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Suffering as Qualification for Ministry

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Abstract

The realities of Christ and the Gospel were for Paul powerful interpretive tools. In his letters, Paul uses these realities as lenses to interpret his suffering. This article examines elements of Paul's thought where suffering is interpreted as positive for ministry. First, in Ephesians and Philemon, we discuss the term "Prisoner for Christ," and the ways Paul sees this as a title of honor that qualifies him with authority. Second, in the Corinthians correspondence, we examine the way Paul connects apostleship and suffering, listing his sufferings as qualifications. Third, in 2 Corinthians 1, we look at how Paul sees suffering as contributing to empathy in ministry. Finally, we trace echoes of similar thoughts elsewhere in the New Testament.

Keywords: *Paul, New Testament, suffering, ministry, empathy*

Introduction

This article explores the ways Paul sees his suffering as qualifying and training him for ministry (for the issue of the authorship of the Pauline epistles, see Andersen 2016; Capes 2024). Our goal is to interpret Paul's interpretation of his lived experience. The person of Christ and the events of the Gospel were for Paul powerful interpretive tools. This is why Paul can say seemingly contradictory things about believers' lives. If someone is unmarried, this has benefits for their devotion to Christ (1 Cor 7:8). If someone is married, it is a picture of the devotion between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:22-33). There is one God and one Christ, so idols

and food sacrificed to idols are nothing (1 Cor 8:4). Yet one who is united to the one Christ does not unite themselves to idols through table fellowship (1 Cor 10:21). The gospel makes Paul completely free in Christ (Gal 3:28), while also making him completely a slave for Christ (Gal 1:10). Every aspect of life is interpreted through the grid of the gospel.

Suffering is no different. Paul interprets suffering which others might interpret as general suffering as suffering for the faith (Maroney 2023). Paul also notes that suffering is to be prayed against so that the believer has the benefit of freedom to share the gospel. However, if suffering happens, it is beneficial for the spread of the gospel (Maroney 2023). In this article, we will explore additional ways Paul adds layers of meaning to his suffering, by interpreting it as credentials for his ministry. This will be seen in Paul's use of the "Prisoner of Christ" title, in the way he connects suffering and apostleship, and the way he sees suffering as enabling empathy. We will also examine echoes of these ideas in other New Testament writings. Granted, caution must be exercised in drawing connections across different writings within the New Testament. Thus, we will look not only at similarities but also differences of emphasis. Nevertheless, it is part of the task of interpretation to trace repeated ideas throughout the Christian canon.

1. The "Prisoner of Christ" Title

Paul sees being persecuted for Christ as an honor, one that qualifies him with authority. The background of the "Prisoner of Christ" title is in the title "servant of Christ Jesus." This title appears in many letter openings (see Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1; Jas 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 1; cf. Rev 1:1). The term is based on the Old Testament phrase "servant of the Lord," related to the broader concept of "serving" (עבד) YHWH. "Servant" (literally "slave") is obviously a term of humility and Israel generally was said to serve God (eg. Exod 4:23). But the term becomes a specific term for certain leaders, and is a term of honor. For leaders like Moses and Joshua, the honorary term is not applied to them until the end of, or after, their life (Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1; 24:29; see Dempster 2007, 128–178), suggesting the title is not given lightly. Since Christ is Lord, Paul applies this title to himself as a servant of Jesus. To activate the conceptual metaphor of "lord" naturally requires the activation of "slave." (Hafeman 2000b, 27). Thus, Paul's affirmation of the concept that Jesus is Lord entails seeing himself as his slave.

In certain passages, Paul develops a similar phrase "prisoner of Christ Jesus." This is also clearly a term of humility and devoted service to Christ, but in the way, Paul uses it is also a title that bears authority. In Ephesians 3:1, Paul describes himself as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles," which launches him into a digression (3:1-13) explaining his stewardship (οἰκονομίαν) to take the mystery of the gospel to the world. Paul describes his task as that of a house-

hold manager (οἰκονομίαν), which has the sense of managing not his own house, but of a servant managing the house of his master. He has authority, but it is an intermediate and derived authority. Paul emphasizes his lowliness by noting he is merely a servant (διάκονος), and the "more least" of the apostles (the term he uses is ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ, which combines comparative and superlative adjectival morphemes), Ephesians 3:7-8 (cf. 1 Cor 4:1, "This is how one should regard us, as servants (ὑπηρέτας) of Christ and stewards (οἰκονόμους) of the mysteries of God"). Paul asks the Ephesians not to lose heart over his suffering for them (3:13) and prays for their comprehension of the gospel (3:14-18). He wants them to understand there is a positive interpretation to his suffering, namely that his suffering is their glory (3:13). In Ephesians 4:1, he uses the term again as he shifts toward the ethical section of the letter, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." That a prisoner can give ethical instruction is shocking, but makes sense in the logic of the gospel, which exalts the humble. His ethical call includes humility (4:2), and so part of his reason for using the title could be to point to his humility. But he also seems to imply that because he is a prisoner on their behalf, they should listen to what he has to say to them.

The letter to Philemon similarly begins with the title "Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus." Nowhere in the letter is the metaphor of Christ-follower as *slave* used in the letter, perhaps because Paul did not want that metaphor to be associated with Onesimus' slavery by his reader Philemon. In the letter Paul urges Philemon to release his slave Onesimus, reminding him that Paul could command him to do this in Christ, but wanting instead to appeal to him for love's sake (Phlm 8-9). He then reminds him who he is, "I Paul, an old man (or ambassador, πρεσβύτης, see below) and now a prisoner for Christ Jesus." The political state is not mentioned in Philemon - it is not important to the point Paul is making. Instead, he describes his chains as "the chains of the gospel" (Phlm 13). Part of the reason for using the phrase could be to contrast Paul's right to make ethical demands in Christ of Philemon on the one hand, with Paul's humility as a prisoner on the other hand. But we also see that Paul sees real authority in the title of a prisoner for Christ (Wright 2008, 189–190), as Paul uses it to replace the servant of Christ title, and brings it up in a context of making ethical demands.

There is a translational issue involving Ephesians 6:20, "πρεσβεύω ἐν ἁλύσει" and Philemon 9 "πρεσβύτης, νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ." The former is usually translated "I am an ambassador in chains," and the latter, "Now an old man and prisoner of Christ Jesus." It is likely, however, that the two passages refer to a similar idea, and thus that the translation of one of the passages needs to be changed (see, for instance, Wright 2008, 189–190). The word for ambassador is technically πρεσβεύω and the word for elder is πρεσβύτης, but there are examples of interchange of the two in Greek. If the ambassador's reading is taken, then the

connection of the ambassador's idea with the prisoner's idea gives further evidence for the prisoner's title as one of authority. The intermediate/derived authority of an ambassador is also similar to that of the household manager discussed above.

There is another translational difference between Ephesians 3:1 and Philemon 1. Many translations including the ESV have in Ephesians 3:1 "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (see, for instance, KJV, CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV). But in Philemon 1 the ESV has "prisoner for Christ Jesus." Certainly, it is true in both cases that Paul is a prisoner *for* Christ. But there is evidence that Paul did not just see his imprisonment as for Christ, but *by* Christ. Christ was the prison-master who put him there, as it were (cf. Phil 1:13. It is also intriguing that in Ephesians 4:8 Paul talks of Christ's victory as a leading of captives and in 4:2 of Christian unity as a "chain" of peace). Hafeman has noted that Paul's reference to Christ leading him in a triumphal procession (θριαμβεύοντι, 2 Cor 2:14) has its background in triumphal Roman processions of conquered slaves or prisoners (Hafeman 1989, 334; similarly Paul B. Duff 2015 particularly 18–92). Elsewhere he writes, "In calling Paul to be a minister of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:4-6), God sentenced Paul to death (2 Cor 1:9; cf. 1 Cor 4:9)" (Hafeman 2000a, 23). This is not a march of victory; instead, Paul is being led to his death (cf. Hafeman 1989, 334). This would make sense of the way Paul describes himself in Ephesians 3:1 as being a prisoner of Christ (τοῦ χριστοῦ) for the nations (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν). The imprisonment is for the benefit of the nations, so the genitive on the word Christ could refer to something other than the beneficiary, namely the one *to whom* Paul is imprisoned.

We have seen that Paul interprets his ministry within the prisoner framework. Paul is not merely a prisoner of the state but of Christ. This means that his imprisonment, while it still involves humility, involves authority as well, as he uses the title in making ethical demands of the Ephesians and Philemon. This transformation of humility to humility and authority is similar to that of the transformation of the word slave in the phrase slave of YHWH in the Old Testament, or slave of Christ in the New Testament. In phrases like prisoner, slave, household manager, and ambassador, Paul simultaneously describes his ministry as one of humility, and of derived, intermediate authority. This is just one way Paul puts a positive spin on his suffering and persecution in his ministry.

2. Suffering and Apostleship

We turn now to examine the connections in Paul's thoughts between suffering and apostleship. We will see that Paul ironically argues that his suffering contributes to his authority. That Paul sees authority in apostleship is clear from 1 Corinthians 9. In the context of arguing for his right to eat any food, he describes himself as free, an apostle, and someone who has seen the Lord (1 Cor 9:1). If he is not an

apostle to others, he at least is to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:2). He goes on to note that as an apostle he has a right to be supported financially by them (1 Cor 9:6-12), even comparing himself to those who served in the Levitical temple (1 Cor 9:13-14). Paul is showing that he has authority and rights, but that he gives them up for the sake of fellow believers, as a lesson for how they should act regarding food sacrificed to idols. Paul sees apostleship as entailing authority, honor, and benefits including monetary support. That apostleship entails a place of authority in the church is also clear from 1 Corinthians 12:28, "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles."

Yet Paul wants to stress his humility in the Corinthian correspondence as well. Factions have arisen at Corinth with people following different leaders like Paul, Apollos, and Peter (1 Cor 3:1-4). So, Paul notes that they are all nothing but ministers (1 Cor 3:5), servants, and household managers of Christ (1 Cor 4:1). He continues, "I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men" (1 Cor 4:9). He goes on to list other things he has suffered in verses 10-13. And yet, as an apostle, Paul still has authority. He notes that he is not just their guide but their father, and they are his children. They are to imitate him and if they do not, he might visit them and discipline them (1 Cor 4:14-21). In 1 Corinthians 5:3 he notes that though absent in body, he is present in spirit and has cast judgment on a particular sin in the Corinthian congregation. While Paul sees himself as the least of the apostles (15:9), he has the Spirit and commands the Corinthians to imitate him and remain in the traditions he has delivered to them (7:40; 11:1-2, 23; 15:3). In 2 Corinthians, Paul takes this a step further, listing suffering as part of his credentials, to prove his authority. He does not just retain his apostleship despite suffering but through it. In 2 Corinthians 10:8 Paul acknowledges his authority, "even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed." He notes, however, that he will not compare himself with those who commend themselves and will not boast except for that which God has given him (2 Cor 10:12-13). Paul then asks the Corinthians to bear with some foolishness on his part. He writes, "Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things…" (2 Cor 11:5-6). He continues, "whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one" (2 Cor 11:21-23). An unsympathetic might say this is prideful speech and a far cry from the humility Paul claims to have. He notes that in this part of the letter he is trying to boast of his credentials to the Corinthians. But he continues, "I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings,

and often near death." Paul then goes on to *boast* of a long list of his various sufferings in his ministry (2 Cor 11:24-33). He then turns to a positive credential - he *boasts* of someone he knows who experienced a unique revelation (2 Cor 12:1-5).

Part of Paul's strategy is straightforward, boasting in authority and of the man he knows who received special revelation. But in between these things, he strangely boasts of his suffering. The key to understanding Paul's argument is in the comparative adjective in 11:23. Paul says he has experienced *greater* labors, *more* imprisonments, and *more* beatings. Who has he suffered more than and why does this matter? These statements are parallel to how he compares himself to the super-apostles earlier in the verse, saying he is a *better* servant of Christ. Hafemman has argued that the entire letter of 2 Corinthians is framed as a response to the super-apostles who were questioning if Paul was an apostle, given that he was suffering (Hafemman 1989, 333).[1] Thus, Paul responds by noting that apostleship and suffering are not opposed, but go hand in hand. Corinth began to look down upon Paul because they were looking to the super-apostles, who saw a suffering Paul as an embarrassment. We must always be careful with hypothetical reconstructions of the background of this letter. But it is clear from the letter itself that Paul is arguing against the super-apostles, and that he is trying to convince the Corinthians that he retains apostolic authority. 2 Corinthians 12:11-12 reads, "I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works." It is plausible that he states he is not inferior because Corinthians were beginning to think he was inferior due to his suffering.

What we want to note here is that Paul does not just argue that he can be an apostle and suffer, or even that apostles must suffer, but that he lists his sufferings as a qualification for ministry. There is deep irony in his lusting of his credentials. He notes that he is a Hebrew of Hebrews, just as much as his opponents (2 Cor 11:22). He notes that in even talking this way he is speaking like a madman (2 Cor 11:23 Paul here literally talks like a madman - the ESV's "I am a better one" translates ὑπὲρ ἐγώ, a grammatical abnormality since prepositions cannot take the nominative); after all, in Pauline theology, one's ethnicity is less important than their relationship to Christ. But Paul still makes sure he gets this credential in. He then turns and lists his sufferings, noting that to list these as credentials is to talk like a fool. But within Pauline theology, this makes sense since God's power is shown through weakness. Paul lists both the credentials his opponents would have cared about and the ones they would not have cared about. Both have

1 For another argument regarding the background of 2 Cor also focusing on leadership, see O' Reilly 2021, 80–95. For a different view, see Paul B. Duff 2015, 18–92.

caveats acknowledging that Paul understands he will sound like a madman to his listeners.

We briefly mention 2 Corinthians 6:2-4, "We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger." Here also Paul connects his ministry, commendation of his authority as a servant of God, and suffering. Paul's view of ministry and qualification is clear. He sees himself as a more qualified (better) servant of Christ than his opponents, because he has experienced more suffering.

2.1. Suffering and Apostleship in Historical Context

Many have noted similarities between the *peristasis* (list of sufferings) of Paul and Hellenistic philosophers. Free (2017, 80–85) in particular points out that emphasizing suffering was a common rhetorical tool used by traveling teachers and philosophers (especially Stoics), to emphasize credentials. Free takes this as evidence that Paul was exaggerating in his claims about his suffering. Free sees some of Paul's language as metaphorical or hyperbolic. Free also makes other arguments to minimize Paul's suffering, noting that house arrest would not have been as bad as traditionally thought, that the suffering Paul lists would have been experienced by anyone who traveled in the ancient world (this makes the opposite point, namely that Paul did suffer, thus there is some inconsistency in the argument here), and that the Roman state was not persecuting Paul, but that Christians were facing the consequences of voluntarily separating from the state.[2]

Certainly, the distinction between house arrest and prison is an important one. We also do not deny that rhetoric plays a role in Paul's writing as he is trying to convince. It does seem that Paul interprets general suffering specifically as Christian persecution (Maroney 2023, 40–47), and adds layers of meaning to his lived experience by seeing himself as a prisoner of Christ. But we think Free goes too far. We first note that Free makes conflicting arguments, namely that every traveler would have suffered the way Paul describes, but also Paul's suffering was not as bad as traditionally thought. If traveling was dangerous for everyone in the ancient world, then it was for Paul. And that it was a common experience does not invalidate Paul's applying importance and meaning to it.

Second, for Paul, suffering is fully integrated into Christian theology. This does not mean his views could not have been influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. But the suffering Paul experiences is seen by him as having distinctively Christian significance. It is no problem to Pauline theology if all travelers in the ancient

2 For somewhat similar arguments for seeing suffering in early Christianity as a myth, see Moss 2013, especially 215–246.

world experienced suffering. Certainly, those imprisoning or beating Paul were not doing so to qualify Paul for ministry. But that does not mean Paul cannot interpret God as working that way in the events that are occurring. Additionally, if one accepts Hafeman's reconstruction of the background of 2 Corinthians, namely that the super-apostles were saying a suffering apostle is not an apostle - then the super-apostles would be examples of traveling teachers who do not experience the kind of suffering Paul does.

Third, it is important to note the differences between Pauline and Stoic thought. Stoic philosopher Epictetus argued that a sufferer must be impassible in their suffering, remaining true to themselves even as they are attacked from the outside (Bertschman 2020, 256–275). We do not see this sort of emphasis in Paul. Additionally, Epictetus does not see suffering as necessary the way we see in Paul (Bertschman 2020, 256–275).

Fourth, we might add that in Pauline thought the listing of sufferings as credentials is distinctly ironic. Suffering is not a qualification for Paul because it shows how strong or impassible he is in suffering. Instead suffering qualifies him precisely because it shows his weakness and humility, emphasizing God's strength. Matt O'Reilly (2021, 80–95) gives arguments for seeing Paul in 2 Corinthians as distinguishing himself from what the Corinthians would have expected leadership to be in a Greco-Roman context. He reconstructs the Corinthians as expecting not a Stoic, impassible leader, but a strong leader not experience suffering.

Fifth, and most importantly, if Paul's listing of his suffering did not have some basis in reality, we wonder how effective the letter would have been. If Paul had not suffered, to what extent could he convince the Corinthians that he had? They would have been aware of the Hellenistic Philosophy trope. Paul also references the Corinthians' suffering, in 2 Corinthians 1, and it is doubtful that he would describe their suffering hyperbolically to them. In our view, it is unlikely that Paul would have pointed to his suffering as evidence of his greater credentials than the super-apostles if his suffering was not that great. The Corinthian correspondence's defense of suffering does not fit a context of Paul making up his suffering, or a context of suffering being experienced by everyone.

For these reasons, we argue that Free (2017, 80–85) overstates the case and that the rhetoric of the Corinthian correspondence does not make sense if Paul's suffering is entirely fictional rhetoric. To conclude this section, Paul connects his apostleship with his ministry. Paul argues against the idea that his suffering disqualifies his credentials and ironically lists his various sufferings alongside his credentials.

3. Suffering and Empathy

The third way Paul sees suffering as a qualification for ministry is in the way it equips him with empathy. 2 Corinthians opens by describing the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). Paul notes that because God comforts him in his affliction, he can (δύνασθαι) comfort others in affliction, "with the *same comfort*" he received from God (2 Cor 1:4). Paul's experience of suffering is the very tool he uses in his ministry. To use modern terms, Paul is saying that he does not just have *sympathy* for the Corinthians' suffering (imagining what it is like and feeling bad for them), but *empathy* for their suffering (knowing what it is like from personal experience). Because he has made it through suffering to comfort, he can share that comfort with the Corinthians. If the super-apostles were questioning Paul's ministry because of his suffering, Paul makes a practical counter-argument. Suffering enhances his ministry because it enables him to have empathy with the Corinthians who are themselves suffering and in need of comfort.

Paul continues, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ, we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort" (2 Cor 1:5-7). "Christ's sufferings" can alternatively be translated as "Messianic sufferings/woes." Scholarship has recognized the importance of seeing Paul in the context of Jewish Apocalypticism. Apocalypticism was the idea that the present age was so marred by sin that it could not simply be fixed but needed to be replaced completely by the age to come, with the advent of the Messiah. Before the new age arrived, it was thought that the people of God would experience oppression, referred to as the "Messianic Woes," or "Messianic Tribulation."[3]

In 2 Corinthians 1, suffering originates with the believer's solidarity with Christ. The Messiah suffered and his followers must suffer as well. But this solidarity with the Messiah also provides comfort and an equipping for a ministry of comfort to others. Paul sees solidarity not just between Christ and believers, but between believers and other believers, as they suffer together. This idea of union with Christ extending beyond the individual believer to the corporate Church resurfaces in 1:21, "it is God who establishes us with you in Christ." Suffering enables empathy with those who suffer, so in this sense, suffering trains the apostle for ministry.

