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Application of the Term “Stability” in the  
Interpretation of Selected New Testament Texts from  
the Epistles of Paul and the Gospel of Luke

Booklet of the  
Ph.D. thesis in Theology

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# **I. Introduction**

The fundamental message of the New Testament is to proclaim the radical transformation of the relationship between God and creation, especially human beings, through the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ, i.e., through His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The authors of the New Testament describe this salvation process through various keywords, e.g., redemption, reconciliation, atonement, fulfilment and intercession. Moreover, this transformation of the relationship induces questions, e.g., the role of the Mosaic law after Christ, the future of the creation, or the godly life among people or church members.

In my thesis I examine how these crucial topics of the New Testament can be interpreted through the term “stability”, which is a fundamental term in systems and control theory. The examination is based on the interpretation of selected New Testament texts, especially focusing on Romans, First Corinthians and additionally Galatians, Colossians and also the Gospel of Luke. Consequently, the research leads to the formulation of new interpretations or to the evaluation of the existing exegetical results.

## **II. Applied terms and the goal of the thesis**

### **Stability**

The term stability can be interpreted to various systems in life, e.g., economy, biology, mechanics, transportation. Furthermore, it has already been applied to human sciences: politics, social justice analysis, social networks and philosophy. Although its application is unique in each area, stability always refers to the connection between the input and the output of the system, i.e., what is the impact of an external input to the system? The system is considered to be stable if system inputs with finite measure result in system outputs also with finite measure. If this criterion is not guaranteed, e.g., small input results in unpredictably high output, the system is unstable. Moreover, stabilization refers to the elimination

process of this disadvantageous feature through control intervention, which leads to stable system. In this thesis, stability is applied to the interpretation of the relationships between God and human beings or among human beings.

## **Analogy**

Forming analogies has an essential role in the proposed stability-based interpretation method. The goal of forming analogies is to create connections between the messages of the New Testament texts and the processes with stable or unstable characteristics. The analogies are formed, if the characteristics of stability or instability can be interpreted for message of the text regarding the relationship transformation between God and human beings or among human beings. Analogy creates active interconnection between the text and the semantic field of the term stability. Consequently, stability forms a principle for structuring the exegetical results.

## **The goal of the Ph.D. thesis**

The goal of my thesis is to form new interpretations of selected New Testament texts using the term stability. The result of the work is a new stability-based interpretation framework for analysing the texts. It provides a new principle for structuring their relationships to each other. The coherence between the texts is guaranteed by this common framework that can be characterized by the semantic field of stability. The understanding of the term from the field of systems and control theory can be necessary for understanding the relationships between the texts. Nevertheless, the new interpretations to each text are not directly resulted by the stability analysis methods of systems and control theory. Instead, the character of the original term determines the principle for prioritising the exegetical results. It helps to uncover the message of the text in relation to the relationships between God and human beings or among human beings.

### III. New scientific results of the Ph.D. thesis

#### **First group of theses: Applying the term of stability to the interpretation of selected texts in Romans and Galatians**

The analogy between the selected texts in Romans and the term of stability is formed, which is the fundamental basis for the interpretation framework. It has resulted in the formulation of Thesis 1.1.

**Thesis 1.1:** *The character of relationship between God and human beings, described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-21; 5:12-17; 10:6-8, can be interpreted through the stability-based interpretation framework. The terms “disobedience”, “sin”, “death” and “depth” in these texts are in analogy with “instability”, while “obedience” and “grace” are in analogy with “stabilization”.*

The analysed texts reveal that these Pauline texts, describing the relationship between God and human beings, can be interpreted through some general terms of systems theory. It depicts that the messages of these texts regarding “sin” and “grace”, “disobedience” and “obedience” can be interpreted not only in the context of the church in Rome, but also in a general way. The achieved new scientific results are used as a starting point for the analysis of the further texts in the Ph.D. thesis. The solutions to the stability problems in terms of God-human or human-human relationships are found using the analogies of these important Pauline terms.

Thesis 1.2 and Thesis 1.3 are formed regarding the Pauline interpretation of law.

**Thesis 1.2:** *The existing interpretations in the literature regarding the term τέλος in Romans 10:4 can be synthesized using the stability-based interpretation framework.*

The Ph.D. thesis shows that the term stability is in analogy with “goal” and also with “end”, i.e., both of them can be used as the translations of τέλος. These translations are complementary regarding the role of Christ in Romans 10:4. i.e., the role of the Mosaic law in the salvation has already been ended, but the culmination of the law has not been finished yet. This synopsis helps the reader to recognize the richness in the

semantic field of the original Greek text. Thus, the differences in the translations (e.g., “end of the law” in the King James Version and in the New American Standard Bible, or “culmination of the law” in the New International Version) cannot lead to the ranking of the translations.

