contemplative hermeneutic and also a contemplative homiletic. But why is that? James Keating can offer a response, because he presents the fact that in the contemplative homiletic activity God is present and His power is at work, and this presence has a therapeutic effect for the auditor. By this therapeutic effect we understand the necessity to return to God's values and renounce to sin.²⁷ The answer also lies in the need of experience which characterizes the postmodern thinking. In the middle of secularization and relativism there is a special desire for experience. The postmodern man wants to feel the reality, to experience everything that can be experienced. For this reason, many addictions are developed in society.²⁸ But this desire for experience is not just an evil thing, this desire can be used to address the message of Gospel in a proper way. In Elaine Graham's opinion, this postmodern thinking of the society, or post-secular world also has a special sensibility for spirituality in many ways²⁹, the majority of this spirituality can be considered a false spirituality, but this sensibility can be used for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the public square. Christopher Wright also

²⁶ Richard H. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 62-67.

²⁷ James Keating, "Contemplative Homiletics, being carried into reality," *Nova et vetera*, vol. 17 (2019), 1-13

²⁸ Melba Maggay, "Confronting the Powers" *Holistic Mission God's Plan for God's People*, Eds. Brain Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 174-178.

²⁹ Elaine Graham, „How to Speak of God? Toward a Postsecular Apologetics," *Practical Theology* 11, (2018), 1-12.

presents the importance of the presence of the voice of the Church in the public square,³⁰ but if we look at the Pentecostalism context in Romania, we will see a very limited voice in the public square. We have some sessions of evangelization in our local churches and we are present in the public schools through the Pentecostal Religion classes. It is absolutely necessary to change this paradigm and to have a contemplative approach in the way we address the message of the Gospel, and this means that every believer must reflect God's character in his life and not just useless rules, and then we can say the Church has an impact on the public, by our love in action.

Using the principles which resulted by the application of a contemplative hermeneutics on John epistemology, I will develop some applications for the Romanian context. First, I will show that Jesus is presented as the light of the world, and that means He is the moral standard for the practice and it also means that in front of Him everything is uncovered, all the intentions of people and all their sins. For his reason Christians must not judge and condemn anybody, but they must show love. Also, Max Stackhouse sustains the idea that renouncing to the ethical judgment of others leads to a higher efficiency in our proclamation in the world.³¹ Concretely this understanding of the biblical text can be applied in the dilemma caused by the question how must a Christian look at homosexual people. In Romania, in 2018 we had a referendum for the definition of the family in the constitution. This topic brought a lot of debate in the public square about other sexual orientations and also the gander ideology came in debate. Pentecostal believers were not far from this debate, and when they were involved in this, they had an approach characterized by hate and judgement. In my opinion this reflects a directive hermeneutics in which everybody who is different must be blamed and condemned. In this situation if we have contemplative hermeneutics, we will understand the fact that it is not our job to judge anybody, our job is to show the love of Christ. If we apply this contemplative hermeneutics and we understand what it really means that Jesus is the light of the world, then if a homosexual enters in our church he must feel loved and accepted by the believers, and then the Light of Christ will show him his sin and he can be transformed by the power of the Gospel. Having this approach does not mean that we agree with the sin of homosexuality, but we understand that our duty is to show the love of Christ for all people, including a homosexual person.

With this perspective I do not want to give a justification for the sin of homosexuality, but the Church must understand that the believers are called to be involved in the society for making social justice³², including in this domain. And in this domain, social justice for the Church means not to respond with hate and rejection for these people. The Church is called to show love to everybody and if someone lives in sin, as Heinrich Bedford sustains in one of his articles, even in the Public Theology and in the proclamation in the public square there must exist the idea of an eschatological judgement, but this Judgment belongs to God, not to the Church, the Church must show love to everyone.³³

³⁰ Christopher Wright, *Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2010), 234.

³¹ Max Stackhouse, „Public Theology and Ethical Judgment.” *Theology Today* 54, (1997), 165-179.

³² Geoff Broughton, „Restaurative Justice, Opportunities for Christian Engagement,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 3, (2009), 299-318.

³³ Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, “Poverty and Public Theology, advocacy of the Church in Pluralistic Society,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 2, (2008), 144-162.

Another application for the principles that I found in John's epistemology is in the way Jesus is presented as the Master over the dead and the Lord of life. In the matter of abortion, Romania is the first country with the highest rate of abortion in the European Union (480 abortions / 1000 pregnancies)³⁴. What is the position of the Pentecostal Church in Romania regarding this situation? In a directive approach the discourse is almost entirely about the fact that the abortion is a sin, which is correct, but this will generate only conviction and judgment. While by using a contemplative hermeneutics we can change the Pentecostal discourse and the new one will center on the fact that God is the Lord of life, He is the creator of life and of the society and we can understand that all the individuals must respect life, and we can thus understand the fact that abortion is not just a sin, it is an act of violence against life. I think that with this perspective the Pentecostal Church from Romania can bring a positive transformation in the public square. Using these examples of the way that the contemplative hermeneutics in John's epistemology can be applied, can also be developed in applications for leadership in the public square, using the statement "I am the true vine" which reflect the full dependence of believers to God in all actions.

In conclusion I will say that the contemplative hermeneutics and contemplative homiletics are better than the directive hermeneutics and directive homiletics. The contemplative hermeneutics can be applied to the biblical text, and as an example we have the epistemology of John through the "I am" statements. Using the contemplative approach is more efficient than a directive approach in addressing the message of the Gospel in the public square in different ways and situations.

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³⁴ <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/ab-romania.html> accessed in 26.08.2019

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