3 For an important introduction to the concept and its importance, see Dubis 2002.

3.1. 1 Peter

Here we turn to examine resonances between what we have seen in Paul's thought, with other texts of the New Testament.[4] In 1 Peter and other texts, we will see resonances with the first Pauline concept of suffering as honorary title and qualification, and potentially the idea of empathy. Then in Hebrews, we will see resonances with the idea of empathy as training for ministry.

In 1 Peter we see ideas similar to the Pauline ideas of suffering as giving a leader authority, and of suffering as enabling solidarity. 1 Peter 5:1 reads, "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you." There is much here in common with what we saw in Paul. "τῶν τοῦ χριστοῦ παθημάτων" is nearly identical to the phrase in 2 Corinthians 1:5. Here as in 2 Corinthians, the phrase could be translated "Messianic sufferings" instead of "sufferings of Christ."[5] We also see Peter exercising authority and making commands, but doing so in a humble way as he stresses his solidarity with them and his partaking in suffering. Part of his credentials are suffering, and this suffering gives him solidarity with those he is speaking with. Of note as well is Revelation 1:9, John introduces himself, "I, John, your brother and partner (συγκοινωνὸς) in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus." Like Peter, John stresses less what is different about him and his disciples, and more what they have in common through suffering. He also strikingly identifies the location of the suffering (as well as the kingdom and endurance) as *in* Jesus.

3.2. Hebrews

The author of Hebrews also sees suffering as a qualification for ministry because it enables empathy, though from a different perspective. Hebrews makes the shocking statement that it was fitting, even necessary that Christ be "made perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10, 17). To be able (δύναται) to be a merciful high priest, he had to suffer and be tempted, so he could help those who suffer and are tempted (Heb 2:18). Later in the letter the author returns to this theme, noting that Christ is a high priest who can sympathize with his peoples' weaknesses (Heb 4:15). The author then discusses how high priests, in general, can deal gently with their people, themselves being beset with weakness (Heb 5:2). The difference, of course, is that Christ does not have to make sacrifices for his sins since he is

4 For introductions to issues in the study of persecution in 1 Peter, see Williams 2012.

5 For extensive argumentation, see Dubis 2002. One thing he notes is that Peter did not directly witness the cross, and so it is likely that he here speaks of witnessing other believers suffer. See especially pp. 5–36.

without sin. Nevertheless, his suffering was real – "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:7-8). This obedience of Christ specifically as a son is applied to the believer generally toward the end of the letter, "have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb 12:5-6, quoting Prov 3:11-12). The author of Hebrews also commands a ministry of empathy to all believers, "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body" (Heb 13:3). Believers do not *need* to be made like their brothers in every way like Christ. The command here is not to *enter* into prison. The author also notes that the recipients of the letter have not yet shed blood in their faithfulness to Christ (Heb 12:4), and he does not tell them to seek out such a situation. But even if *experiential* empathy is not commanded, the author does command the hearers to put themselves in the shoes of their fellow believers, for the sake of solidarity. Hebrews promotes empathy based on the solidarity and union believers already have, being "in the body" (Heb 13:3). In chapter 10 of the letter, the author notes that the recipients have recently fallen from their former faith when they "endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" (Heb 10:32-34).

Here we see similarities with Paul's thought, namely that suffering can provide empathy and solidarity for ministry. But there are also significant differences of emphasis. The first is the direction of the solidarity. Paul can sometimes talk of Christ becoming like the believer when Christ suffers. Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6), became a servant (Phil 2:6), and was made to be sin though he knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21). In all these texts we see Christ entering into solidarity with humanity. But by far the more common move for Paul to make is to see solidarity going in the other direction with believers entering into solidarity with Christ. Christ died *for* believers - but for all the spiritual benefits this entails, it does not mean that believers will immediately avoid physical death. Being united to Christ can entail *more* suffering for the believer as they enter into burial with Christ before being raised with him (see also, Rom 6:4, Col 2:12. This insight comes from Andrew Rillera). Believers become more like Christ through suffering. In 2 Corinthians 1 the "Christ sufferings" are seen as something already existing, applied, and abounding to the believer. The believer suffers because they have to be made like Christ in every way.

In both Hebrews and Paul, Christ is an example of suffering for the believer. But again, a different reason for suffering is given. In Hebrews, believers suffer as they are disciplined for sin to become more perfect. Christ similarly suffers to be "made perfect."[6] In Paul, Christ is also an example of the sufferer, but a reason for suffering is not given. Christ and believers suffer because this is necessary in the current (final) age.

The second difference between Hebrews and Paul here is that Paul does not seem to make as much use of the theology of suffering as fatherly *discipline* (Bertschman 2020, 256–275 also notes this, pointing to Romans 5 as the only place that Paul connects suffering with growth in virtue). God the Father is present in the suffering of the believers (2 Cor 1). But here in 2 Corinthians 1, the goal is not to connect the suffering with sin (this is a move made elsewhere by Paul, for instance in 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20).

Paul does see sinners as suffering, even using some of the same language for believing and unbelieving sufferers. But Paul discusses suffering in unbelievers' lives less as instruction and more as judgment. It is *mercy and patience* (delaying judgment) that Paul points out as instructive for sufferers. In the suffering discussed in 2 Corinthians 1, the focus is not on sin but solidarity and comfort. Here it is 1 Peter that is closer to Paul. 1 Peter makes a distinction between unbelieving and believing sufferers, between those suffering for sin and suffering for being Christian (1 Pet 4:16).

Conclusion

Understanding Paul's interpretation of his life experience and the way he and his community respond is a vital topic in Pauline interpretation. This article has attempted to outline Paul's thought process regarding suffering and how it relates to ministry. Paul sees suffering as a qualification for ministry first as he is imprisoned for Christ. Paul takes a humiliating reality and makes it an honorary title. Second, Paul sees himself as a suffering apostle. Paul does not just retain his apostolic authority despite suffering, but in fact through it. Thirdly, Paul sees suffering as a qualification for ministry as one who can empathize with those experiencing similar suffering. Through suffering, Paul is being trained to minister to those who are currently or will in the future suffer.

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Nathan Maroney

Patnja kao kvalifikacija za službu

Sažetak

Za Pavla su stvarnosti Krista i evanđelja bile moćni interpretativni alati. U svojim pismima Pavao koristi te stvarnosti kao leće kojima tumači svoje trpljenje. Ovaj članak istražuje elemente Pavlova razmišljanja u kojemu je patnja protumačena kao nešto što ide u prilog službi. Prvo, u Efežanima i Filemonu raspravljamo o terminu „sužanj Krista Isusa" i načine na koje Pavao to vidi kao počasni naziv koji ga kvalificira autoritetom. Drugo, u korespondenciji s Korinćanima razmatramo način na koji Pavao povezuje apostolstvo i patnju, nabrajajući svoje nedaće kao kvalifikacije. Treće, u Drugoj poslanici Korinćanima promatramo način na koji Pavao vidi patnju kao nešto što doprinosi empatiji u službi. Na kraju otkrivamo odjeke sličnih misli drugdje u Novomu zavjetu.

Christology in John's Gospel as a Trigger for Discipleship[1]

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Abstract

This article discusses the relationship between Christology and discipleship. It argues that Christology is the driving force, or trigger, behind becoming a disciple of Jesus and can also be used to revitalize existing disciples. The first part of the article examines the use of the term mathētēs, asking the question, "Who is directly or indirectly called a disciple of Jesus?" The second part explores concepts related to discipleship, which provides a basis for the third part of the article, which delves into why someone becomes a disciple of Jesus, i.e., questions of motivation. Since the topic is extensive, this section will only focus on the parts of the Gospel that contain explicit Christological titles and where the response to Jesus is positive. Since, in the Gospel of John, Christology is the means of initiating discipleship, the fourth part analyzes whether the main message of the gospel is centered on Christology or soteriology and how different messages impact discipleship. The article concludes that the Gospel of John emphasizes Christology as the center of its message rather than focusing on man's fallen state and need for salvation. It also states that Christology triggers discipleship and plays a crucial role in motivating believers to commitment, zeal, sanctification, and sacrificial service within the Church today.

Keywords: *John's Gospel, Christology, discipleship, gospel, soteriology, believe, sin*

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Introduction

Writing about a topic based on the Gospel of John can be quite challenging. This is because John does not follow a linear writing style where he discusses one topic and then moves on to the next. Instead, he uses amplification techniques and often connects and overlaps different concepts to create a network of links and associations. This means that no matter how much you delve into the analysis and treatment of a topic, you may still feel like you have not done it justice and that so much more could have been said.

This article aims to demonstrate the interconnectedness of Christology and discipleship in the Gospel of John. In essence, discovering who Jesus is (Christology) is the foundation for and catalyst of discipleship. To accomplish this, the first section delves into explicit references to discipleship, including who is invited and considered a disciple. The second section explores the various concepts related to discipleship, as John uses a range of terms to describe it. The third section examines how Christology (positive responses to Jesus) encourages and inspires discipleship. Only texts where Christological titles appear and people respond favorably are analyzed. Finally, in the fourth section, John's Christology is examined to determine if the Gospel is primarily focused on Christology or soteriology. It is also pointed out that the greatest sin in John's Gospel is Christological in nature – the disbelief in Jesus' identity.

1. Discourse on Discipleship in John's Gospel

We will start by identifying the specific claims to discipleship. If we trace back to the earliest person directly linked to the term *mathētēs* concerning Jesus' disciples, we find Andrew. Andrew is first mentioned in John 1:35-37 as a disciple of John, along with another unnamed disciple. However, it is not until John 6:8 that the term *mathētēs* is directly associated with Andrew's name. Judas Iscariot is another person to whom the term is directly linked (Jn 12:4), but John immediately warns readers that Judas will betray Jesus. The beloved disciple is mentioned as the third person, referred to as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (Jn 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 23, 24), but the Gospel does not explicitly name him. Simon Peter is introduced as the fourth person, mentioned in chapter 18 as accompanying Jesus at his arrest. It should be noted that others call Peter Jesus' disciple (Jn 18:15-17, 25). There is also a reference to "another disciple" whose identity remains unknown. This pair of disciples, consisting of Peter and "the other disciple," appears again in John 20:2, 3, 4, 8 related to the empty tomb. In John 19:38, it is stated that Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus. However, he kept his discipleship a secret due to his fear of the Jews. Another person mentioned in the same chapter is Nicodemus (Jn 19:39). Although the text does not explicitly state that Nicodemus was a

disciple of Jesus, it is worth noting that he appears alongside Joseph of Arimathea during the burial of Jesus' body. Thomas, also known as the Twin, is explicitly mentioned as a disciple of Jesus in 20:26. In 21:2, the largest list of Jesus' disciples is given, which includes Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples.

When examining the use of the term *mathētēs* concerning individuals, only Philip is a new addition due to his mention in John 6:5, 7 where it is linked with the term *mathētēs* in John 6:3. Philip is also mentioned in the context of the paschal meal in John 14:8-9. Peter's name occurs several times: a) in John 6:68, linked to *mathētēs* in John 6:66 and the term "the Twelve" in John 6:67; b) in John 13:6-9, linked to *mathētēs* in John 13:5; c) in John 13:24 linked to *mathētēs* in John 13:22-23; d) in John 18:10-11, linked to *mathētēs* in John 18:1. Peter also appears in chapter 12, but as already mentioned, he is directly called a disciple of Jesus along with some others (Jn 21:2), and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Thomas the Twin, mentioned in John 11:16, is categorized as a Jesus' disciple in connection to *mathētēs* in John 11:12 and to *symmathētēs* in John 11:16. Furthermore, Judas Iscariot is mentioned as a disciple of Jesus in John 12:4 and his status as a disciple is confirmed in John 13:26, 29 in connection with *mathētēs* in John 13:22 and 18:2 in links with *mathētēs* in John 18:1. In John 14:22, a Judas is mentioned, but the author of the gospel clarifies that this is not Judas Iscariot. Although the noun *mathētēs* is not used in close proximity, it is understood that Judas is indeed a disciple, given that the events of chapters 13 to 17 occur during the Passover dinner that Jesus had with his disciples (Jn 13:5, 22, 23).

If we were to list the names of Jesus' disciples in the Gospel of John, they would be:

- Andrew: John 1:40; 6:8; 12:22
- Simon Peter: John 1:40, 42, 44; 6:8, 68; 13:6, 8, 9, 24, 36, 37; 18:10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27; 20:2, 3, 4, 6; 21:2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21
- Philip: John 1:43, 44, 45, 46, 48; 6:5, 7; 12:21, 22; 14:8, 9
- Nathanael: John 1:45, 46, 47, 48, 49; 21:2
- Thomas: John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24; 20:26, 27, 28; 21:2
- Judas (not Iscariot): John 14:22
- Judas Iscariot: John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29; 18:2, 3, 5
- Beloved disciple: John 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 23, 24
- Sons of Zebedee: John 21:2

In the Gospel of John, the term "disciple" generally refers to those who were Jesus' disciples. This can be seen in various passages such as John 2:2, 11, 17, 22; 3:22; 4:1-2, 8, 27, 31, 33; 6:3, 8, 12, 16, 22, 24, 60, 61, 66; 7:3; 8:31; 9:2; 11:7-8, 12, 54; 12:16; 13:5, 22-23, 35; 15:8; 16:17, 29; 18:1, 2, 19; 20:10, 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 30; and 21:1, 4, 8, 12. In other instances, John 1:37, 38, and 3:25 mention the disciples of

John the Baptist, while in John 9:28 the Pharisees refer to themselves as "disciples of Moses." The Pharisees also suspect the man blind from birth of being a disciple of Jesus in John 9:27-28. It is important to note that the term "Twelve" (Jn 6:67, 70, 71; 20:24) refers to a special category of Jesus' disciples, as seen in the use of *mathētēs* in John 6:66 and 20:25.[2]

2. Terms Belonging in the Discipleship Domain

2.1. To Follow

Some other terms do not necessarily denote a "disciple," but their semantic scope can contain such a meaning. Of course, in such cases, the immediate context will reveal the word's meaning. The first such term is the verb *akoloutheō*, meaning "to follow." It occurs 19 times in John's Gospel, but only once does it refer to following someone as a disciple (Jn 11:31). At the start of the Gospel, John 1:35-37 mentions two of John the Baptist's disciples who decide to follow Jesus in verses 1:37, 38, 40. One of the disciples is named Andrew, and is the brother of Simon Peter, while the other disciple remains anonymous. It is important to observe that these two disciples are not initially referred to as Jesus' followers. However, their decision to stop following John the Baptist and instead follow Jesus classifies them as disciples, but no longer as John's disciples but as Jesus' disciples. In John 1:43, Jesus calls Philip to follow him, which is the first time he calls someone directly. We see this verb next in John 6:2, where we learn that a significant group of people followed Jesus. However, as we read the rest of the chapter, we discover that their motives for following him were not entirely pure. The crowd followed Jesus because they witnessed his miracles on the sick. However, this is not necessarily negative, as in John 10:38 Jesus acknowledges that faith based on works, such as miracles (see Jn 9 and 10), is acceptable to him, though not ideal.[3] However, the context of chapter

2 Discussing discipleship in the Gospel of John presents a challenge as John does not provide a clear definition of discipleship or what it means to be a disciple. Instead, he describes it in various ways. Additionally, there are instances, such as with the Samaritans in John 4, where it appears that they became disciples of Jesus, but John doesn't explicitly confirm this. As a result, their fate after Jesus departed remains unclear. Theologians also have differing opinions on whether Nicodemus ultimately became a disciple of Jesus or not.

3 Commenting on John 10:38, Colin G. Kruse (2003, 241) highlights the following: "The miracles of Jesus were the works of God, and Jesus invited his opponents to believe in him on account of the miracles, even if they could not believe what he said. This he said was so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father. Though belief based on miracles is not ideal (4:48), many did believe because of his miracles (7:31). Sadly, there were many who saw the miracles and still refused to believe (12:37). Nevertheless, the evangelist records Jesus' miracles to engender belief in his readers (20:31)."

6 shows that the large crowd following Jesus misunderstood him, believing him to be only a "prophet" and seeking to make him their "king."

The next group of texts describes the meaning of following Jesus, i.e., being his disciple. John 8:12 tells us that the one who follows Jesus will not "walk" in darkness. Based on John 10:4, 5, and 27, we find out that following the Shepherd involves listening to his voice. John 12:26 informs us that the prerequisite for serving is to follow Christ wherever he goes. Additionally, John 12:25 describes that serving/following implies hating one's own life in this world.

The final set of texts refers specifically to Simon Peter and to a lesser extent, the "disciple whom Jesus loved." In John 13:36-37, Jesus tells Peter that he is not yet ready to follow him, but will be in the future. The context clearly shows that Peter believes this means he is not ready to die for Jesus. Later in John 21:19-22, Jesus brings up the topic of death again and predicts that Peter will die a martyr's death, like Christ, and encourages him to follow him. In John 18:15, Peter and another disciple follow the arrested Jesus to the High Priest's courtyard, but this may not necessarily be related to discipleship. In John 20:6, Peter is shown following "another disciple" to Jesus' empty tomb, and in John 21:20, Peter notices the disciple whom Jesus loved following them and asks about his future. Instead of answering, Jesus invites Peter to follow him.

2.2. To Abide

The verb *menō*, meaning "to abide," is another term that carries the idea of discipleship. In John 1:38, when Andrew and another disciple follow Jesus, he asks them, "What are you seeking?" They answer with a counterquestion, "Rabbi… where are you staying/abiding?" Although they seem to be asking for his place of residence to spend time with him, according to Laurentio (2019, 3), this is another way of asking, "Who are you?" Similarly, in John 4:40, the Samaritans who believed in Jesus wanted him to "stay/abide with them." Since it is clear that their faith was the fruit or result of woman's testimony and Jesus's teaching, this refers to discipleship and not just hospitality. In John 6:56, Jesus makes the connection between abiding in him and eating his body and drinking his blood, while in John 8:31, the condition for discipleship is abiding in his word/teaching. In John 12:46, Jesus stresses that whoever believes in him may not remain in darkness. The most significant discussion of abiding can be found in chapter 15, where Jesus speaks about "abiding in him" (15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 16). To abide in Christ means that his *word* abides in us (15:7), which is connected to abiding in his *love* (15:9). This love is defined as keeping or obeying his commandments.

2.3. To Come

The verb *erchomai*, "to come," is also sometimes associated with discipleship. In John 1:39, Jesus calls his first two disciples, saying, "Come and you will see." It is obvious that the invitation "Come" signifies a call to discipleship. Shortly afterward, Philip, who was invited by Jesus to "follow" him, met Nathanael and shared about Jesus with him. Philip invited Nathanael to meet Jesus himself, simply saying, "Come and see" (Jn 1:46), echoing the same words Jesus used in John 1:39.

When we encounter the term *erchomai* in the context of discipleship again, it is when Nicodemus approaches Jesus. In John 3:2, Nicodemus approached Jesus to discuss his ministry. He did not come specifically to be or become a disciple of Jesus. However, in the context of John's Gospel, it is reasonable to see this arrival of Nicodemus in the context of discipleship, because of his later involvement in the burial of Jesus together with Joseph of Arimathea (Ch. 19). As we have said before, Joseph of Arimathea is described as a secret disciple, and it is possible that Nicodemus also falls into this category. Therefore, if we understand discipleship as a process, this "coming" of Nicodemus in chapter 3 can be seen as discipleship. Additionally, Jesus uses the verb *erchomai* twice in his conversation with Nicodemus, referring to those who do not "come" to the light and those who do (Jn 3:20-21). The fact that he came to Jesus at night seems to testify that Jesus indirectly pointed out to Nicodemus that he was still "in darkness."