**Thesis 1.3:** *The analogy between the term of “law” in Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:2.24 and the temporary stabilization is in relationship with the “plight”-“solution” pattern defined by Frank Thielman.*

As a result of the Ph.D. thesis, the stability-based interpretation framework confirms that the “plight”-“solution” pattern defined by Frank Thielman can still be upheld.<sup>1</sup> Plight is in analogy with the temporary stabilization, the solution is in analogy with the full stabilization. Consequently, the “plight”-“solution” pattern, using this ordering of the terms, is in analogy with the terms “instability” and “stability” used in my interpretation methodology. This interpretation helps to understand the connections within the triad of “sin”, “law” and “Christ”.

## **Second group of theses: Applying the term of stability to the interpretation of selected texts in First Corinthians**

The stability-based interpretation framework is applied to understand the relationship among human beings and the conflict within the church members, described by the Apostle Paul in 1Cor 12-14. It has resulted in the formulation of Thesis 2.1.

**Thesis 2.1:** *The Apostle Paul uses the term ἀγάπη as a personification of Jesus Christ in 1Cor 13. The term ἀγάπη is determined as the exclusive, unique solution to church conflicts described in 1Cor 12-14. Thus, Paul provides a christological solution to the instability of the relationship among human beings. The personification leads to the understanding of 1Cor13 as a text with mythological terms. The goal of Paul’s mythologizing program is to proclaim the gospel using the language familiar to the Corinthian church members.*

The stability-based interpretation framework leads to a new interpretation regarding chapters 1Cor 12-14. I have not found any

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<sup>1</sup> Thielman, F.: *From Plight to Solution. A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul's View of the Law in Galatians and Romans.* 1989, Leiden: Brill.

interpretation in the existing literature which would as significantly highlight the understanding of the christological personification of ἀγάπη (“love”) as my interpretation does. Moreover, the contribution of my work to the state-of-the-art interpretations is the uncovering of the reason and the goal of this personification. Consequently, the message of ἀγάπη in 1Cor 13 is unfamiliar with moralization or an interpretation requiring an attitude to be adopted by the church members for eliminating their conflicts. Moreover, ἀγάπη is not a charism or a character that is worthy of God either. Instead, according to my interpretation 1Cor 13 contains a special form of Christology that I recommend to call “bonding Christology”, i.e., Christ holds together the church in his body through bonds. This unconventional new interpretation leads to a different message in the preaching related to the conventional ones: the relationship between Love as Christ and the church members must be highlighted instead of analysing love as an attitude in themselves.

The stability-based interpretation framework is applied to Chapter 1Cor 15 for understanding its eschatological message (see Thesis 2.2), and its results are synthesized to the cosmic Christology in Colossians (see Thesis 2.3).

**Thesis 2.2:** *In the eschatology of 1Cor 15 Paul interconnects the future of the cosmos, the community (church and society), and the individual.*

The result of the proposed new method is the interconnection of the existing eschatological interpretations which are focused to different levels, i.e., cosmos, community, individual. It is formed an analogy between convergence and resurrection. The property of convergence is the character of stable processes, and the resurrection is Paul’s solution to the eschatological problem. Due to this analogy it is recommended to structure the exegetical results of 1Cor 15 in a joined interpretation framework for cosmos, community and individual. This approach can contribute to the existing ecological Bible interpretations. My joined interpretation framework fits to the contemporary views which look for the individual responsibility within the global challenges. This new interpretation highlights that Paul proclaims the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the unique solution to the eschatological challenges, instead of any human actions. Resurrection is the solution to the salvation of the individual, the community and the cosmos, too.