In John 4:40, we encounter the Samaritans who approach Jesus after hearing the testimony of a woman. This act of arrival can be categorized as discipleship for two reasons. Firstly, these individuals request Jesus to "abide" (*menō*), which in certain contexts refers to discipleship.[4] Secondly, we witness that some of them gain faith (Jn 4:41) in Jesus as the Savior of the world (Jn 4:42) upon arriving. Conversely, in John 5:40, Jesus informs the Jews during a Jewish holiday that they are knowledgeable about the Scriptures but refuse to "come" to him to obtain life. Jesus points out that the Jews claim to believe and follow the teachings of Moses, but since Moses wrote about him, they should come to him. Clearly, "coming" has the meaning of discipleship, among other things. Similarly, in John 7:73, during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus invites all those who are thirsty to "come" to him.[5]

4 As was already pointed out, John often enhances and expands one term by connecting it and overlapping it with other terms, creating a network of links and associations between various concepts. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that "discipleship," among other things, is described as "residence," but the meaning of "residence" extends beyond the concept of discipleship.

5 It is sometimes difficult to find the boundary between discipleship and soteriology in John, because the belief that brings eternal life is directed at recognizing and accepting Jesus' identity. Different people "come" to Jesus and "follow" him. Regarding some, we are told they "believed" in him. However, there are also those who believe but still need to believe (disciples in Ch. 1 believed in Jesus but were still in the process of believing (e.g., Jn 2:11, 22), and some who believed were capable of stoning Jesus (in Jn 8:31 the Jews who believed in Jesus wanted to kill him in the end (Jn 8:59)).

Chapter 6 of the book mentions the verb *erchomai* six times. The first instance of this occurs in John 6:5, where a crowd approaches Jesus after witnessing his miracles. Although this act of coming to, or following, Christ seems commendable, the same crowd displays a great misunderstanding of Jesus' person and ministry after he performs the miracle of multiplying the bread. They recognize him as a prophet and want to enthrone him as king (Jn 6:14-15). In John 6:24, after Jesus leaves them, the same crowd comes to him again, calling him "teacher" (Jn 6:25). However, Jesus sees through them (Jn 6:26-27) and understands that they follow him for the wrong reasons and with a deep misunderstanding. In John 6:35, 37, Jesus uses *erchomai* again to address the same people and tell them about himself as the "bread of life." He also explains that those who come to him "will not go hungry" and that only those whom the Father gives him can come to him. He repeats this thought in John 6:44, 65, where we find two instances of *erchomai* again. Based on this, what can we deduce? In those passages, *erchomai* certainly appears in the context of discipleship, given that Jesus is "teaching" the listening crowd (Jn 6:59). However, we also learn that the group contained many of his "disciples" (Jn 6:60) and that many of them left him (Jn 6:66). If discipleship is a process, we see that some who follow Jesus stop halfway.

In John 8:2, we find Jesus sitting at the Temple as people "come" to him, and he teaches them. The text does not reveal in what sense they come to him or whether they are his disciples. However, things get more complex because while Jesus teaches the multitudes, the Pharisees and scribes enter the scene with the woman caught in adultery, shifting the focus toward them. In the discussion from 8:3 to 8:20, Jesus teaches at the Temple, with the Pharisees at the center of that conversation. From 8:21, the Pharisees are no longer mentioned, and John refers to the "Jews," leading to many people believing in Jesus (Jn 8:30). It is not clear whether the Pharisees are counted among those Jews or whether it refers to the people from 8:1. From John 8:31 onward, Jesus now talks to those who "believe in him," but from the rest of chapter 8 we find out that those "believers" actually want to kill/stone Jesus (Jn 8:59), the reason being that Jesus told them who their true father was. The events of chapter 8 take place at the Temple, making it possible that this group of "believers" who want to stone Jesus are associated with those mentioned in John 8:1.

In John 10:41, the Gospel plot points us back to the beginning and John the Baptist's role as a witness. The verse mentions that some "come" to Jesus because of John's testimony. Based on the fact that these people came and "believed" in what John the Baptist said about Jesus (about his identity), it is evident that this "coming" may be related to discipleship.

2.4. To Believe

The term *pisteuō*, meaning "to believe," holds great significance in John's Gospel. This is already evident in the Prologue, where John introduces certain themes and topics that he will expand on throughout the Gospel. The verb *pisteuō* occurs two times. Here we see that John the Baptist bears witness about the light so that people can believe (Jn 1:7). Those who believe become children of God by "receiving" Christ (Jn 1:12). The Prologue does not mention discipleship, but faith is a shared trait among those who follow Jesus. Nathanael, for example, believes in John 1:49-50 that Jesus is the Son of God and the king of Israel. The miracle of turning water into wine in chapter 2 leads to disciples believing in Jesus (Jn 2:11). Only after Jesus' resurrection did his disciples believe what he said in John 2:19: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:22). In chapter 4, the Samaritans begin to believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony (Jn 4:39) and his word (Jn 4:41). The connection between faith and discipleship is perhaps most evident in John 8:31-32: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Jesus says that those who abide in his word are truly his disciples, and they will know the truth and be set free. Finally, in chapter 10, Jesus refers to himself as the good Shepherd and says that those who believe are his sheep. They listen to his voice, he knows them, and they follow him (*akoloutheō*). In John 10:38, we learn that this talk of faith includes the knowledge that "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38).

Speaking of believing, we should point out that John's Gospel gives us a multifaceted picture of the concept of belief:

1. Some believe in Jesus because they have seen a sign (Jn 2:11).
2. Some believe because they have seen miracles, but Jesus himself does not believe them (Jn 2:23-24).
3. Some believe because of his teaching/word without seeing any miracles (Jn 4:41).
4. Some follow Jesus not because of miracles, but because of food. However, faith based on miracles alone is better than no faith (Jn 6:26).
5. Some look for signs and wonders to believe (Jn 6:30; 4:48).
6. Some believe in Jesus, but end up wanting to kill him (Jn 8:31, 59).
7. There are some who neither believe his words nor his deeds. That means that the miracles and the Word will not necessarily bring people to faith in Christ (Jn 10:25).
8. In 10:37-38 we see that Jesus accepts faith that is based on believing the miracles. People want to stone him for pretending to be God although he is only a man (Jn 10:33), but Jesus appeals to his words (what he told them) and his deeds (Jn 10:37). It seems that Jesus allows people not to believe if he is not doing his father's works.

9. Some believe because others witnessed to them about Christ (Jn 4:39; 10:41).
10. Some believe in Christ but are not willing to say that publicly, fearing for their reputations (Jn 12:42).
11. In John 19:38 we see that Joseph is a secret disciple of Jesus, because of the fear of the Jews.
12. Some believed it because of the empty tomb (Jn 20:8).
13. Some do not believe without seeing (Jn 20:25), and yet some others will believe without seeing (Jn 20:29).

If the concept of belief in John is primarily aimed at recognizing and accepting the identity of Jesus, it is clear from the above examples that belief in Jesus has different meanings for different groups of people, and their faith (knowledge of who Jesus is) is of a different quality. Additionally, simply believing in Jesus does not necessarily make one a disciple. For example, some follow Jesus without truly understanding who he is (as in point 4), and some seem to be believers in Jesus, but their faith does not indicate that they are Jesus' disciples (e.g., points 2 and 6).

2.5. To Walk

The verb *peripateō*, "to walk," is yet another term that sometimes carries the meaning of walking in the sense of discipleship. The first such mention occurs in John 6:66, but in a negative context because it is said that many of Jesus' disciples no longer "walked with him." In John 8:12, the combination of *akoloutheō* ("to follow") and *peripateō* ("to walk") suggests that walking in this context means following Jesus. In John 11:9-10 and 12:35, there is a recurring theme of light and darkness. In John 11, Jesus says that those who follow the light walk in the day, while those who do not have the light in them walk in the night. In John 12:35, he warns his followers: "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going." Jesus sees himself as the light, and those who follow him walk in the light. Finally, in John 21:18, Jesus prophetically announces Peter's death and uses the verb *peripateō* alongside *zōnnymi* ("to gird"). Peter used to walk wherever he pleased, but there will come a time when he will be guided by others to walk where he doesn't want to. Even though it may not seem related to discipleship, Jesus' instruction to Peter to "follow" him (*akoloutheō*) in John 21:19 implies the idea of walking in the context of discipleship.

2.6. To Hear

The verb *akouō*, "to hear," or "to listen," also sometimes has the meaning of discipleship, describing those who follow Jesus as disciples. The first two mentions of

the verb *akouō* occur together with the verb *akoloutheō*, "to follow" (Jn 1:37, 40), meaning that those who heard Jesus or heard about Jesus, started to follow him. In John 4:42, Samaritans hear for themselves what Jesus is saying and "believe" and "know" (*oida*) that he is the Savior of the world. Similarly, in John 5:24 *akouō* is paired together with *pisteuō*, "to believe," and such persons have eternal life. In John 6:45, *akouō* is surrounded by phrases denoting discipleship: "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught (verb *didaktos*) by God.' Everyone who has heard (*akouō*) and learned (*manthanō*) from the Father comes to me."

In John 8, Jesus presents himself as the one who "heard" from the Father (vv. 26, 38, 40). This is in contrast to those that surround him, because they could not bear to hear his word and, therefore, could not understand it (Jn 8:43). The conclusion comes in John 8:47 when hearing becomes the *measure* or the *test* showing who belonged to God, and who did not: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." In Ch. 10, when Jesus talks about himself being the Shepherd and disciples being his sheep, one of their characteristics is that they "hear" his voice (10:3, 8, 16, 27). Similarly, in John 18:37, speaking to Pilate, Jesus says that those who belong to the truth "hear" his voice.

3. Christology as the Trigger (Motivation) For Discipleship

Having briefly considered terms that explicitly and implicitly fall under the category of discipleship, we will now explore why someone becomes a disciple of Jesus, or what motivates a person to become Jesus' disciple. So, the crucial question is, "Why?" The answer offered in this article is: "Christology." If we accept W. Hall Harris' (1994, 162) statement that "Johannine theology is, in essence, Christology. The person of Jesus Christ is at the heart of everything the Apostle John wrote," it is clear that Christology permeates John's Gospel. In the Synoptic Gospels, there may be uncertainty among Christ's followers about his identity. However, in John's Gospel Prologue, the reader is immediately presented with a clear and powerful Christology that leaves no ambiguity about the Jesus that John is writing about.

In this vein, Howard Marshall (2014, 492–494) explains that while the other gospels introduce Jesus as the Messiah – a human chosen by God to establish His kingdom on earth, who will announce the future arrival of that kingdom, and who calls for repentance, faith, and discipleship – they also acknowledge that Jesus is more than just a man, he is the Son of God. The process of becoming a disciple of Jesus is described as becoming like little children. In contrast, John introduces Jesus as a divine being from another dimension who shares his heavenly status and nature with humanity. Despite the difference in perspective, John also addresses the Jews' acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and the subject of dis-

cipleship. Ultimately, the ingredients are the same, but the story is "put together" in a different way.

The next section will consider occurrences of explicit Christological titles as well as places where the response to Jesus was positive, resulting in discipleship or something akin to it.

3.1. First Disciples of Jesus – Chapter 1

While we are focusing on the Christology of John 1:35 to 51, it is important to remember that this section is preceded by John the Baptist's testimony (Jn 1:19-34) since the first disciples of Jesus come from John's disciples (Jn 1:35). John states that he is not the Messiah, Elijah, or the (expected) prophet (Jn 1:20-21, 25), but the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Jn 1:23). On the other hand, when John speaks of Jesus, he identifies him as the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29), the one on whom the Holy Spirit descends, allowing him to baptize others with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33), and the "Son of God" (Jn 1:34).

All of this serves as an introduction to the passage in John 1:35-51, when "the next day," John is standing together with two of his disciples and repeats that Jesus was "the Lamb of God," causing the two disciples to "follow" (Gr. *akoloutheō*) Jesus. Regardless of whether we consider their reaction to be discipleship in making or true discipleship, their reactions reveal deep Christology (see table below), which then drives them to follow Jesus and call others to do the same.[6] The first disciple mentioned by name is Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who first told his brother about Jesus and described him as the "Messiah" (Gr. *Messias*), the "Anointed One"[7] (Gr. *Christos*) and "brought" (*agō*, cf. Jn 10:16) him to Jesus.

The next pair of disciples on the scene are Philip and Nathanael. Unlike in the case of the first two who turned from following John to following Jesus, here we see Jesus personally invite Philip to follow him. The text does not tell us why Philip began to follow Jesus, but in his invitation to Nathanael, we discover his deep Christology. He calls Nathanael to follow Jesus by telling him: "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote!" (Jn 1:45a). Additionally, Philip points out Jesus' earthly origin by mentioning that this is Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth (Jn 1:45b). We are not told how Philip came to know this about Jesus, except for the detail that Philip was from the same city (Bethsaida) as Peter and Andrew (Jn 1:44). It is obvious that he got to know this through the personal testimonies of Peter and Andrew. So, Philip approaches

6 For more on the true depth of disciples' Christology in Ch. 1, see the short review on the topic in 3.6. In any case, unlike the Synoptics, the first disciples of Jesus in John are well aware of his identity from the very beginning.

7 "The term Messiah is translated by John for the benefit of his non-Jewish readers" (Guthrie 1994, 1028).

Nathanael, and although Nathanael is initially skeptical,[8] Philip invites him to use the same words (Jn 1:46) that Jesus used for his first disciples (Jn 1:39).

In the part that follows (Jn 1:47-51), the emphasis is on the words Jesus says to Nathanael. These words reveal information about both Nathanael and Jesus, since in John 1:51, Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man" for the first time. Nathanael's response to Jesus' words is deeply Christological. In John 1:49, he declares Jesus to be the "Son of God" and the "King of Israel." Although chapter 1 does not indicate whether Nathanael became a follower of Jesus, we learn that Nathanael is listed among the disciples in John 21:2 at the end of the Gospel.

"Lamb of God"	Jn 1:35
"Messiah," "the Anointed One"	Jn 1:41
"him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote"	Jn 1:45
"the Son of God," "the King of Israel"	Jn 1:49
"the Son of God"	Jn 1:51

Since John begins his Gospel with high Christology, showing us that Jesus is both man and God from the start, and since the first disciples recognize Jesus' identity (at least on the terminology level), one must ask how deep their understanding of him was. Although this merits a discussion of its own, for this article, it is enough to highlight the following paragraph:

> John 1:35–51 depicts the beginning of Jesus' active ministry as well as the beginning of the disciples' journey with Jesus. This section of the narrative tells the story of the disciples' first encounter with Jesus and their following of him. The passage is therefore significant for an understanding of Johannine discipleship. As our narrative reading will show, it not only depicts the significant aspects of discipleship (following, remaining or abiding, testifying, believing, etc.), but it also helps to clarify the Christological character of Johannine discipleship. The presence of many Christological titles, which John introduces as a motivating force for the disciples to come to Jesus and follow him, demonstrates the profound relationship between Christology and discipleship in the Fourth Gospel (Hera 2013, 3).

8 "The reason Nathanael has trouble with Jesus' coming from Nazareth is probably because the Messiah was not expected to be associated with Nazareth. Nathanael's question is usually understood as a negative one, though some of the church fathers took the tone as positive—that something good could come from Nazareth (Westcott 1908:1:55). It is probably neither entirely negative nor positive but simply a genuine question, expressing his doubts. He has reason to question whether Jesus is the one promised, but he is open to the possibility that Jesus is, as his subsequent action and confession show. Both Nathanael and Jesus' opponents begin by questioning Jesus' identity on the basis of his origin, but unlike the opponents, Nathanael ends by confessing Jesus and being promised greater revelation. The reason for the difference must lie in the fact that Nathanael is a true Israelite, in whom is nothing false (1:47)" (Whitacre 1999, 73).

3.2. Nicodemus – Chapter 3

We have pointed out that Nicodemus did not visit Jesus as a disciple, but John shows us here that he had a keen interest in his person. His statement: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs (*sēmeion*) that you do unless God is with him" (Jn 3:2), reveals that Jesus' signs made him curious about his identity and his relationship to God. While the conversation in chapter 3 initially centered on the topic of new birth, John 3:9 focused on the person of Jesus. Jesus revealed himself as the Son of Man (Jn 3:13, 14), the only Son (Jn 3:16), and the only Son of God (Jn 3:18). This Christology provides an answer to Nicodemus' initial question about him "doing these signs" (Jn 3:2). The flow of the argument reads:

A. Who are you? (Jn 3:1, 2)

B. You must be born again (Jn 3:3-10)

C. New birth is associated with Jesus, who is the Son (Jn 3:11-18)

B. The one who comes to Jesus, comes to the light and carries out works (*ergon*) in God (Jn 3:19-21)

A. B points to and answers A.

In other words, Jesus answers Nicodemus by linking the new birth, salvation, and crossing from darkness into light to himself. As Edward W. Watson (2021, 30) notes, "Although Nicodemus at this point does not yet embrace Jesus… it also reveals a desire to come to the light and find out more about who Jesus is and what message he brings."

Since Nicodemus appears twice more in John's Gospel (7:50 and 19:39), one must ask if Nicodemus ultimately became one of Jesus' disciples. According to David Beck (1997, 63), "The primary question concerning the characterization of Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel is how the reader should evaluate him. Does he remain a negative example of the unbelieving Jews, or does his understanding of and commitment to Jesus develop to the point of his portrayal in chapter 19 as a valid model of discipleship? Readers are divided on this issue." Regardless of our position on this, we must note that what triggered Nicodemus' approach to Jesus was Christology.

3.3. Samaritans – Chapter 4

The next chapter of John introduces a new character, a Samaritan woman who discovers Jesus' identity through a prolonged conversation with him. Bauckham (2007, EPUB Location 108/388) observes that misunderstandings of Jesus' listeners in John often allow Jesus to clarify the picture he uses or expand on its meaning. Consequently, some of Jesus' listeners understand him, and some do not. In

the case of the Samaritan woman, Jesus uses the picture of water to teach her about his identity. Throughout their conversation, the woman's understanding of who Jesus is grows. Initially, she recognizes him as a *Jew* (Jn 4:8). But after a confusing discussion about water, she asks if he is greater than Jacob, who gave them the well (Jn 4:12), clearly anticipating a negative answer. Jesus then reveals his knowledge about the woman's past husbands, causing her to see him as a *prophet* (Jn 4:19). Later when discussing worship, the woman says that the Messiah is coming. Jesus answers by saying that he is the Messiah, using the phrase "I am," which in this context means "I am the Messiah." Bauckham (2007, EPUB Location 226/388) points out, "…the Jesus who tells the Samaritan woman that 'I am he' (Jn 4:26) has already implicitly claimed to be more than a human Messiah by offering the living water from which eternal life springs (4:14)." Jesus' messiahship is the main content of the woman's testimony to the people of her town, and she now uses the phrase "Come and see" (1:39, 46), which serves as an invitation to discover Jesus' identity (Jn 4:28-30). In John 4:42, we find the last step in the discovery of Jesus' identity, where some of her fellow villagers believe because of her testimony, while many more believe because of Jesus' words. Ultimately, the Samaritans recognize Jesus as the Savior of the world, a unique title found only once in John's Gospel.

3.4. The Large Crowd and Jesus' Disciples – John 6

Chapter 6 gives us an interesting dynamic between the "large crowd" (Jn 6:2, 5, 22, 24) that followed Jesus, Jesus' disciples who stopped "walking" after him (Jn 6:61-66), and the disciples who continued to do so (Jn 6:67-71). At the beginning of this chapter, John tells us the reason why a large crowd was following Jesus: "Because they saw the signs (*sēmeion*) that he was doing on the sick" (Jn 6:2). Although they were following Jesus, we cannot speak of the crowd as disciples because at this point we do not know what they think about him. John 6:14 gives us a first glimpse: seeing a miracle/sign that Jesus did, the crowd believes that Jesus is the long-awaited "prophet" who is to come into the world. The crowd shows great ignorance concerning who Jesus is, because seeing that he is a prophet, they want to make him king. In the case of the Samaritan woman, we saw a progression from Jesus as "prophet" to Jesus as "messiah," and here it goes from "prophet" to "king," although the meaning of the term "messiah" in this case has the meaning of "king," this interaction between Jesus and the crowd produces a different ending. After the crowd begins "seeking" (*zēteō*) Jesus and then finds him, Jesus tells them that they are seeking him for the wrong reasons: "You are seeking me, not because you saw signs [cf. Jn 6:2], but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (Jn 6:26). From this place onward, the image, or the symbol of food is the basis for the dialogue between Jesus and the crowd.