**Thesis 2.3:** *The eschatology in 1Cor 15 and the cosmic Christology in Colossians align with one another, independently of their different formulations. This argument confirms the Pauline authorship of Colossians.*

The stability-based interpretation framework highlights the complementarity of the eschatology in 1Cor 15 and in Colossians, although they are formed in different ways. The application of the term stability is fundamental in the unfolding of the new result, because it reveals the unity in their messages. I recommend to call this relationship “bonding Christology”, which term interconnects the interpretations of Colossians, 1Cor 13 and 1Cor 15. The consequence of this relationship is the reinforcement of the viewpoint that the author of Colossians is Paul. This thesis provides a new approach for the interpretation of Colossians, as follows. The understanding of the message in Colossians can be more difficult compared to First Corinthians, because of the style of Colossians is less familiar with the contemporary readers. My thesis reinforces the basis for applying the hermeneutic approach “Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres”, i.e., the difficult texts of Colossians can be understood through the message in First Corinthians.

Finally, I have joined together Chapters 1Cor 12-14 and 1Cor 15.

**Thesis 2.4:** *Chapters 1Cor 12-14 and 1Cor 15 are in unity in First Corinthians, independently of their different topics. The unity is confirmed by their similar “problem”-“solution” patterns, and the personification character of the terminology used by Paul.*

The stability-based interpretation framework confirms the existing exegetical results which argue for the unity of chapters 1Cor 12-15. It is stated that the distinct topics in the chapters culminate in the same direction. Their goal is to reduce disordering in the church and provide solution through christological argument. Moreover, the interpretation highlights that Paul personifies the mythological terms ἐλπίς („hope”), πίστις („faith”), ἀγάπη („love”), θάνατος („death”) as the part of the terminology in the chapters. The achieved result confirms the exegesis that uses the unity as principle for understanding First Corinthians. Furthermore, the “problem”-“solution” pattern provides a tool for understanding Paul’s message which focuses on Christ, who solves church conflicts. This tool helps the reader to distinguish the major

messages in the texts (e.g., the christological solution to the church conflicts) from the minor messages (e.g., the character of the resurrection or the love).

### **Third group of theses: Applying the term of stability to the interpretation of selected texts in the Gospel of Luke**

The stability-based interpretation framework is applied to the interpretation of selected texts in the Gospel of Luke (4:1-13; 8:22-39; 13:18-30), and their messianic interpretation is given in the Ph.D. thesis.

**Thesis 3.1:** *The messianic character is significant in the interpretation of Luke 4:1-13. Adam typology is an accurate framework for this text. Moreover, John O'Neill's hypothesis about the Jewish law proscribing messianic self-revelation fits well to the interpretation of this text.*

The messianic interpretation on Luke 4:1-13 is proposed through the presented stability-based framework. Although the existing exegetical results deal with the messianic character of the text, my interpretation highlights its fundamental role during the exegesis. I argue for the application of Adam typology in the interpretation, and its consequences that Luke introduces Jesus as “new Adam”. John O'Neill's hypothesis about the Jewish law proscribing messianic self-revelation is used in the stability-based interpretation framework, and this hypothesis is also confirmed.<sup>2</sup> Since the analysis on Luke 4:1-13 is not found in O'Neill's work, this confirmation is a new achievement of the work in the field of New Testament studies. The interpretation helps the reader to understand the text through the messianic role of Jesus. Thus, the reader can focus on Jesus's obedience, His confrontation to the misguided messianic expectations, and His suffering, instead of focusing on the order of temptations or the evaluation of the historicity. Moreover, the confirmation of O'Neill's hypothesis supports the New Testament scholars in the application of the hypothesis on the Lukan texts.

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<sup>2</sup> O'Neill, J. C.: *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* 1991, New York: Brill.



**Thesis 3.2:** *The periscopes in Luke 8:22-39; 13:18-30 introduce Jesus as the Messiah, through whom the kingdom of God is revealed contrary to human expectations.*

The stability-based interpretation framework demonstrates that analogies between the following terms can be formed: storm in the nature and “instability”, calming the storm by Jesus and “stabilization” (Luke 8:22-25), disease and “instability”, healing and “stabilization” (Luke 8:26-39). Moreover, analogy is formed between the relationship of “few”-“many” and the term stability through the inversion revealed in the texts. The important character of this inversion in the texts is that Jesus does not fight against suffering, but He endures suffering as Messiah. It means for the kingdom of God that the stabilizing effect by the Messiah’s suffering is abounded through the kingdom of God to all people and all nations. It is a Lukan explanation about how grace abounded all, i.e., through the growing of the kingdom. It is in relationship with Paul’s message formed in Romans 5:12-17.

Finally, at the end of my Ph.D. thesis the Christology of the analysed Pauline texts and Jesus’s messianic role in the Gospel of Luke are interconnected.