- Jesus immediately places himself at the center of the conversation, urging them to work for the food the Son of Man will give them (Jn 6:27-29).
- The crowd still does not understand that Jesus is talking about himself because they ask for a sign so that they may see and believe him (Jn 6:31-32).[9]
- The crowd still wants the bread Jesus is talking about (Jn 6:33-34), but then Jesus openly says he is talking about himself (Jn 6:35-40).
- The crowd begins to mumble, saying that Jesus cannot be the bread from heaven because he is Joseph's son and they know his mother (Jn 6:41-42).
- Jesus points out that the proper response to him implies discipleship (Jn 6:45), which is synonymous with believing (Jn 6:47), which is then synonymous with eating him as the living bread (Jn 6:50-51).

This last statement creates a double reaction. On one side, Jews begin to quarrel about Jesus' talk of the body that is to be eaten (Jn 6:52). On the other, many of his disciples stop following Jesus (Jn 6:61-66). The last group in this chapter are Jesus' disciples who continue following Jesus, and the response Simon Peter gives on behalf of the twelve reveals a deep connection between discipleship and Christology: Jesus has the words of eternal life since he is the Holy One of God. Since Jesus is the One, they have no one else to go to.

3.5. Born Blind – John 9

A man born blind is another person who progressively discovers who Jesus is. In this story, we find one of the Christological titles, noting that, as in the case of Nicodemus, there is a positive response to Jesus. However, we cannot be certain if this person became a disciple of Jesus. Nicodemus' story highlights the image/symbol of new birth and light and darkness; the case of the Samaritan woman uses the image/symbol of living water; in Chapter 6, the body of Jesus is portrayed as food; and now we have a symbol of blindness and sight. This blind man neither follows Jesus nor, unlike Nicodemus, does he show any interest in him. He is completely passive because Jesus is the one who approaches him first. His journey in discovering Jesus' identity begins with the fact that for him Jesus is merely "a man called Jesus" (Jn 9:11). In a later conversation with Pharisees who did not believe in Jesus' divine origins, the man refers to Jesus as a "prophet" (Jn 9:33), which is a term that has already been used by the Samaritan woman and the crowd who wanted to crown Jesus as their king. When the Pharisees question the man again, accusing Jesus of being a "sinner" (which they had been claiming throughout this chapter – cf. Jn 9:16), the man asserts that Jesus is actually "from God" (Jn 9:33). Finally, after meeting with Jesus, the man reveals that he believes Jesus to be the

9 An interesting parallel with Thomas, "Unless I see… I will never believe" (Jn 20:25).

"Son of Man," a title which has been used in previous conversations with Nicodemus and the large crowd in Chapter 6.

It is significant that between recognizing Jesus as a "prophet" and saying that he was "from God," we find a discourse about discipleship because Pharisees see themselves as Moses' disciples, mockingly describing this man as Jesus' disciple. Although we cannot know whether the blind man became a disciple of Jesus (but he does show some characteristics of Jesus' disciples – witnessing), this whole narrative reveals that the key to discipleship is knowing who Jesus is.

3.6. Thomas – John 20

Apostle Thomas will be our last example. Thomas is a special case because, unlike previously mentioned people, he is by this time already a disciple of Jesus (cf. Jn 11:16; 14:5). We have no record of how and why Thomas became a disciple, but the conversation between him and Jesus is significant because it centers around Christology again. This time, Christology does not generate discipleship but revitalizes it.

John in his Prologue reveals that Jesus is the divine *logos*. Also, the idea of Jesus' divinity runs throughout John's Gospel in various ways (e.g., Ch. 8), and the readers of John's Gospel will immediately understand that. However, the characters within the Gospel discover this truth gradually. Since John begins his Gospel with high Christology, showing us from the beginning Jesus as a man and God, and since the first disciples recognize Jesus' identity, one must ask how profound their understanding of Jesus is. According to Schreiner (2008, 241), when Nathanael referred to Jesus as the "Son of God" and "King of Israel," he did not think that these titles describe Jesus as a divine person. The term "Son of God" in effect meant the "Messiah." Similarly, when Martha says that Jesus is the "Christ" and the "Son of God" in 11:27, she probably used those terms synonymously without necessarily seeing Jesus as a divine person. Schreiner further says that during Jesus' trial, Pilate was informed that Jesus had referred to himself as the Son of God, which may have led him to understand the statement as a claim to divinity. Overall, Schreiner suggests that those who used the title "Son of God" for Jesus may not have fully grasped its depth in terms of his divinity, based on John's theology as a whole.[10]

10 Whitacre (1999, 74–75) points out something similar: "The reference to Moses and the prophets (v. 45) suggests the titles Nathanael uses for Jesus are messianic. One popularly held expectation of the Messiah was that he would be a king in the line of David (for example, 2 Sam 7:12–16; Psalms of Solomon 17:21; cf. Rengstorf 1976:335–37; Michel 1978:648–51). The title Son of God could be understood in this way, as when in the Old Testament the king is called God's son (for example, Ps 2:6–7; cf. Michel 1978:636–37). Thus, in calling Jesus the Son of God and the King of Israel (Jn 1:49) Nathanael is the true Israelite acknowledging his King. This view of Jesus is right, as Jesus acknowledges when he affirms that Nathanael believes (1:50), but it is far short

However, once we come to the end of the Gospel and the purpose of its writing stated in John 20:31, the expressions "Christ" and the "Son of God" are no longer synonymous because the term Christ refers to Jesus as the Messiah, and the "Son of God" denotes Jesus' special status – his divinity (Schreiner 2008, 241). Thomas' proclamation is also significant for the beginning of John's Gospel because it creates a Christological inclusion:

> There is no doubt, according to the Gospel of John, that Jesus is God. The Gospel climaxes with Thomas's declaration to Jesus: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The disciples grasp who Jesus truly is when he is raised from the dead. The acclamation of Jesus' deity forms an inclusion with John 1:1, framing the entire Gospel. The same framing device exists in the prologue itself. The best textual reading of John 1:18 proclaims that Jesus is "the only God" (*monogenēs theos*) (Schreiner 2008, 259).

Melvyn R. Hillmer (1996, 93) reaches a similar conclusion when he says that the vocabulary used to describe discipleship – terms that describe the relationship but also the action – is remarkably diverse. However, it can be summed up by Thomas's proclamation about the risen Christ, "My Lord and my God." According to him, "This is the affirmation of faith of all who believe in Christ, for Thomas speaks for the entire group of disciples of that day and all followers of Jesus throughout the subsequent history of the church."

4. John's Christology as a Guideline for Proclaiming the Gospel and Discipleship

4.1. Gospel Message: Christology or Soteriology?

Through the analysis of John's Gospel, we have discovered at least two key points:

1. The main purpose of Jesus' interaction with people is to recognize his identity.[11]
2. Those who recognize Jesus for who he is (partially or fully) and respond positively become his disciples.

of the deep truth expressed by these titles. Jesus is truly King, but his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). He is indeed the Son of God, but in a sense far beyond anything expected by Moses and the prophets. Each of Jesus' titles affirmed in this chapter is true, so the disciples have glimpsed something of Jesus' identity. But much purging of error and further illumination will be necessary before they truly grasp what they are saying."

11 Fernando F. Segovia (1985, 91) highlights that John systematically and throughout the Gospel shows the difference between "Jesus' disciples" and "Jews" in a way that the basic point of contention is "the validity of claims about Jesus' relation to the Father."

Marianus Pale Hera (2013, 48) aptly summarizes these two points:

> …John does not argue for Jesus' divinity for its own sake. Rather he emphasizes the divine identity of Jesus in relationship to the human response to his coming. The presence of the divine Logos in the world naturally provokes the world's response, rejection, and acceptance. In the prologue the narrator draws the audience into the narrative by appealing to the audience's experience of the Word to prepare them to give their response to the incarnate Word by believing, so that they may have eternal life (20:31). If the Gospel's testimony of the divine identity of Jesus is Christology and the message concerning the acceptance of Jesus in faith is called discipleship, then the movement from Christology to discipleship is apparent and can be traced in the opening passage of John.

The significance of this subject is connected to another important subject – the message of the gospel and the question: What is the primary content of the gospel message – Christology or soteriology? This topic is of utmost importance for Christianity because it directly influences the concept of discipleship and does so in this way: the basic assumption of marketing is that people will buy a product if they think it will improve their quality of life. Therefore, the basis of marketing is *interest*. However, the problem arises if the gospel message starts to look like marketing, which is easily possible if the *center* of the message is man, his spiritual state, and the need for forgiveness/salvation. Speaking specifically about Western Christianity, the fact is that there is more than one message of Christianity. In this vein, Dallas Willard (n.d.) notices:

> In the post-WWII period, the strongest association of evangelicalism was with evangelism, and for many citizens of North America, the only thing they knew of evangelicals was that they were evangelistic. And indeed they were. They were intent upon proclaiming a gospel of "salvation" and upon winning converts to Christ… This vision was firmly tied to the version of the Gospel and of salvation that dominated evangelicalism during the period. It was strictly a gospel of forgiveness of sins and assurance of heaven after death upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ – or, minimally, profession of faith in his having suffered the penalty for our sins upon the cross. If you believed in his death as your substitute, you were a Christian, even though you never became a disciple.

Similarly, in his book, *The Great Omission*, Willard (2009, 62) emphasized two related things: "If there is anything we should know by now, it is that a gospel of justification alone does not generate disciples" and "we cannot have a gospel dealing only with sin" (2009, 64). Willard hereby points to one of those gospels that emphasizes man's sin and justification.

However, the situation is far more complex, as the "marketplace" contains various "gospels" that uniquely prioritize man and his needs. Following Bill Hull's tax-

onomy, Dennis Allen and Raymond Brown (2023, 44–47) set forth the following versions of the gospel message:

1. **The "Forgiveness Only"** Gospel sees salvation as the outcome for the believer and considers everything else to be secondary. It is satisfying to the radical individualism of the American Christian and establishes a "do-this-get-that" transactional thinking.
2. **"Left" and "Right" Gospel** "is used to shorthand sociological stances on a range of cultural issues, typically the Left taking the liberalized view of economic, moral, and political topics, whilst the Right hews, typically to the conservative, or historically traditional view."
3. **Prosperity Gospel** focuses on bartering with God and the "rights" believers have in Christ (health, blessings, wealth, etc.).
4. **Consumer Gospel** focuses on how God and/or the church community can fulfill my needs and maximize my enjoyment.

What do these four gospel versions have in common? They all place man in the center. Yes, people may believe in Christ. Yes, people may start attending church, services, and other church activities. Yes, they may get baptized, change some of their habits, and consider themselves Christians, believers, and Jesus' worshippers, but at what cost? Well, at the cost of distorting or disabling true discipleship. Because if salvation is seen as a *transaction* between God and us, supported primarily by man's self-interest, such a starting point in the relationship with God will inevitably affect and define one's subsequent walk with God.

In his discussion about the gospel, Scot McKnight (Wax 2010) points out that there is a dilemma within Evangelical Christianity concerning integrating Jesus' emphasis on the Kingdom of God and Paul's emphasis on the message of justification by faith. Consequently, some view the talk of the Kingdom of God as the center of the gospel message and some think the center is justification by faith. However, there is a problem:

> The minute a kingdom hermeneutic comes up, one either abandons the Pauline hermeneutic or one synthesizes or – and I think this is most common – one colonizes Jesus' kingdom hermeneutic by a justification hermeneutic. That is, we make Jesus talk to Paul. Or, we colonize Paul with Jesus' kingdom hermeneutic and make Paul talk to Jesus.
>
> Evangelicals are worried that if we colonize Paul with Jesus' kingdom hermeneutic, we will lose a Pauline soteriology. There are plenty of cases where that very thing happened. But I think many are doing the very same thing by colonizing Jesus with Paul.
>
> What I suggest in my article is that both of these approaches fail (sic) to find the essential continuity between Jesus and Paul. Kingdom doesn't lead to justification and justification doesn't lead to kingdom. The unity is found through Christology, not through kingdom or justification.

This is how McKnight (2010) defines the gospel message: "The gospel is first and foremost about Jesus. Or, to put it theologically, it's about Christology. Behind or underneath both kingdom and justification is the gospel, and the gospel is the *saving story of Jesus that completes Israel's story*. 'To gospel' is to tell a story about Jesus as the Messiah, as the Lord, as the Son of God, as the Savior." If McKnight is correct, then we should first proclaim Christology in order to make a path toward soteriology (Budiselić 2013, 19).

4.2. The Key Sin in John's Gospel: The Sin of Unbelief

If we go back to John's Gospel and consider those parts where we directly or indirectly notice a call to discipleship, we will see that the talk of sin (soteriology) is in the background. When Jesus calls to discipleship, the focus is the realization of who he is, and not a confession of one's *sinfulness* (lust, lying, stealing, etc.) or a call to repentance/conversion. However, when we talk about sin, John's Gospel brings us "the sin of all sins" that stretches from the Prologue to the very end of the Gospel and is essentially of Christological nature: the sin of not believing in who Jesus is, or, in other words, the sin of refusing to accept who Jesus says he is. Accordingly, the parallelism in the Prologue between those who "received" and "believed" in Jesus (Jn 1:12) and those who "did not receive him" (Jn 1:11), can be seen throughout John's Gospel. John's Gospel abounds in examples of those who believed in Jesus and those who did not believe, but here we will focus only on passages we already mentioned in the context of a positive response to Jesus' person through discipleship:

- The calling of the first disciples (Jn 1:35-42) was preceded by John the Baptist's statement that Jesus was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), but when Philip and Nathanael are called, there is no mention of sin or the need to repent – it is all about Christology. Nathanael is the one who believed in Jesus (Jn 1:50) because Jesus told him that he saw him under a fig tree.
- In the case of Nicodemus, Jesus pointed out the need to be born again. However, as previously noted, all the talk about being born again, salvation, and crossing from the darkness into the light, Jesus connected to himself. What was not in focus was Nicodemus' sinfulness but the topic of belief/unbelief in Jesus: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (Jn 3:18).
- In the case of the Samaritan woman, Jesus does comment on her sinfulness, but, as Beck (73) observes, "[t]he question of the woman's sinfulness has received far greater attention from some readers than the narration of it seems to warrant. Nowhere in this scene is there any textual evidence of

repentance, nor is Jesus portrayed requesting it of her." At the center of this story, the focus was not on the woman's sinfulness but on the fact that some Samaritans believed because of her testimony (Jn 4:39), and some because of Jesus' teaching (Jn 4:41-42).

- The problem of the large crowd Jesus dialogued with in Chapter 6 is also unbelief (Jn 6:36, 64; cf. 6:29, 30, 35, 47).
- Although the story of the man born blind begins with the question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?", Jesus seems to ignore that issue. Rather, he sees this as an opportunity to manifest the works of God. The ultimate result of this miracle is the blind man's belief in Jesus (Jn 9:35-38).
- The last example is Thomas, whose statement "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28), and Jesus' invitation for Thomas to no longer "disbelieve but believe" (Jn 20:27), nicely sum up the story of John's Gospel Christological call to faith.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John falls into a special category due to its unique structure and message. It also places a great emphasis on Christology, while discussing personal sinfulness and the need for repentance and conversion less frequently than other synoptic Gospels. This does not imply that these topics are not relevant, but they are not as prominent. Instead, the focus is on Jesus as a person and how people react to him. In this article, we have tried to demonstrate the significance of Christology for discipleship.

The importance of this topic is manifested in several ways. Firstly, John's Gospel clearly shows that the core of the Gospel message is centered around Christology, rather than man, his fallen state, and his need for salvation. Secondly, John's Gospel also points out that Christology is the trigger for discipleship. Consequently, if believers/Christians lack interest in discipleship in their churches, perhaps it is due to their focus on the gospel message, which is centered on soteriology. In such cases, it is necessary to reconsider the content of the message being announced and emphasize Christology at the gospel's core. Lastly, if Christians do not show enthusiasm toward the person and work of Jesus Christ, it is unlikely that anything else will permanently motivate them to commitment, zeal, sanctification, and sacrificial service. John's Gospel invites us to explore the depth and beauty of Jesus' person and follow the positive examples outlined in John's Gospel to become Jesus' disciples.

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Ervin Budiselić

Kristologija u Evanđelju po Ivanu kao okidač za učeništvo

Sažetak

U ovome članku razmatra se tema učeništva u poveznici s kristologijom budući da se ističe kako je kristologija pokretač ili okidač za to da netko postane Isusov učenik te se ponekad koristi i za revitalizaciju učenika. U svrhu dokazivanja ove teze, u prvome dijelu članka istražuje se korištenje pojma *mathētēs*: koga se sve direktno ili indirektno naziva Isusovim učenikom. U drugome dijelu članka istražuju se pojmovi koji spadaju u domenu učeništva, a sve to služi kao temelj za treći dio članka u kojemu se istražuje zašto netko postaje Isusov učenik, tj. što je to što neku osobu potakne ili motivira da postane Isusovim učenikom. Zbog širine same teme, u ovome dijelu razmatraju se samo dijelovi evanđelja u kojima se javljaju eksplicitne kristološke titule i gdje je odgovor na Isusovu osobu pozitivan. Budući da u Evanđelju po Ivanu kristologija pokreće učeništvo, u četvrtom dijelu razmatra se je li primarni sadržaj poruke evanđelja kristologija ili soteriologija te kako različite poruke evanđelja utječu na učeništvo. U članku se zaključuje kako Ivanovo evanđelje zorno pokazuje da je središte poruke evanđelja kristologija, a ne čovjek, njegovo palo stanje i potreba za spasenjem, kako je kristologija okidač za učeništvo te kako je kristologija ključna u današnjoj Crkvi za motiviranje vjernika na predanje, revnost, posvećenje i požrtvovno služenje.

T4T Discipleship Model[1]

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Abstract

In recent years many discipleship models emerged on the Christian global scene. One discipleship model that has garnered attention in theological seminaries, mission organizations, and churches is the T4T discipleship model (Training for Trainers). The T4T discipleship model is a part of Church Planting Movements (CPMs) and Disciple Making Movements (DMMs). This article provides information about the T4T discipleship model - what it is, what it does, and how is it applied. Further, this article considers its strengths and weaknesses regarding the use of it in the Croatian context. This article concludes that the T4T discipleship model is not suitable for use in local churches in Croatia unless there are substantial adaptations to its teaching and practices.

Keywords: *discipleship, discipleship model, evangelism, disciple*

Introduction

Over the church's history, there have been many attempts to develop discipleship materials or discipleship models to help a church in its discipleship efforts. One of the reasons that churches want to practice discipleship is because Jesus Christ commanded it. The most quoted passage when referring to discipleship comes

1 This article was written as part of the Zagreb Biblical Institute research project: "The Concept of Discipleship Among Evangelical Churches in Croatia."

from, Matthew 28:18-20, also known as the Great Commission passage, which says: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (ESV[2]). Jesus gave this command to the original 11 disciples who were present at the mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16) yet it applies to all churches, to all believers at all times. All followers of Christ are called to make disciples.

In the attempt for different churches and Christian organizations to create different models of discipleship, in the last several decades, a few discipleship models emerged. Missional Discipleship, Family Discipleship, and Life-to-Life Discipleship to name a few. However, the evangelism/discipleship model that has drawn special attention to some churches and some seminaries in recent years is T4T (Training for Trainers). T4T is a part of "Disciple Making Movements" (DMMs) and "Church Planting Movements" (CPM). The idea behind these movements is: "a vision of church planting that is capable of 'rapid multiplication' primarily because it does not require people to be converted to become part of the church or even part of its leadership" (Morrell 2018). There are certainly pros and cons to these movements. However, these movements have (rightly so) received some pushback in recent years. This article will not focus on DMMs and CPMs but will focus on T4T. DMMs and CPMs movements do have parallels with T4T because they are all a part of similar movements.