**Thesis 3.3:** *The stability-based interpretation framework reinforces that the term “Christ” refers to the term “Messiah” in the analysed Pauline texts (Rome 1:18-21; 5:12-17; 7:14-25; 10:6-8; Galatians 3:24; 5:14 and 1Cor 12-15).*

The results of the analyses of the Pauline and Lukan texts are interconnected and synthetized. The main principle of the interconnection is that the messages in both groups of texts can be characterized by the term stability. This characterization is connected to the term “Christ” in the Pauline epistles, and the term “Messiah” in the Gospel of Luke. The stability-based interpretation framework highlights the messianic character of the term “Christ” in the Pauline epistles, although, it is generally interpreted solely as a proper noun, e.g., in Hungarian or English. Consequently, the usual messages formed in the sermons can be expanded using my results, because the following phrases are in close relationship to each other: “Messiah expected by Israel”, “Christ” and “body of Christ”.

## **IV. Outlook and future works**

The results of the Ph.D. thesis are new interpretations of New Testament texts using the analogies formed through the term stability. These results can be the starting point for future works, i.e., the formulation of metaphors for semantic innovation, see e.g., the theory of Ricœur and Blumenberg. The challenge in the context of the Ph.D. thesis is formed as follows: Is it possible to interconnect the concept of stability in control theory and the New Testament texts through metaphors like “Christ is the Stabilizer”? The answer requires further exegetical analysis on the texts, which work can be helped by the achieved results. Thus, my results can help to bridge the gap between New Testament studies and control theory in the future for providing their fruitful interconnection.

Consequently, the achieved results can be applied to solve multidisciplinary problems, e.g., the ethical-oriented challenges in the fields of engineering, autonomous systems and artificial intelligence. The design of systems in these fields is not only a technical problem, but the design process also poses societal and ethical challenges. Some of the examples are as follows: ethical manoeuvring of autonomous vehicles in critical situations with unavoidable injuries, human-machine interactions in the context of highly-automated robotic systems, impact of virtual reality within autonomous systems to the users’ freedom and decision, military applications of the artificial intelligence, or the alienation of the users from their environment. Stability has an important role in the control theory, that is in strong relationship with these fields. Therefore, I hope that the developed analogies in this Ph.D. thesis can contribute to find solutions on the ethical, societal challenges induced by the technical field.

## V. Publications of Balázs Németh in theology and multidisciplinary fields

Németh, B.: „Interpretation of Christ-Adam connection in Romans using the analogy of stability”, In: *35th Szeged International Biblical Conference*, Szeged, Hungary, 08.26.2024-08.28.2024 (expected publication date of the proceedings: 2025)

Németh, B.: „An AI-based comparison method for English Bible translations with illustrations on selected New Testament texts”, In: Benyik, Gy. (ed.): *A fordítástól a parafrázisig - Von der Übersetzung bis zur Paraphrase*. Szeged, Hungary: Foundation of Szeged International Biblical Conference, 151-161 (2024)

Németh, B.: „Consequences of an Analysis Using Biblical Analogies for Automated Vehicle Control Design”, *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Reformata Transylvanica* 67(2), 29-56 (2022)

Németh, B.: „A Római és a Galata levél törvény fogalmának értelmezése irányításelméleti analógiákkal” (in Hungarian), *Sárospataki Füzetek* 26(2), 13-25 (2022)

Németh, B.: „Az optimum fogalmának újszerű teológiai megközelítése” (in Hungarian), *Theologiai Szemle*, 65(3) 144-149 (2022)

Németh, B.: „A stabilitás irányításelméleti fogalmának bibliai analógiái” (in Hungarian), *Theologiai Szemle* 64(3), 138-143 (2021)

Németh, B.: „A rendezettség fogalmának irányításelméleti és a bibliai kapcsolópontjai” (in Hungarian), *Sárospataki Füzetek* 25(2), 161-175 (2021)

Németh, B.: „Coordinated Control Design for Ethical Maneuvering of Autonomous Vehicles”, *Energies*, 16(10), No.: 4254 (2023)

Németh, B.: „Önvezető járművek irányítástervezésének egyes etikai vonatkozásai” (in Hungarian), *Városi Közlekedés* 58(2), 19-24 (2022)

Németh, B.: „Route selection method with ethical considerations for automated vehicles under critical situations”, In: *20<sup>th</sup> IEEE Jubilee World Symposium on Applied Machine Intelligence and Informatics*, Poprad, Slovakia: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 419-424 (2022)