1. Definitions

Before we go any further it is important to define several terms that this author will be using in this article. We need to define a disciple of Jesus Christ, discipleship, evangelism, and what is the relationship between evangelism and discipleship. We need to acknowledge that not all theologians have the same definitions of these terms. There are different thoughts and approaches to these important terms. However, this article focuses on one model of discipleship and not on various definitions of the above-mentioned terms. Consequently, this author will define these terms according to his position toward them.

Regarding the definition of discipleship, that is, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we will follow the definition offered by Michael Wilkins. Wilkins (1992, 40) says: "In the specific sense, a disciple of Jesus is one who has come to Jesus for eternal life, has claimed Jesus as Savior and God, and has embarked upon the life of following Jesus." Further, Wilkins (1992, 40) defines discipleship as follows: "Discipleship means living a fully human life in this world in union with

2 Unless stated otherwise, in this article the author will use an ESV translation of the Bible.

Jesus Christ, growing in conformity to his image as the Spirit transforms us from the inside-out, being nurtured within a community of disciples who are engaged in that lifelong process, and helping others to know and become like Jesus." Next, we need to ask ourselves what is evangelism. Lewis Drummond (1992, 9) defined evangelism as: "A concerted effort in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront unbelievers with the truth about Jesus Christ and the claims of our Lord with a view to leading unbelievers into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and thus into the fellowship of his church so they may grow in the Spirit."

Finally, what is the relationship between evangelism and discipleship? The relationship between evangelism and discipleship comes directly from the missionary nature of the triune God who desires to see forming congregations to embody the gospel and to equip Christians to participate in the restorative and redemptive mission of God in the world (Akkerman and Maddix 2013, 16). In the passage already quoted (Matt 28:18-20), the text presumes that nations do not have the gospel and thus disciples are called to go and proclaim the gospel to the lost, lead them to Christ, then baptize them, and finally teach them everything our Lord has commended. Discipleship, evident in this passage, is this whole process that was just described, and evangelism is the first part of the discipleship process. In a parallel passage to Matthew 28:18-20, in Mark 16:15[3], also considered the Great Commission passage, Jesus explicitly calls his disciples to proclaim the gospel. Hence, evangelism takes different forms (how people go about doing it): It can be done by proclaiming the gospel on streets and squares (Luke 6:17-49; Mark 16:16; Acts 17:17), through building relationships with the lost over time (John 1:40-51; 4:28-42; Acts 10:24), and any other way that a believer chooses to do. However, evangelism at some point requires the proclamation of the Word. The Gospel must be preached for people to come to Christ (Mark 16:15; 2 Tim 4:2, Rom 10:14-17). As we already mentioned, all believers are called to make disciples, which includes evangelizing the lost and investing in believers (the second part of the discipleship process). Some believers are more gifted in the first part of discipleship (evangelism) and some believers are more gifted in the second part of discipleship (investing, mentoring, walking alongside a believer). But regardless of the giftedness, all believers are called to do both, that is the whole process of discipleship.

2. T4T Discipleship

"T4T," which stands for "Training for Trainers" is one particular model of discipleship. One of the creators of T4T, Steve Smith, explains in his own words what

3 "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.'"

it is. "T4T is an all-inclusive process of training believers over the course of 12-18 months to witness to the lost and train new believers to form reproducing discipleship communities generation by generation" (Smith 2011, 36). Additionally, T4T seeks to provide missionaries and pastors globally with practical principles for multiplying churches and trainers.

T4T was developed by Southern Baptist missionaries Ying Kai and Steve Smith in South Asia. Since 2001, according to the authors, when the T4T program started, it documented 1.7 million baptisms and 150,000 new churches. When leaders attempted to randomly sample this process, they found generations of believers who came to Christ in a 4–5-year time span (Garrison 2014, 3).

In the book *T4T*: *A Discipleship Revolution*, Steve Smith articulated the content of this discipleship movement. Smith wrote that "T4T is an all-in-one process that God uses to take a person from lostness to maturing disciple who can start new groups and train others to reproduce the process" (Smith 2011, 75). Essentially, T4T is an evangelism and discipleship strategy to reach the world with the gospel.

Smith, in his book, provided an inside look at why and how the Church Planting Movement is moving very rapidly around the world using the T4T process. Smith provided lessons in how a new believer or existing believer goes through a process to become a maturing disciple who then leads other participants to do the same. In the T4T process, a believer is encouraged to immediately implement lessons he is learning with those he led to Christ or with those who wish to be trained. This process is primarily done in a group setting.

T4T gives any reader who desires to implement discipleship movement step-by-step principles to follow. This book is full of content that one can utilize in the ministry. One of the most important principles in this training, Smith noted is the following: "If you want real obedience-based discipleship, avoid one of the chief traps: Never give an assignment or goal unless you plan to ask about it at the next meeting. Failing to ask about it is the fastest way to kill obedience-based discipleship" (Smith 2011, 112). T4T is structured to be multiplied and it is important to keep trainees accountable.

How does T4T work? T4T has 9 lessons that every potential leader or new believer needs to go through to be fully equipped to pass on lessons to the next generation of trainers. The goal of the process is that groups multiply every 9 weeks. The T4T manual is available free online, and it has 161 pages on how to go through the whole process (Garrison 2014, 3).

A typical lesson in T4T has several steps: (1) Look back, (2) Look up, and (3) Look Ahead. In Look Back – "the goal of this time is to evaluate how the trainers did while apart, celebrate together, and encourage them that God can build a movement through them" (Smith 2011, 107). In Look Up – "the goal of this time is to look up to God for a new direction by studying a new lesson or Bible study" (Smith 2011, 107). In Look Ahead – "the goal of this time is to prepare the trainers

to implement the things God has been teaching them – evangelism, discipleship, training others, starting a group, etc" (Smith 2011, 107).

T4T has a lot of good content that can be utilized in evangelism and discipleship. Smith throughout the book emphasizes that the lessons must be biblical. Smith highlights that the content is valuable and that a person must get through it, however, the most important part is to develop a trainer.

2.1. Evaluation of T4T Model

Because this article is written as a part of a discipleship research project in evangelical churches in Croatia, we need to consider a few strengths and weaknesses regarding using T4T discipleship training as a tool to help churches practice discipleship well in Croatia. One of the biggest strengths of T4T discipleship training is that it encourages believers to fulfill the Great Commission. There seems to be a lack of emphasis in Croatia to fulfill the Great Commission. Also, there seems to be a lack of strategy to make disciples.[4] Stanko Jambrek said that the most vital problem of churches in Croatia has been disobedience to the Lord's command to make disciples (Bohall 2018, 1). In his most recent book on discipleship for Croatian readers *Učeništvo na Isusov način* (*Discipleship in Jesus' Way*), Ervin Budiselić believes that there is a crisis in discipleship, if not in all evangelical churches in Croatia, then in some part of evangelical churches in Croatia (Budiselić 2023, 13–14; 19).[5] T4T discipleship training encourages making disciples a priority. Jesus gave the Great Commission to a church. In his ministry, Jesus emphasized on numerous occasions that he must preach the gospel to the lost. He said that is why he came (Luke 21:10). Jesus told his disciples to go to the whole world and to preach the gospel to all creation (Matt 16:15; 28:18-20). There is an urgency to proclaim the gospel in Croatia and to the rest of the world. T4T encourages that aspect of Christianity.

A second strength of the T4T discipleship training is that it keeps those churches and believers who signed up for training accountable to continue the process of evangelism and discipleship. After every training session during T4T

4 In 2021, this author interviewed a former missionary in Croatia for 25 years, Eric Maroney, and a research professor from the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, Ervin Budiselić. Both Maroney and Budiselić said that very few Croatian churches have a strategy for discipleship.

5 In his book, Budiselić uses the research by Barna Group made in the USA. He believes that evangelical Christianity in the USA greatly influences evangelical Christianity in Croatia. Although Budiselić acknowledges that the context and cultures are different between evangelical Christianity in the USA and Croatia, he is convinced that if a similar survey was done in Croatia, the results would indicate that there is a crisis in discipleship in evangelical churches in Croatia. I, the author of this article, am a part of the research project about discipleship in evangelical churches in Croatia. A much better picture of the state of discipleship in evangelical churches will be evident after the completion of the discipleship survey, sometime this year, 2024.

training participants are being followed up next week if they have fulfilled or met the agreed agenda from the previous week. It is well-known in sports that coaches need to keep players accountable. In schooling systems there is accountability. After a period of lectures comes a test to see how much content students have acquired. In any field, there is a process of accountability for goals to be achieved. We see that practice in the Bible as well. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1[6] that Jesus will judge the living and the dead. Believers will be accountable for how they lived their lives certainly, but they will (also) be judged whether they proclaimed the gospel to the lost or not. Every believer will give an account of his life at some point. The T4T discipleship training keeps participants accountable to fulfill its objective.

While the T4T from the outside looking seems to be an effective evangelism and discipleship method, it does have several significant weaknesses. One of the weaknesses of T4T discipleship training is that it moves way too quickly through discipleship training steps. One reason for this might be because it appears to measure its results on obedience to evangelize rather than a long process of discipleship. T4T discipleship training presumes that new converts are ready to immediately start sharing/teaching training lessons to the next person. This process presumes that these new converts grasped the material well. T4T discipleship training encourages these new converts to immediately proclaim/teach other non-believers the gospel.

As already mentioned, T4T is designed to start churches with these new converts. I would argue that for the most part, we do not see this urgent and questionable practice in Scripture. We do see the spirit of God moving in the book of Acts. The question is what is prescriptive text and what is descriptive text in the book of Acts? If someone uses the book of Acts as a model of what we should do today, can they provide evidence that the Lord commands it? I would argue that a lot of what the author in the book of Acts writes is a narrative report (descriptive text) of what the Lord did through the Apostles at that time, and not necessarily what Christians should do today.[7]

We observe in the practices of our Lord that, he, Jesus did not choose to take the shortest route possible in equipping his disciples. He could have sent them out right after he first called them to start planting and leading new churches. Although Jesus occasionally sent disciples to evangelize, he spent three years

6 "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

7 Descriptive text in the book of Acts or general in the Bible describes what took place. The Bible describes something in the past. Prescriptive text in the Bible is associated with a command of God, or imperatives in the Bible. Things that the Bible commands us to do.

training them. Jesus assured them that when he departed this world, they would be ready for the task he called them to fulfill.

The Apostle Paul was also concerned about the long-term consequences of the churches he helped to establish. Although in a general sense, all Christians are called to make disciples, Paul admonished Timothy (who was a delegate of Timothy, but served as a current pastor in the church in Ephesus) in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, the following, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." We do not have time to look deeper in this passage, but Paul urged Timothy to find faithful men. Why is Paul encouraging his disciple Timothy to be careful when selecting who he will train? Paul was aware that he was close to the end of his life, and he wanted Timothy to continue the work that he (Paul) had begun. Paul communicated that it was essential for Timothy to find men of character who would continue to teach the true gospel, the same gospel Timothy had learned from Paul. Timothy was admonished by Paul to find these men, to entrust the gospel to them, and to ensure the integrity of the gospel message (Mounce 2000, 503).

Jesus's discipleship approach provided the knowledge of the Scripture, teaching, and learning through example and imitation, an approach that is evident in the discipleship example between Paul and Timothy (Gracin and Budiselić 2020, 40). The T4T discipleship training is much more concerned with rapid multiplication rather than taking time to train participants or look for faithful men (leaders). The T4T training method does not consider the consequences of rapidly training participants in discipleship/evangelism methods (Rhodes 2022, 40).

A second weakness of the T4T method is the issue of authority. The author of the T4T method, Ying Kai developed this method of discipleship for an authority-based Chinese society. In a society such as China and other similar countries, students and people in general tend to obey their teacher's suggestions. Having completed eleven mission trips to Latin American countries, with a few instances of stays that extended to a month, I have gained personal experience that leads me to confidently assert that pastors and missionaries are accorded greater authority in Latin American countries than in Western countries. While this elevated status may seem advantageous, it can sometimes result in questionable practices by these leaders.[8]

8 While on my travels, I found myself in a position of influence, despite not being a local resident. I observed pastors and missionaries pressuring individuals to raise their hands and recite the sinner's prayer, even when it made them feel uneasy. These leaders were misusing their authority by resorting to tactics of urgency without properly explaining the gospel message. Such methods are frequently utilized in regions where those in positions of power are highly respected, and it is not customary to challenge visiting missionaries or authority figures.

On the other hand, this is not true in other cultures. In the United States of America, almost the whole of Europe, and for our purposes Croatia, some would possibly agree to witness to five people a week and then would not go through with it. Generally, Croatian people are very suspicious about connecting to new people or exploring new things. In Croatia, leaders do not have such high authority as leaders in countries such as China, or regions such as Latin America. Further, in Croatia, most people are opposed to going out on the streets and proclaiming the gospel thus this model is very difficult to apply in this country.

The third weakness of the T4T discipleship training method is that it creates churches that do not have adequately trained leadership. John David Massey correctly pointed out that in the T4T training model, new believers are quickly elevated to the office of pastor without adequate theological training. Massey (2014, 9) emphasized that the "T4T lacks a robust articulation of a New Testament church or what constitutes church leadership. Church Planting Movements strategy and T4T training is opposed to deep-level theological training for leaders because it allegedly slows down the movement."

Quite frankly, leaders of such a movement find preaching and teaching new believers scripture impediment to the movement's spread. You might find this very hard to believe. Listen to what leaders of such movements (Disciple Making Movement) David and Paul Watson (2014, 52) emphasized: "When working with lost people, we have to avoid failing into the role of explaining Scripture." Leaders of these movements think that direct teaching and pastoring new believers by experienced missionaries and disciple-makers is dangerous. They believe the lost and new converts should study scripture together without experienced missionaries guiding that process. Rather, they emphasize that only one new convert/leader should be coached by an experienced missionary or disciple-maker (Rhodes 2020, 81).

This model goes against the model from scripture where we see Jesus and the Apostles teaching the Word regularly. New converts should not be put in a leadership position in a local church (1 Tim 3:6), the very things that DMMs and the T4T method encourage to practice. What we see from Paul instructing Timothy and Titus in those respective epistles is that those who lead a church (elders and deacons) need to pass certain qualifications to be in leadership roles in a local church. Furthermore, Paul is calling Timothy, Titus, or any leader to exercise biblical leadership in his ministry. Timothy or any leader is responsible for creating a healthy discipleship environment in his church (Allen and Monroe 2023, 52).

Conclusion

We need to acknowledge that the movement of the Holy Spirit worked in marvelous ways in different places and at different times throughout church history.

China is no exception. We can affirm that it is highly possible that the Holy Spirit has been moving and is still especially moving in China. We need to acknowledge that in that process, God used the T4T discipleship training method in China. However, we need to consider the validity of some of the methods used today to reach people for Christ, the T4T is no exception.

It is quite natural and human to desire rapid success in any endeavor a person or a group tries to achieve. However, this is generally not a reality of how things work in the world we live in. As we consider the T4T method of discipleship and evangelism in the context of evangelical Christianity in Croatia, some of the methods that T4T does are commendable. All of us as believers should aspire to see many people come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ here in Croatia and beyond. However, we should aspire that those who do not know Christ come to Him with the understanding that there is a cost to pay and that there are consequences to following and serving Jesus Christ (Luke 14:26-33). Croatian people who are presented with the gospel are often aware of the fact that it would cost them to follow Christ because of the stigma of Evangelical Christianity in Croatia.

I would conclude that it is not wise to implement the T4T discipleship training method in evangelical churches in Croatia under the current method of practice in T4T. However, if there is an extensive adaptation to the T4T discipleship training method addressing some of my concerns (certainly there are more), then I would consider changing that position. Considering the context of Croatia, any person who lived and served in this country in a missionary role (or any ministry position) for an extended period is aware that Christianity grows slowly, and it grows through relationships. Without extensive adaptation, T4T discipleship training in my opinion is not suitable for the Croatian context.

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Josip Debeljuh

Model učeništva T4T

Sažetak

U posljednjih su se nekoliko godina na kršćanskoj globalnoj sceni pojavili mnogi modeli učeništva. Među njima je jedan privukao pažnju teoloških fakulteta, misijskih organizacija i crkava, a to je model učeništva T4T (*Training for Trainers*). Model učeništva T4T dio je Pokreta za osnivanje crkava (*Church Planting Movements* – CPM) i Pokreta za stvaranje učenika (*Disciple Making Movements* – DMM). Ovaj članak pruža informacije o modelu učeništva T4T – što je, što postiže i kako se primjenjuje. Nadalje, članak propituje njegove prednosti i mane u pogledu upotrebe u hrvatskom kontekstu. Na kraju, članak zaključuje da model učeništva T4T nije prikladan za upotrebu u lokalnim crkvama u Hrvatskoj osim u slučaju da se naprave znatne preinake njegova učenja i prakse.

The Role and the (Lack of) Need for Silence in Worship

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Abstract

The author of this article explores whether there should be a space for silence in the worship of God in believers' lives, church services and the part of the service in which God is praised with songs. To carry out the study, the author compared worship services of two churches in Zagreb – the Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Rock of Salvation" and the Church of Christ (on Kušlanova Street). The author analyzed the presence and role of silence, considering the non-use of musical instruments in the Church of Christ and concluded that the "empty" space in the church service between individual smaller parts is used in various ways. The author presented different definitions of silence or quietness, which nowadays for many no longer means absolute silence, by putting in dialogue the interviews with the pastors of the mentioned churches – Ratko Medan and Mislav Ilić – and the reflections of theologians and experts in the field of Christian services. The same problem is also put against the backdrop of modern times that are both unfamiliar and uncomfortable with silence.

Keywords: *silence, church service, worship, praise, music*

Introduction

As a musician who was taught the importance of pauses and silence, and as an introvert for whom silence is indispensable, I began to notice that there is less

and less space for silence in the services of various Christian churches. The space of silence is mainly filled with background music or songs of celebration that do not end but flow from one to the other. This article, therefore, wants to examine whether music and church worship leaders have become the primary "stoppers" of silence. It also seeks to understand whether services and, thus, personal worship of believers have lost something due to the loss of natural silence. Finally, it attempts to answer whether silence should be purposefully returned to church services. To explore these questions, I will observe and compare two worship services of two churches in Zagreb – one of which uses instruments in celebration and the other not. I will also analyze semi-structured conversations regarding these matters with the pastors of these two churches – Pastor Ratko Medan of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Rock of Salvation" and Pastor Mislav Ilić of the Church of Christ on Kušlanova Street. Through this analysis, I hope to understand the relationship between music and silence and the role of silence as one of the methods of worship. By focusing on silence in the context of a church service as liturgy, we will disregard the congregations and movements that value silence in different worship contexts. By emphasizing the observations of Western churches in dialogue with voices of similar backgrounds, we will offer a small sample of the current state of silence in church services and the musical part of the service. Different congregations will be able to observe this in their contexts and liturgies and compare it with their own experiences. Additionally, they may contribute to their own more exhaustive research on this topic. Placing side by side a survey of the biblical theology of silence, the history of music and silence in liturgy, and the opinions of theologians and worship leaders on these topics, along with reflections of two Zagreb pastors, we will compare the conclusions about the definition, methods, and purpose of worship and silence, as well as the role that silence can play in church services.

1. Defining Silence

When learning an instrument, beginners are taught about pauses in music. Although making sound is more exciting, the mastery over those parts of a composition that contain long or short breaks is what indicates a future artist. Pauses or rests in music contain pulse that the performer must match with the listener. If the performer is nervous or insecure, he or she reveals it in the shortchanged rests. However, if the performer's pauses are correct and the listener's foot follows the same pulse with movement, then the listener becomes a silent interlocutor in the music. However, if the performer's skill is so great that he fully and fearlessly masters the breaks and the space of silence, and even expands them beyond the constraints of time, then he comes to a space where the listener is fully engaged and prepared to receive the intended message from the composer and performer.

During moments of silence and anticipation, there is a true, almost two-way connection between the musician and the listener.

Once one gets to know this power of silence as a cultural phenomenon (Beeman 2005, 23–34), which is necessary but not exclusive to music, which opens the senses and the possibility to hear and to be heard, the desire to find the space of such silence in other spheres of life becomes inevitable. However, while individuals naturally lean towards the need for such a quiet type of sound, which is one possible definition of silence (Beeman 2005, 23–34), the world is getting louder. From the Industrial Revolution to the present, the production of things that sound at specific frequencies has constantly increased. While typing these words, I can hear the sound of the keyboard hitting, the soft hum of the computer fan, the hum of the refrigerator, the sound of water in the pipes, and the sound of cars. However, it is necessary to say that in addition to all the mentioned sounds, there is also a simultaneous light background music from my computer speakers. According to many, the set of these sounds would fall in the category of peace and silence. Before we ask what silence is and whether silence and peace are synonymous, we must add that we live in a time that knows two terms: noise pollution and fear of silence.

Noise pollution is the excessive sound that negatively affects human health, wildlife, and the environment (Britannica, "Noise pollution"). Fear of silence is a modern-day phobia (Ferrucci 2015). In our daily life, we are always exposed to various types and levels of sounds, some technological, some natural. Natural sounds sometimes seem absent when immersed in an assortment of other sounds. Also, amidst all these sounds, there is always a constant background sound of music. According to the definition of noise pollution, excessively loud music can also be a pollutant. But it is the diagnosed fear of silence, or a learned need for background noise of television, radio, and music caused by growing up in an environment with constantly turned-on televisions or radios, because of which younger generations cannot tolerate silence (Fell 2012), that creates an atmosphere of noise pollution. Background music is ubiquitous in our daily lives, from cafes and restaurants to the sound emanating from the headphones of fellow train passengers, as well as portable speakers, workplaces, elevators, shops, and even in the silence of one's own home. Background music has become a method of creating a peaceful atmosphere, which is an interesting concept that Pastor Medan discusses several times in the conversation. He talks about his own personal attitude towards background music and how he sees it functioning in our culture (Interview with Ratko Medan).

Through this delineation, we are trying to highlight a paradox about the modern world and its relationship with sound and silence. Namely, despite the increasing noise levels around us, we also tend to raise the level of "loudness" of our silence, creating a construct of peace that is not truly silent. Hence, silence is not

necessarily synonymous with peace. Pastor Medan agrees with this and believes that some people might find silence to be synonymous with restlessness, providing the example of shock and alarm that arises when electricity goes out, eliminating the source of most of background noise (Interview with Ratko Medan). Both pastors, although having different attitudes towards silence, use similar expressions to describe how it makes some people uncomfortable during services (Interview with Ratko Medan, Interview with Mislav Ilić). Interestingly, the concept of peace and rest in the word *shalom* is not equivalent to silence in Tanakh. In fact, the integrity and general prosperity of man, along with the "rest" that comes after entering the Promised Land, which describes the idea of *shalom*, includes everyday activities and especially liturgical ones (MacCulloch 2013, 16).

Therefore, silence is not the absence of sound but a cultural phenomenon that is defined as a contrast to some other sound (Beeman 2005, 24). By this definition, each individual can have their own definition of silence as something that contributes to their personal peace. While the example of *shalom* can lead us to conclude that silence and peace were never synonymous, it is important to restate that the level of sounds and noise has changed significantly from the Old Testament enjoyment of *shalom*. Today, this peace, defined as silence, can represent music in earphones which is for someone else – noise. In a world full of other people's silences and noises, there are still some who seek to hear God's voice in the peace of their own silence, however loud it may be.

2. Defining Worship, Service and Praise

Listed terms represent only a fraction of terms used in the context of a Sunday service, singing of praise songs and life lived in the worship of God. This is confirmed by pastor Ilić (Interview with Mislav Ilić). The terms are so confusing that many books that deal with this subject start with a chapter dedicated to defining them. While the Croatian language has several practically synonymous terms, the English language uses "worship" to refer to everything from Sunday service to prayer, song praising, and a life fully dedicated to God. This can create confusion when it's unclear what is meant by the term, for instance, if one narrows worship to exclusively glorifying God with song (Kauflin 2008, 206). To define these terms and their connection to the space of silence we're exploring and its place in mentioned concepts, we'll review them through the biblical theology and several modern definitions. This is important for grasping the relationship between an individual's worship of God and the role of the church in this context.

Worship in the Old Testament included adoration of God as king. It was possible to express this through silence or simple gestures of sacrifice or thanksgiving, and it also included serving in obedience, faithfulness and humility, which manifested in one's whole life. Christ's life in the Gospels shows a godly life of a Jew

who actively participated in the religious life of the temple and the synagogues, but whose whole life was an example of "sacrificial service to God and his people," which he pointed out through symbols of bread and wine. Epistles emphasize that at the time of fellowship we simultaneously worship God with psalms, songs and hymns, that also serve for mutual correction and instruction, with the gospel and the strengthening of believers being a priority for those who worship. The Book of Revelation also highlights the importance of giving thanks and acknowledgment as a way of worshiping God. The Epistle to the Hebrews stresses the importance of mutual encouragement among Christians during meetings where they are focused on Christ's finished work and the hope of the world to come. To sum up this short overview, the worshippers are gathered into a" worshipping relationship" with the Risen One, and, through his work, Christ enabled a new relationship with the Father and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Using the biblical theology of worship, Peterson (1992, 73, 129–130, 188, 221, 279, 254, 258, 287) recognizes the symbiosis of individual and joint worship as an element of connection, i.e., mutual encouragement of believers gathered at a service to live in obedience in their everyday lives.

However, if we are looking at the period when temple sacrificial system was not possible due to there being no temple or the period when it was completed in Christ, the Bible does not describe worship as a specific program. This opens various possibilities for Christians. It also raises questions of limits to what is allowed in the context of a service but also in understanding the wider term of worship (Allan 1987, 63). Vineyard, one of the most influential churches of the 20th century in the area of music and ways of worship, defining worship as a way of realizing the relationship with God, to which God himself calls and commands us, and in which we willingly and lovingly acknowledge his authority and honor, separates the musical part of the service, calling it "worship," from the next part of the service which it calls "teaching" (Webber 3:1993, 81, 83). The Presbyterian Church organist, Dwight Steere (1960, 13), classifies worship in four levels: personal, family, informal group and public Church worship. Analyzing the word "worship," the professor of Christian Worship, James F. White (2000, 27, 29), defines worship as "valuing or honoring someone" and, giving an overview of New Testament terms related to worship, emphasizes the physical and sacrificial aspect of worship and wants to differentiate common worship which is most visible in the gathered church, from the equally important, individual godly activities.

The church that comes together on Sundays to worship God through various means such as listening to the preached Word, singing, reading the Scriptures, praying, taking the Lord's Supper, and sharing testimonies, listens to God's voice, learning how to continue their worship in their daily lives. These practices are common among both observed churches, as indicated by their pastors. Pastor Medan differentiates between the term "church service," that refers to an event

with a certain form, and the concept of worship as a broader concept of glorifying God with one's life. In the rest of this article, we will use the latter terminology. However, using the holistic approach in which God is worshipped, i.e., glorified with one's whole life, and which eliminates the dualistic approach to life in and outside the church, Medan points out that those two terms are interconnected in practice and that everything is worship (Interview with Ratko Medan). In the same holistic vein, Bob Kauflin (2008, 206–209), a long-time worship leader, emphasizes two types of worship: private and with the gathered church. He connects these two aspects into one and encourages us to continuously worship God with our entire lives. The change of the phrase "call to worship" to "continuation of worship" by worship leaders perfectly describes this connection. This is because the life of worshiping God begins with conversion and the first response to God's call.

In the context of the topic of this paper and the idea of silence and peace as a method of worship during services, but also in believers' lives, every modern church community implies a gathering of different people who come with established needs for certain decibels of noise they are comfortable with, at "peace" with, which is a prerequisite for them to enter a space where they can worship God in the company of others. Medan shows that he understands this when he describes the diversity of people and their methods of preparing for worship, their own ways of "calming down." Some prefer to sit, read in peace, close their eyes, sing softly, pray, or even draw (Interview with Ratko Medan). Therefore, these learned needs and definitions of peace vary from person to person and from pastor to pastor, as testified by pastors Medan and Ilić. Their personal attitudes towards the interdependence of silence and peace are also different. While Ilić says: "I love silence," Medan finds complete silence uncomfortable and prefers to have background music for achieving peace (Interview with Mislav Ilić, Interview with Ratko Medan). It is therefore necessary for everyone to define their own peace and silence in which they can communicate with God, observing how others achieve peace so that in communal worship everyone can achieve a common communication with God. In this honest self-analysis it is also essential to recognize the influence every person is exposed to, and which defines our understanding of peace. Failing to recognize this influence shows a lack of critical reflection about one's personal preferences. The influence might come from tradition or novel ideas, but it affects all of us, including Christian music composers (Steinberg 1992, 268), pastors, or even the most senior members of a community. Therefore, discussing the concept of silence, however individual it may be, is crucial during the Sunday service, as it is a common continuation of worshiping God, to whom all human life is dedicated.

3. Through Methods of Worship to the Purpose of Worship: Movement, Music and Silence

Throughout history, services have been changing – from the Tabernacle, the Temple, then synagogues, all the way to the first Christian communities. Defining Greek New Testament words used for worship, *proskyneo*, *leitourgeo*, *latreuo*, John Allan (1987, 66–67) suggests that purpose of worship is threefold: "*release* of the emotions, *recognition* with the mind, and *resolve* of the will in gearing itself for fresh acts of service." According to him, it is possible to reach these three purposes through the use of three worship methods: music, movement and silence. We will put aside the method of words and focus instead on these three methods that were historically used during services. We will encompass things ranging from singing of songs and hymns in early Christianity, the use of ritual movements in Catholic and Orthodox traditions and dance in black or Latin American denominations, to the use of silence in mystical traditions (Allan 1987, 66–67). Allan's idea of three methods gives us an opportunity to think about our own methods of worship and the reason why we emphasize certain methods. We will do this through a brief historical overview of their use.

The method of movement is related to the philosophy of the body. The Hebrew view of the body invites us to see that the body, as a "physical expression of personality in a physical universe," has its place in worship. It is "not a channel of sacredness" and, although movement can help in understanding, it is not a replacement for "rational appreciation of God." However, the Platonic philosophy and the view of the body as the "prison of the pure and valuable spirit" has left a lasting mark on the Christian view. It implies two attitudes toward worship: loathing of all things physical and a desire to free the spirit from the body (Allan 1987, 73–74). By calling music the art of the body because it invites movement, an instinct that is inhibited as we grow up, White (2000, 115–116) lists many examples of dancing as an inherent part of worship. Dance and movement were part of the Old Testament worship. However, in the early church, dancing was not part of worship, because it used to be associated with pagan religious rituals (Allan 1987, 74–75). In the 2nd century, Clement of Alexandria spoke about the use of hands and legs. 19th century Shakers made dance an important part of their services. African Christians introduced clapping and stomping which was until recently a part of the church service in American Protestant Churches. More frequently than dancing, we find numerous other examples of movements in various symbolic gestures used differently in different church communities, including kneeling and standing up, hugging, making the sign of the cross, raising of hands, gathering, offering, processions, raising of bread and wine, etc. (White 2000, 115–116). This presents a challenge for today's church, as movement and dance do not come naturally in

the Western culture, especially in the liturgical environment (Allan 1987, 74–75). When asked about movement as a method of worship, pastor Medan confirms this, saying that he sees small symbolic elements, such as raising of hands, raising of bread and wine as a part of the method of movement, but also shares that people do this unconsciously, without thinking (Interview with Ratko Medan). In a similar reflection, pastor Ilić acknowledged that movement can be an unconscious method of worship. However, he emphasized that music is a priority for his own, as well as for other communities, as a method of worship (Interview with Mislav Ilić).

Out of the three offered, both interviewed pastors highlighted the method of worship with music as the primary one in their church services. Although the topic of music in church services is wide and highly debated, in this work, we will briefly touch upon it in the context of its relationship with silence in services. Closely related to this is the constant theological debate about the relationship between secular and church music, which was equally influenced by new technologies and the appearance of new instruments. The early church sought to differentiate itself from pagan practices in music, just as it did with Judaism in its worship. This has resulted in ongoing dilemmas about church and secular music to this day (White 2000, 117). The organ serves as an essential example and proof of these theses, but also of further arguments. In antiquity, organs were used in gladiator games and significant social events and were the favorite instrument of Emperor Nero. It was not until the 11th century that they began to appear in churches (Steere 1960, 191).

The facts presented raise questions about how we approach new things and how much we stick to labeling tradition as sacred. Are our definitions of the quality and sacredness of certain music in history accurate? We often rely on age and historicity, or the so-called test of time, to determine the value of a work. However, at the time a piece of music was created, it may have been considered unacceptable according to the standards of sanctity or values of that time. For example, the organ was once deemed inappropriate in the church due to its association with pagan rituals but is now considered an unsurpassed sacred sound of the church. Similarly, Bach's "spiritual harmonies" are considered to stand above all secular music, even though the style of his secular works does not differ from that of his sacred works (Steere 1960, 191). Also, in the Middle Ages, the use of the augmented fourth was forbidden as a highly dissonant sound that belonged to the devil. Yet, this sound interval is commonly used today (Allan 1987, 72).

No matter where a discussion about excellence and the value and aesthetics of a work of art or instrument leads, and it can at least remind us that often a work of art or instrument was like a prophet, unwelcome in its time, the fact remains that the purpose of worship is not to teach art. Of course, this does not exclude the desire and aspiration to offer the best and highest quality in worshiping God.

In the 10th century, the organ entered the Western Church from the secular world, revolutionizing music by introducing new sounds, styles and concepts. Similarly, the electric keyboard in the 20th century opened up a whole new realm of sounds and styles (White 2000, 129). However, the specificity of the organ to hold the tone and to create a background atmosphere is not reserved only for modern times. Organs had this possibility long before the synthesizer, but they never used it in the way it is used today, when you press one chord on the synthesizer and hold it for a long time. Church music for the organ used pauses and the end of compositions and preludes as something akin to background music, to create an atmosphere of sublimity and reduce distractions within the church space during transitional parts of liturgy. However, Calvinists, for example, excluded the organ because it became a substitute for singing and deprived the congregation of words of worship and participation in the liturgy. Lutherans excluded the organ from some parts of the service for a time but restored the instrument for meditation and a sense of continuity within the service (Wilson-Dickson 1997, 432–436). We can therefore say that there is a fine line between the usefulness and distraction of music and musical instruments in worship and that it depends on the motivation of the musicians and church elders. Pastor Medan points out that he is against the manipulation of worship methods, especially music, since the whole church is responsible for worship, and not only leaders with manipulative capabilities (Interview with Ratko Medan). The motivation of those who lead the musical part of worship certainly plays an important role in the method of worshiping with music. Modern musical expression brings with it self-absorption, the desire for self-presentation, and superficial excitement, but it also encourages emotional depth (Allan 1987, 72), which is God's gift to man for communication that does not need words.

Therefore, without shutting out novel ideas that may one day become "classics," and by being aware that under the influence of the new culture of background music or noise, and Platonic philosophy of the body, we choose and emphasize methods of worship that we may have unconsciously chosen earlier, and by bringing awareness to the motivation of musicians, who may either enhance or detract from the overall purpose of worship, we can further explore the method of silence. The issue of distraction during worship, which the musical instrument can either cause or remedy, and the attempt to reduce it in order to achieve the purpose of worship, is not limited to musical instruments. This issue is closely related to what we will say about the method of silence in worship.

4. Silence as a Method of Worship

Silence as a form of worship poses a dilemma between the Old Testament principle of prayer that should always be audible and the questioning of its purpose if

the goal is only to create a "racket" and noise (Allan 1987, 67). The Old Testament shows a certain tension between silence and various forms of vocal expressions and their symbolic meaning. In the Tanakh, silence is connected with defeat in war as well as the defeat of death, since the dead, or those that go into silence, cannot glorify God. Although the Jews distinguished dumb idols from the One God, they still thought that God, as if he were a man with ears, should hear the prayers spoken. At the same time, there was mistrust towards those who engaged in silent prayers, since it could not be known what they were striving for and what they were looking for. This is evident in the reaction of the priest Eli to Anna's silent prayer (1 Sam 1:10-18). Thus, the directed noise of worshiping God is common in Israel (MacCulloch 2013, 13–14, 20).

God is the God who creates through speech, communicates with his people, appears with the noisy effects of thunder and fire and uses the voice of a mediator. When God is silent, the people are unhappy because they are deprived of God's presence (Ps 22). The silence in creation, from which the work of creation begins, is followed by the rest in silence of the seventh day, in the "sanctity of silence" (MacCulloch 2013, 17–21, 28). In the midst of the sounds of joy associated with God's presence and daily life activities like temple rituals and a relationship with God, there are special places of silence. The moment when a quiet silence can be heard, as described in the Hebrew original, in which God speaks to Elijah at Horeb in 1 Kings 19:11-13 carries a great significance. One of the most important places of silence and God's presence is the Holy of Holies, which is far enough away from the joyous courtyards where people sing, sacrifice, and celebrate. Apart from this obvious spiritual-physical space of silence, social conventions imply silence before the monarch, as seen in Psalm 37 ("Be still before the Lord"), while Psalm 19 also conveys the idea of "silent worship."

Various mystics have described the attitude and the purpose of silence in worship. Dionysius the Areopagite believed that spiritual growth is not achieved by knowing about God, but only by removing all knowledge of God in silence does "the bare communion of the soul with God" come. However, according to Allan (1987, 75–77), this type of spirituality is not available to every Christian and can be dangerous as it is similar to the mysticism of other religions. Western mystics considered silence to be an art equal to speech and stressed the importance of good measure in both cases. Ambrose of Milan also referred to the new concept of joint reading of the psalms as silence, in which everyone speaks and no one interrupts, and all distractions from the outside are abolished (MacCulloch 2013, 86, 92, 94). Speaking about the world, the Catholic theologian, Cardinal Robert Sarah, criticizes the world's incessant, fast and loud monologue that precludes the world from hearing God: "The noise is misleading, addictive, and a false tranquilizer" (Sarah and Diat 2017, 56).

The Reformation movement restored the Tanakh's attitude towards silence and, in its "era of words," kept speaking, producing, and explaining the Word. Protestants added to this noise by incorporating congregational worship in the form of music, although Zwingli also acknowledged that "true prayer is silent prayer." These emphases will vary in different theologies and churches (MacCulloch 2013, 129, 131–132). While pastor Medan mentions the possibility of using parts of the service after the sermon and before the Lord's supper as possible spaces for silence in his local church, he concludes that silence is not an integral part of the service (Interview with Ratko Medan). Pastor Ilić says that he did not notice silence in other Evangelical churches and, even in his church, which does not use musical instruments, a dedicated silence of a few minutes during the service is very rare (Interview with Mislav Ilić). It is interesting to observe how the pastor of a church without instrumental support, who is himself a lover of silence, recognizes that people often have a need to fill the silence with speech, songs or rustling sounds, and states that he would like to introduce spaces for deliberate silence. Pastor Medan, on the other hand, is not comfortable with absolute silence and believes that our culture is hostile to silence. He advocates for an atmosphere of silence that enables calm in the form of background music (Interview with Ratko Medan). The services of their churches, which I attended on two Sundays in May 2023, will reflect the honest descriptions of their characters and the character of their churches.

5. Two Services: EPC "Rock of Salvation" and the Church of Christ

In May 2023, I attended two Sunday services in Zagreb: one at the Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Rock of Salvation" and the other at the Church of Christ on Kušlanova Street. At the "Rock of Salvation", the service began at 10:30 a.m. with an opening song. This song was followed by another song with guitar accompaniment, which ended in an *a capella* form. The band included a female lead vocalist, a guitarist, a drummer, a bassist, a flautist, and three backing vocalists. After the *a capella* ending of the second song, the guitar continued gently as a musical background for prayer, followed by two cheerful songs. These songs were followed by pastor's prayer accompanied by a guitar. Then there was a reading from the Bible without musical accompaniment. However, towards the end of the reading the guitar gently became the basis for the prayer of the worship leader, which was followed by a song that people swayed to, raised their hands, and sang gently. Although the song ended, the guitar remained as the background, while the person leading the service prepared the church for Lord's Supper. The pastor took over this part of the service, with constant guitar strumming in the background. At 11 a.m., the church sang *Jesus Paid it All*, followed by background silence for

the duration of the prayers, the reading of the biblical text that will be preached, and a prayer for the preacher. The sermon began at 11:15 and ended at 11:53, immediately followed by the last song led by the band, which started preparing during the last sentences of the sermon. After the last song, there were announcements, followed by a short prayer accompanied by the guitar, and a final greeting and prayer. The recorded background music started playing at 12:03.

During the service, my thoughts were focused on the anticipation of spaces of silence and opportunities for inner contemplation in any part of the service. However, silence, in its literal sense of an intentional or unintentional activity by any member of the worship team or service leader, was not accomplished. During the service, the guitar played continuously, filling the gaps between songs and other parts of the service, except for the sermon and the actual celebration with songs. The service also included prayers, announcements, and the sermon itself, which were all part of the constant sound of songs, instruments, and speech. However, if someone were observing the service without focusing on waiting for silences, they could describe it as well-prepared and flowing smoothly from one part to another. In terms of sound, the decibel and dynamics meter would show that every dynamic was changed with a fine use of transitional dynamics of *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, giving the illusion of silence and a sense of peace in the quieter parts of the guitar, or in the microdynamics of the sermon.

As a classically trained musician, I appreciate the structure of compositions that have a clear beginning and end. However, in the Christian music world, it has become popular to perform a series of songs seamlessly without breaks, preferably in the same key. The musicians at the "Rock of Salvation" Church have executed this trend very well, creating a continuous music backdrop. However, this approach ignores the individuality of each composition as a standalone piece and also treats silence as hostile, because it does not use a single pause to anticipate the sound, since the sound does not subside. This *perpetuum mobile* of sound is particularly distracting to my introverted nature – I require moments of stillness to gather my thoughts and immerse myself in God's presence. My personal preferences obviously influence my observations, and further research would have to include a more significant number of respondents of different ages and professions to obtain a more accurate ratio of those who need silence, especially in the church, and those for whom the described service might even seem insufficiently loud and unconnected. However, before conducting this research, pastors and worship leaders should consider how valuable silence really is to their congregation. In the end, the goal of worship was accomplished, and the methods used – music, raising of hands, clapping and light dancing, and silence as the most peaceful parts of the service contrasted to the louder and more active parts, contributed to this. This unity was evident through the Church's prayer, song, and attentive listening to the Word of God, which gave glory to the Lord.

The following Sunday, I attended the Church of Christ's Sunday service located on Kušlanova Street in Zagreb. I was interested in this particular community because they do not use musical instruments during their services. I was curious to see the extent to which music, which is greatly influenced by the world in terms of technological innovations, the style and legality of composition, and the overall stage expression of musicians (Ingalls 2017, 10–12), is the main or perhaps the only method of worship that takes away silence. Since there were no instruments in the church, the organ, the keyboard, or strumming of guitar will not tirelessly maintain the background music, and the human voice, which is particularly valued in this church, is not capable of holding a single tone for 30 minutes without tiring.

The service began in relative silence, with only the light humming of the projector which would remain present throughout the service. After the introductory reading of the biblical text and prayer, three songs followed, with the pastor saying the number of the song in the hymnal. The leader, prepared in advance, started the song, and the rest of the congregation joined him. All voices could be heard; one could distinguish between young and old voices singing, and I even heard my own voice. After the last song, the congregation silently waited for the leader who led the prayer. Since there was no microphone, the congregation further stilled their movements and commotion so that they could hear the prayer. Prayer introduced the Lord's Supper. The first prayer was over the bread and was followed by song as the bread was shared and eaten. Then, there was a prayer for the wine, and the pattern was repeated. After the song ended, there was a two-minute silence while everyone waited for others to take and return the wine and for the servers to do everything related to that ministry. Then, the prayer began again, followed by reading the text as a preparation for the offering, which was done in silence, lasting two minutes. The sermon followed immediately after the offering. When the sermon was over, there was one last song, followed by announcements at the end of the service. This was immediately followed by socializing and conversation.

Although this service differed from the one at the "Rock of Salvation" by two distinct characteristics, namely the absence of constant background music and two two-minute silence breaks, my personal impression is that there is still a lot of room for dedicated, but also spontaneous silence. When a child is learning to play an instrument and make musical breaks, sometimes there is an impatience to endure the prescribed break for fear of being late or making a mistake on the next note. Similar to this, the service could also have had several spaces of natural silence with its own tempo and pulse, which were often interrupted prematurely by an impatient chant or prayer before the sustained beat of the break. Therefore, after observing this service, I believe that there is room for more dedicated silence, especially after the sermon, but, more importantly, that one does not need a musical instrument to disturb the silence. A person does this through impa-

tience generated by his desire for things to run smoothly. He does this through nervous movements, shuffling, and the fear of "idling" which is nowadays seen as a waste of time or a sign that some ideal of well-prepared program has not been accomplished. He interprets such spaces as unpleasant silences that need to be filled, as Pastor Ilić himself observed in our conversation (Interview with Mislav Ilić). However, it is precisely the desire to fill them that creates the effect of a conspicuous premature reaction, because of which everything falls out of rhythm and becomes nervous. The nervousness accompanied by sound breaks the silence, and more importantly, the sense of peace necessary to accomplish the purpose of worship.

The surprising conclusion that came from observing these two services is that music is an effective and easy tool to break the silence, but not the only one. The conclusion is also that music can be a form of silence to some extent, especially when a wide dynamic range of sound is allowed in which the quietest sounds can be defined as an atmosphere of silence, a position advocated by pastor Medan (Interview with Ratko Medan), but also that the interruption of real silence in the form of speaking, walking, rustling, singing prematurely in the context of unsustained pauses is therefore easier to notice because it happens in an atmosphere where everything can be heard.

We must therefore ask what the purpose and role of silence, or the atmosphere of silence in the context of a church service, actually is. Is it really necessary for individuals to step away from sound in order to engage in personal contemplation with God during worship (Sarah and Diat 2017, 21–22)? Is silence, or the smallest amount of sound, something that is needed by everyone or just a minority? Or have the needs of people changed, as both pastors suggest, so that an atmosphere of silence created by background music, especially in hiding other distractions such as rustling, traffic, whispering or yawning, is a better way to facilitate personal conversation with God? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must ask a question that cannot be answered here, due to the need of approaching it from disciplines of psychology and sociology, namely, is it even necessary to fulfill people's needs – that which they consider to be comfortable and necessary?

6. Silence and Worship through Music, Silence and Service, Silence and Worship

Building on the idea that a service is a Sunday gathering of the church that worships and glorifies God together, among other things, with song, while worship continues beyond the service in the individual lives of church members, we can observe the method of silence with the purpose of calming down and preparing for communication with God in three aspects: in glorifying God with song, in the entire event of a church service and in the worship life of believers.

First, we want to consider silence in relation to its greatest partner, and nowadays its rival, music. Parts of worship in which music is the main method of worshiping or glorifying God with song are spaces of prayer, or communication with God, and are often defined as praise. The question of silence in the church is always closely related to music, because music is defined both as that which breaks the silence, and that which eventually enables it. These two concepts are hard to separate because music permeates church services and it is not necessarily contained in just one part of the service. The two church services I observed have most of their songs at the beginning of the service, although worshipful singing will also be present during the Lord's Supper, during giving, and after the sermon.

By having the first part of the service where several songs are played alternately with prayer and reading of biblical passages, the local Church of Christ offers an example of a natural silence after each song, allowing for a brief pause and a space for silent prayer. Although this break is not a dedicated period of silence, it is natural – it is part of the music because it respects the laws of musical composition, allowing for a rest period between compositions, and taking into account the tonality, character and message of each piece of music. This is how services were conducted in many churches and many services until the 20th century. In contrast, modern concepts of worship have several songs collected and played in one or a related key, often without an ending, in order to create one long expression, one long song. Such uninterrupted sound of the "prolonged" song does not allow for the possibility to think about the song as one exegetical entity, as the author intended, which has a beginning, middle, and end, and which requires some space for reflection after it ends.

The concept of silence in church services can have different meanings and effects. Peterson (1992, 160) points to the slippery terrain of silence being welcome but also seen as a distraction: "Formality may be the expression of a very narrow and inadequate view of worship and informality may be an excuse for lack of preparation or any serious attempt to engage collectively with God." On one hand, we are so used to smooth services that any part which is seemingly empty produces discomfort. This can put pressure on leaders to try to turn the service into a play, but such fears combined with the desire for excellence can also distract both active and passive participants from the true purpose of worship. Preparation for the service is the responsibility of the pastors, but also of the church. What is essential is the spiritual preparation and awareness that God is the one who "evaluates" our worship because it is directed at him. It is important to prepare and try to achieve excellence, but ultimately God does not need our excellence because it does not increase him at all while it can lead to pride and concern about the form, neglecting the content (Hayford, Killinger and Stevenson 1990, 18–19, 37). The technical preparation of those who lead is important, but the spiritual preparation of all present is even more important. This is because if

everyone is spiritually prepared, technical difficulties and apparent problems will not disturb the spiritual peace of those who lead worship. It is a circular problem that shows that every person in the community is equally responsible for creating an experience of worship in fellowship that pleases God, as pastor Medan teaches his church (Interview with Ratko Medan).

Ruminating on how to use music to enhance the moment of the offering of bread and wine and on the idea that there is no such thing as absolute silence, since there is always noise and distractions from the outside, the church organist, Steere (1960, 194), says that the organist can create "a fine fabric of organized sound" to counteract the noise and distractions from outside. Thus, the organ can offer the atmosphere of silence which can prepare for the sanctity of the moment. This is the common approach of most churches that have instruments. Steere sees the organ as the smooth link between different parts of the service, which removes distractions and offers a good preparation for the beginning of the service itself, and idea contemplated by pastor Medan as well (Interview with Ratko Medan). However, Steere also believes that the organ should not "speak" for the faithful, and that there should be space for "silent" personal prayer. He argues that playing music during quiet personal prayer can be distracting for some people, and that personal prayer should be free from any distractions. This is because some people cannot help but listen to music, and a melody can distract them from their prayers instead of allowing them to find peace.

Spaces of silence during church services, as we saw in the example of the Church of Christ, can be filled with non-musical sounds, words, prayers, and announcements and deliberately narrowed to avoid causing discomfort and the feeling of an unprepared service (Hayford, Killinger and Stevenson 1990, 60–61). However, the silence that has its space in church services and is jointly disciplined through Christocentric meditation, thoughts on his word and deeds, reflection on repentance, or the lesson presented is also purposeful and leads to worship (White 2000, 116). It is beneficial because it eliminates external stimuli and turns a passive worshiper into an active worshiper, brings worshipers closer to a deeper communion, who in silence become more aware of each other, and changes the direction of worship because by removing the "noise," one listens more carefully to the Holy Spirit and his guidance (Allan 1987, 75–77). A memorable Sunday service is one in which all parts of the service: prayers, songs, readings, prayers, sermons, and the Lord's Supper, point to the overall experience of the whole of that service (Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson 1990, 23). And Pastor Medan would add "to the entire Christian experience" because worship does not stop with leaving the space where the service took place (Interview with Ratko Medan).

In the broadest context of whole-life worship, we can implement the intimacy with God that we experience during a church service into our everyday lives. This is the third role of silence. Whether that everyday life will include the

search for spaces of solitude and silence to achieve communication with the Creator or whether there will be no need for that kind of isolation, will depend on the character of the individual but also on the example of the church community to which the individual belongs. Extracting from a series of thoughts of the Catholic priest Sarah about ways to encounter God, silence is emphasized as a necessity for such an encounter. Sarah (2017, 21–24, 27) believes that God's voice is silent and that "we encounter God only in the eternal silence in which he abides." He also believes that God Himself is silence and that this "divine silence dwells in man." By becoming silent ourselves, we can discover God through His silence "inscribed in the center of our being." Stating that no prophet met God without withdrawing into solitude and silence, he continues that it is not enough for man to be silent, but "[i]t is necessary to become silence." While solitude is the best place to listen to God's silence, the silence that reveals God resides within us and we can remain silent even in the midst of the noise that separates us from the transcendent dimension. "Silence is not an absence" but is a manifestation of the most intense presence. Sarah adds to this the thoughts of Benedict XVI who says that our society seems to need to fill every moment with "projects, activities and noise," making it difficult for us to listen. Therefore, he encourages us to not be afraid "to create silence, within and outside ourselves," to become aware of God's voice and the voices of those around us.

Conclusion

So, should the language of a church service be understandable to the modern world? Should it speak in the language of constant sound, movement, and noise, such as the hum of a computer or background music? Should the church recognize that today's world does not theoretically or practically define silence and peace as the absence of sound and maybe endeavor to create an atmosphere of peace with background sounds and constant movement to make worship more "pleasant" to the modern person? Or is the task of the church to educate and confront people with the forgotten and, for some, uncomfortable aspect of silence, and offer it to the person who cannot, or does not want, to escape from the daily noise of everyday life? Is there a place for "pockets of silence" and pauses in church services, and if so, how can they be implemented in the service liturgy? These are questions raised in this work, and here are some suggestions for addressing them.

Every church and pastor faces unique challenges and specific calling to serve in a certain way to certain groups of people. This diversity is the strength of Protestant churches, as pastor Medan concludes (Interview with Ratko Medan). The challenges his vision for the "Rock of Salvation" as a city church with open doors for everyone contains include achieving a fine balance "between warmth and seriousness, distance and closeness." The urban pastor Medan, along with his elders

and worship leaders, aims to create a city church open to everyone and an atmosphere in which our culture can thrive. Both pastors recognize this need to sustain an atmosphere of peace, with background music and a variety of transitional dynamics, including moments of silence as a good base that will allow for deep communion with God and the community. The goal is for the worship through song to transition into the worship of listening to the Word as the center of the church service. This will nourish and encourage the church, helping believers to continue worshipping God daily until they gather again for communal worship, whether over coffee, at the next Sunday meeting, or as the background music of the new service begins, ushering in a fresh nourishment of the Word.That church, in a more modern expression of our culture, will speak the language of a man accustomed to sound. And perhaps it will at times remember that there are introverts in the church who long for silence in communication with God and the church.

The challenges pastor Ilić is facing include preservation of the archeological artefact of silence – fragile and exposed to the elements that demand it to change, grow stronger, louder and more like the surrounding modern buildings in order to survive the culture of incessant noise. In the Church of Christ, we can learn to hear not only our own and other people's voices in song, but also our own and other people's silence, in which God speaks to us, without requiring many words. But if that church succumbs to the relentless challenges of modern daily noise, it will be loss not only for the members of that community, but for all of us. Communion with God and people in silence will only remain as a memory of this generation, as it will fade away into oblivion.

I believe that the very existence of this wealth of diverse church services can provide answers to questions raised in this article. One community will emphasize the modern language of culture, and the other will retain the language of the past. One will drown out the noise of the world with worship, with its drums and cymbals and voices, and the other will silently enter transcendent spaces where it will listen to God's voice. One will raise their worship to the heavens and join their voices with the heavenly church, and the other will tear down the transcendent wall that separates us from God's voice and enjoy him together with the heavenly church.

Perhaps some other community will look for balance in its methods, and inspired by the saints in the "Rock of Salvation" and the Church of Christ, accompany their instruments in praising God with not only a "new song" but also "new silence" as a creative response that God asks from us in a church service (Allan 1987, 63, 65). The idea of "new silence" in a church will have steps similar to those of a musician. At first, a novice on an instrument rushes through pauses, loses rhythm, and shows nervousness and impatience by shortening the pauses. However, with time and practice, the musician begins to master the sense of pulse and

time, eventually reaching a state of enjoying the silence of the pause, extending the time and creating a space for unique contact between musicians and listeners in an atmosphere of rapt attention. And, as any musician quickly learns, after much tireless practice, the church will master a new method of worship: dedicated silence – for all the introverts of this world, or at least those who speak the language of silence.

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Judita Paljević-Kraljik

Uloga i (ne)potrebnost za tišinom u štovanju

Sažetak

U ovom radu autorica je istražila postoji li i treba li postojati prostor tišine u štovanju Boga u vjerničkom životu, u crkvenom bogoslužju i u dijelu službe u kojemu se slavi Boga pjesmama. Usporedbom dvaju posjećenih bogoslužja dviju zagrebačkih crkava, Evanđeoske pentekostne crkve Stijena spasenja i Kristove Crkve (Kušlanova) te analizom zastupljenosti i uloge tišine, s obzirom na nekorištenje glazbenih instrumenata u Kristovoj Crkvi, zaključeno je da se „prazan" prostor u bogoslužju između pojedinih manjih dijelova bogoslužja upotrebljava na razne načine. Stavljanjem u dijalog intervjue s pastorima spomenutih crkava, Ratkom Medanom i Mislavom Ilićem, i promišljanja teologa i stručnjaka na području kršćanskog bogoštovlja, iznesene su različite definicije tišine, odnosno mira, koji u današnje vrijeme kod mnogih više ne podrazumijeva apsolutnu tišinu. Također je isti problem stavljen u kontekst modernog vremena koje ne poznaje tišinu i kojemu je tišina nelagodna.

Christians Facing the Challenges of Artificial Intelligence

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Essay

Abstract

The development of artificial intelligence technology is, on the one hand, the fulfillment of God's task given to humanity (Genesis 1 and 2), and on the other hand, in humans' desire to be like God, it is a rebellion against God (Genesis 3:5). Therefore, Christians face numerous challenges in their relationship with artificial intelligence systems. These challenges can be categorized into two fundamental groups. The first group includes challenges where Christians have and will have the choice of responsible use of AI systems, while the second group consists of AI systems controlled by powerful corporations or by AI systems themselves. The text provides a brief introduction and overview of the levels of artificial intelligence development (ANI, AGI, and ASI) and the relationship of Christians towards them. The central part of the discussion is dedicated to the spiritual evaluation of AI systems and tools, especially those that have spiritual consequences in their application. The process of comprehensive spiritual evaluation must be rooted in the Word of God and guided by the Holy Spirit, and the quality of the spiritual evaluation of AI systems for Christians will come as a result of their daily relationship with God. Regarding artificial intelligence, the most important task of the church today and tomorrow is to train and educate believers in AI literacy and biblical-spiritual literacy so that they can independently and effectively make decisions in all situations involving the use of AI systems, machines, and applications. The final section of this article brings an evaluation of the development and application of AI concerning goals that oppose God, such as creating eternal life and god-like machines.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, ANI, AGI, ASI, goals in AI development, Christians and AI, evaluation of AI*

Introduction

Artificial intelligence technologies have been significantly advancing since the mid-twentieth century, and their applications are becoming increasingly prevalent in everyday life in the twenty-first century. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming humanity faster and deeper than any technology before. The average reader and consumer of AI technologies may feel overwhelmed just by listing the systems, applications, and machines powered by artificial intelligence. We encounter them daily in various areas of human life from smartwatches, mobile phones, cars, homes, and cities to powerful robots, drones, and supercomputers controlled by artificial intelligence. Facing the applications of artificial intelligence in everyday life and the announcements of its future development and application challenges Christians to constantly evaluate everything in the light of God's word.

Based on this, the first part of the article provides a brief introduction and overview of the levels of development in artificial intelligence (ANI, AGI, and ASI) and the relationship Christians have with them. The second and central part of the discussion is dedicated to the spiritual evaluation of AI systems and tools, especially those that, in their application, have and cause negative spiritual consequences. The process of comprehensive spiritual evaluation must be rooted in the Word of God and guided by the Holy Spirit, and the quality of the spiritual evaluation of AI systems for Christians will come as a result of their daily relationship with God. Regarding artificial intelligence, the most important task of the church today and tomorrow is to train and educate believers in AI literacy and biblical-spiritual literacy so that they can independently and effectively make decisions in all situations involving the use of AI systems, machines, and applications. In the third part of the article, an assessment is made regarding the development and application of AI concerning goals that oppose God, such as the creation of eternal life and god-like machines.

1. Overview of Levels in the Development of AI

The editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2023) defined artificial intelligence as "the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings." Microsoft's AI tool Copilot also refers to this definition: "Artificial intelligence (AI), often abbreviated as AI, refers to the ability of computers or computer-controlled robots to perform tasks that are typically associated with intelligent beings. This term is often applied to the development of systems that have the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from past experiences." The development of computer systems that can think, reason, and learn based on data and experiences can be tracked at three levels: narrow artificial intelligence, general artificial intelligence, and arti-

ficial superintelligence. ChatGPT refers to them as levels of artificial intelligence with varying degrees of complexity and scope of capabilities.

Artificial Narrow Intelligence **(ANI)** represents systems we are familiar with today, which are specialized in solving one or a few problems within the same domain and can perform individual, automated, and repetitive tasks. It is used in numerous areas, such as internet searching, online shopping and advertising, digital personal assistants, machine translation, smart homes, cities, and infrastructure, security features in cars, autonomous vehicles, navigation, cybersecurity, as well as healthcare, transportation, manufacturing, agriculture, and public administration. Particularly popular is generative artificial intelligence, which deals with creating various content such as images, music, text, and videos. An extended list of ANI applications can be generated on ChatGPT, which, when asked, "What are the application areas of ANI?", listed ten areas with specific applications in each of them. The actual list of application areas of artificial intelligence systems includes numerous known and unknown aspects of human life and activities. Only the areas with positive public perception, such as those mentioned, are commonly highlighted publicly, while the development and application of AI systems in some areas, especially in the military industry, biotechnological, and space research, are skillfully concealed. ANI is currently the only type of artificial intelligence we know of that exists in public use today (ChatGPT).

Much has been written and debated about the negative aspects of AI systems and tools, and questions about their negative impact on humanity and interpersonal relationships will continue to be asked and discussed for a long time. I posed a question to ChatGPT about the negative aspects of AI, and I received the following response: "Artificial intelligence has its potential negative applications that can raise concerns. Some of the problems and challenges include: privacy, security risks, discrimination, job loss, misuse of artificial intelligence, ethical challenges, technology dependence, and lack of transparency." It was added that: "It is important to note that many of these negative aspects can be mitigated or avoided through careful design, ethical programming, transparency, and responsible use of artificial intelligence. It is also crucial to work on establishing regulations and guidelines that will ensure responsible use of this technology."

The regulation and direction of the development of artificial intelligence have been partially taken over by the European Union through an agreement among its member states in February 2024 to adopt the Artificial Intelligence Act,[1] which still needs formal approval from the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.[2] Once the Artificial Intelligence Act is confirmed, it will serve as European

1 EU Artificial Intelligence Act (https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/ (accessed on February 14, 2024).

2 This article was written and submitted to the publisher before the completion of the process of confirming the Act in the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

legislation on artificial intelligence and thus will become the first law on artificial intelligence. The applications of artificial intelligence technologies and systems in the Act are categorized into three risk categories: first, systems and applications that create unacceptable risks are prohibited; second, high-risk systems and applications will be regulated in more detail; third, other applications that are not explicitly prohibited or listed as high-risk are mostly unregulated.

Artificial General Intelligence **(AGI)** is the ability of an intelligent system to understand or learn any intellectual task that a human being can understand. The goal of general artificial intelligence is to create systems that would be able to understand the world like any other human being and provide solutions to the problems they face. The goal is to create humanoid machines (robots) that would become capable of self-control, self-adjustment, and self-understanding. These machines would be wiser and more intelligent than humans and proactive and interactive like humans. Therefore, the development of artificial wisdom intelligence (AWI) is rapidly progressing.

Transhumanist, inventor, and futurist Ray Kurzweil predicted in his book *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005) that within a few decades, information-based technologies will encompass all human knowledge and skills, ultimately including pattern recognition powers, skills solving problems and the emotional and moral intelligence of the human brain itself. To the question "What is a singularity?" Kurzweil (2005, 7) answered:

> What, then, is the Singularity? It's a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself. Understanding the Singularity will alter our perspective on the significance of our past and the ramifications for our future. To truly understand it inherently changes one's view of life in general and one's own particular life.

According to transhumanists, the time of singularity is very close, and the development of AI systems that will surpass human intelligence to such an extent that many will consider it akin to a "god" is rapidly progressing far from the public eye. Kurzweil predicted that singularity would occur around the year 2045. Other scientists differ in their predictions as to when this will happen. Research by artificial intelligence experts published in 2016 showed (Ng 2020) that there is a 90 percent chance of achieving Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) by the year 2075. However, Zack Kass, one of the creators of ChatGPT, has shortened that timeframe and claimed that scientists will create AGI by the year 2030.[3]

3 That information was shared in February 2024 at the "Visionary of the Year" conference in Zagreb. See more in the article: Jedan od tvoraca ChatGPT-ja: "Čeka nas najuzbudljivije razdoblje u povijesti čovječanstva. AGI ćemo stvoriti do 2030." https://www.tportal.hr/tehno/clanak/

What do the development and application of general artificial intelligence technologies bring us? Answering this question with certainty is very difficult. Experts, including transhumanists and futurists, indicate some key applications of AGI technologies. For example, Ray Kurzweil sees the convergence of humans and machines as an inevitability that will bring significant benefits. In an article for the *Encyclopedia Britannica Anniversary Edition: 250 Years of Excellence,* he wrote (2018): "…we will ultimately merge with our machines, live indefinitely, and be a billion times more intelligent…all within the next three to four decades." According to this prediction and the state of artificial intelligence development, we could soon experience both voluntary and involuntary implantation of brain chips into every human, enabling individuals to be directly and continuously connected to powerful computer systems. Here is an example of this prediction.

The news about the implantation of an experimental brain chip in the first human made a strong impact on the world media at the beginning of 2024.[4] Neuralink, a company owned by billionaire Elon Musk, announced that they used a robot to surgically implant brain-computer interface (BCI) implants in the region of the brain that controls movement intention. The initial goal of the implanted interface is to enable people to control a cursor or keyboard on a computer using only their thoughts. This initial goal of assisting patients in overcoming paralysis and a range of neurological conditions is very noble and serves as a successful means to achieve the ultimate goal. Under the pretext of connecting the human brain to help address complex neurological conditions, Musk's Neuralink, along with many other startups, is strongly advancing towards the implantation of brain-computer interfaces (BCI) into every human brain and connecting them to powerful AI machine systems. It is important to note that in the current stage, the brain-computer interface is assisting people in need, but very soon, it will serve the purpose of manipulating human lives. This will lead to the creation and organization of a powerful "organization" or "agency," as Bostrom (2006, 53) called it, which will accomplish the task of controlling, fixing, and directing humanity.

Artificial Super Intelligence **(ASI)** is the third level of AI development. It is considered a logical progression and continuation of AGI, with the prediction that it will surpass all human capabilities. Powerful corporations are striving to create a superintelligent computer that learns and develops autonomously (self-aware computer), understands its environment without the need for supervision, and can control, guide, and transform the world around it. Research and development of superintelligent computer systems are accelerating rapidly every day and moving in numerous directions, mostly according to the desires and goals

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4 Here I am using a report from Reuters: Elon Musk's Neuralink implants brain chip in first human. https://www.reuters.com/technology/neuralink-implants-brain-chip-first-human-musk-says-2024-01-29/.

of wealthy individuals and powerful corporations. Among the myriad of goals, most of which serve the benefit of humanity, I highlight two goals that currently appear to be the greatest threat to humanity. Their "working" names are *singleton* and *god-like AI*.

Some scientists believe that artificial superintelligence could be like a monolithic, super intelligent machine called a "singleton" a single decision-making agency at the highest level, so powerful that no other entity could threaten its existence (Bostrom 2006, 53). The development of AI technologies and systems contributes to and facilitates the creation of a singleton that will employ improved surveillance (including reliable lie detection), mind-control technologies, and communication technologies (Bostrom 2006, 53). Hence:

> A singleton is a plausible outcome of many scenarios in which a single agency obtains a decisive lead through a technological breakthrough in artificial intelligence or molecular nanotechnology. An agency that had obtained such a lead could use its technological superiority to prevent other agencies from catching up, especially in technological areas essential for its security (Bostrom 2006, 54).

The term "god-like AI" is increasingly mentioned as a goal in AI development. Research by artificial intelligence experts published in 2016 showed (Ng 2020) that there is a 75 percent chance of achieving artificial superintelligence (ASI) by the year 2105. However, the leaders of OpenAI announced recommendations for managing artificial superintelligence in 2023, which they believe could be achieved in less than 10 years (Altman, Brockman, and Sutskever 2023). The ongoing development of AI technologies, systems, and applications has not only provided a range of everyday life applications but also enabled the development and creation of superintelligent systems according to the desires of powerful individuals and corporations. In response to the question of what kind of superintelligence we want, Winyard (2016, 203) answers: "That, of course, depends on who answers the question: So far, AI research has produced skilled game players, but hedonists want sex toys; Kurzweil[5] wants a super-inventive genius; Bostrom[6,] a

5 Ray Kurzweil is one of the leading global transhumanists, futurists, and inventors. He is a co-founder and Chancellor of Singularity University and the Director of Engineering at Google, where he leads a team focused on machine intelligence and natural language understanding. Kurzweil is best known as the principal inventor of the CCD flatbed scanner, optical character recognition of multiple fonts, speech-to-text reading machine for the blind, text-to-speech synthesizer, and a range of other inventions. He has received numerous awards and recognitions for his outstanding contributions to technology. His most influential books include *The Singularity Is Near* (2005) and *How to Create a Mind* (2012). More about him can be found at https://www.kurzweiltech.com/aboutray.html.

6 Nick Bostrom is a Swedish philosopher and polymath with expertise in theoretical physics, computational neuroscience, logic, philosophy, and artificial intelligence. He works as a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Oxford. He is the founding director of the

likeminded philosopher; Waser[7], a cooperative collaborator; Benek[8], a Christian; and, of course, Rothblatt[9] wants to build god."

This brief overview of the levels of artificial intelligence development will be rounded off with a summary generated by ChatGPT:

> ANI represents specialized artificial intelligence for specific tasks, AGI denotes general intelligence with human-like abilities, while ASI is a hypothetical superior intelligence that could surpass the best human minds in all areas. It is important to note that we are currently in the ANI phase, while AGI and ASI are still theoretical concepts that pose challenges and questions for the future development of artificial intelligence.

2. Christians' Relationship to Artificial Intelligence Technologies

Christians constantly encounter AI systems and tools, and it is nearly impossible to avoid them. Some of these systems and tools are highly useful and improve our lives, while others are created for entertainment and pleasure. Yet others are designed for gathering and distributing information for various known and unknown purposes. This confronts Christians with a multitude of challenges in their relationship with artificial intelligence, ranging from God's blessings to direct rebellion against God. I have divided these challenges into two fundamental groups. In the first group are the AI challenges where we have and will have the choice of responsible usage. The majority of today's AI systems and applications fall into this group. We have the choice of whether to use a smart medical or sports watch powered by artificial intelligence. We have the choice of using generative AI. We have multiple choices in whether to use the internet and everything it offers when combined with AI tools. We have the choice to experience both the positive and negative consequences of using AI tools. The second group of challenges includes AI systems and machines that will be [ir]responsibly controlled

multidisciplinary research center Future of Humanity Institute, which enables a select group of exceptional mathematicians, philosophers, and scientists to carefully consider global priorities and major questions for humanity. More about him can be found at: https://nickbostrom.com/#bio.

7 Mark Waser is the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) at the Government Blockchain Association.

8 Pastor Christopher J. Benek describes himself as a global expert in technology and theology, internationally recognized for his social and religious analyses and commentaries. He is known as a techno-theologian, futurist, ethicist, Christian transhumanist, public speaker, writer, and tech pastor. He is the co-founder and president of the Christian Transhumanist Association. He is regarded as the first self-identified ordained Christian transhumanist in the world. (Source: https://www.christopherbenek.com/about/).

9 Martine Aliana Rothblatt is an American lawyer, author, entrepreneur, and advocate for transgender rights. More about her can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martine_Rothblatt.

by powerful corporations or AI systems themselves. Solutions to these challenges we will have to leave to God because the rebellion of artificial intelligence against God will go so far that there will be no human solution, only God's solution.

In the development and application of artificial intelligence technologies, there are and will be countless dangers. Like any technology, artificial intelligence can be used for both good and evil. A minority gathered around leading tech giants believes that the use of artificial intelligence technologies will significantly improve the quality of life, emphasizing the benefits of using known AI technologies in everyday life. On the other hand, there is a large group of scientists and intellectuals who see a huge danger in the use and abuse of AI, with the likely possibility that intelligent machines will take control of humans in the near future.[10] However, most people often do not think about the negative impacts of AI technologies, but they do notice and comment on such consequences. A banal but very instructive example is the use of smartphones, which help in everyday communication and finding information that interests people, while at the same time constantly directing them not to think about anything and rely on AI for everything. This process of using smartphones leads to dependence on AI, acceptance of control and manipulation by those who manage AI systems, and ultimately, the conscious subordination of humans to AI systems. Alongside the positive impacts on society, there are also noticeable negative impacts that steadily and daily lead people into social isolation.

2.1. Utilizing AI Systems and Applications in Christian Ministry

Regarding the question of whether Christians can and should use AI in Christian ministry, the apostle Paul provided an answer long ago: "'I have the right to do anything', you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is constructive" (1 Cor 10:23). Christians should filter their response to this question through two lenses of Scripture: the filter of *spiritual usefulness* and the filter of *spiritual edification.* Christians can use artificial intelligence, and many do. However, whether and to what extent Christians will use AI tools depends on their beliefs and values, especially on the quality of their relationship with God.

Many Christians are enthusiastic about certain AI applications and use them to spread the gospel. For example, an AI-powered *chatbot* can answer questions

10 This is supported in the short statement in the "Statement on AI Risk": "Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war." It was signed by more than seven hundred AI experts and public figures, including Bill Gates (Gates Ventures), Sam Altman (CEO of OpenAI), Ilya Sutskever (Co-Founder and Lead Scientist of OpenAI) and Shane Legg (Lead Scientist for general artificial intelligence – AGI and co-founder of Google DeepMind). The statement was published in 2023 by the Center for AI Safety (https://www.safe.ai/statement-on-ai-risk).

about Christianity, find biblical references, and prepare teachings and sermons. Artificial intelligence can find, analyze, group, and present information from the Bible, but it cannot inspire a message without which every teaching and sermon is rendered ineffective. Preaching is God's word addressed to people through the Holy Spirit. AI does not have a personal relationship with God or spiritual understanding, so it cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit or replace the inspiration that comes from God.

Tools of ANI are increasingly being used in the field of biblical studies and theology, as well as in church administration and pastoral work. Their usage is multifaceted. They assist in translating Bible text from the original languages, finding passages in the Bible, and analyzing them, facilitating the identification of key themes. Here we encounter the issue of training artificial intelligence tools. Namely, the question is on which templates the artificial intelligence trained. The results greatly depend on the templates/texts used to train and shape AI systems. For example, an AI system trained in the translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses Bible likely does not provide the same answers to specific questions as the translation of the NIV Bible. An AI system trained on the Bible and various religious texts may provide biblically accurate answers, but there is a higher likelihood that it will draw information from all texts and provide a "religiously correct" answer that is likely to be biblically incorrect.

AI systems can analyze users' spiritual preferences and provide personalized recommendations for further reading or study. In this area, the user of an AI system can easily fall into the trap of "personalized advertising," where the AI system often offers similar texts to those the user has shown interest in. In such cases, AI can take on the role of the Holy Spirit in studying the Bible and in the relationship with the triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Artificial intelligence offers the user what they "want to hear, see, and read" in the Holy Scriptures, rather than what the Holy Spirit personally wants to convey and communicate to them through the Scriptures.

AI systems can be excellently used for discipleship, biblical study, and educating believers in the church. As believers have increasingly less time available weekly to attend church for Bible study and prayer, *chatbots* and virtual assistants based on AI can provide believers with answers to many questions important for understanding the Bible and spiritual growth in faith. In that case, the time of community gatherings of believers can be focused on serving God and one another, as well as fellowship.

Answers, pieces of advice, and information provided to Christians by artificial intelligence depend on the data and how the machine is programmed, as well as the worldview biases of the AI creators. Artificial intelligence can provide accurate biblical information as well as incorrect information that leads to heresy. Therefore, Christians should verify the information and solutions provided by

AI through multiple sources. Christians can use AI for studying and interpreting the Bible, but AI tools cannot replace their relationship with God. Artificial intelligence lacks spiritual understanding, and the Bible should always be read and interpreted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2.2. Spiritual Assessment of AI

We are faced with the application of artificial intelligence technologies daily, and whether we want that or not, we will increasingly encounter and use them (consciously or unconsciously). In doing so, we assess this technology based on various criteria such as attractiveness, usefulness, popularity, price, etc. For every technology, including AI systems and tools, their creators and vendors highlight the facts that suit them, while skillfully concealing and downplaying those that do not contribute to their financial gain. Christians should evaluate every AI tool based on various parameters, especially those AI systems and tools that have spiritual implications in their application. This requires comprehensive spiritual discernment rooted in the Word of God and guided by the Holy Spirit. The quality of spiritual discernment of AI systems, machines, and applications will be ensured to Christians through their daily relationship with God. Considering artificial intelligence, the most important task of the church today and tomorrow is to train and educate believers in AI literacy and biblical-spiritual literacy so that they can independently and effectively make decisions in all situations involving the use of AI systems, machines, and applications.[11]

AI literacy is a set of skills and competencies necessary for effectively using artificial intelligence technologies and applications that are present in everyday life, from healthcare and finance to education and entertainment. The increasingly prevalent artificial intelligence systems strongly influence spiritual, social, cultural, and political relations and interactions, shaping the understanding of the present and future world. AI literacy thus becomes one of the key skills for understanding the positive and negative impacts of AI technologies and systems, both on individuals and on social communities.

Biblical literacy is the ability to read, understand, interpret, and apply the foundational teachings and truths of the Bible related to various contexts. It involves the ongoing study of the Bible and the application of what is learned concerning

11 For this occasion, I am using UNESCO's working definition of literacy: "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. Generally, literacy also encompasses numeracy, the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. The concept of literacy can be distinguished from measures to quantify it, such as the literacy rate and functional literacy" (UNESCO 2004, 13).

the triune God: the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as well as all other relationships, including relationships with people and communities, relationships with God's creation and products of human creativity. The fundamental goal of biblical literacy is the continuous and consistent following of Jesus Christ (discipleship) in understanding and applying the Holy Scriptures "so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:17).

The history of humanity would be significantly different if Christians had invested more in biblical-spiritual literacy. We cannot change historical events, but we can learn a lot from them about the application of biblical-spiritual literacy. What does this mean for today? What is biblical-spiritual literacy? I have briefly explained biblical literacy, and now I will add spiritual literacy to it.

Spiritual literacy is the ability to perceive the spiritual realm and understand and interpret spiritual events and the consequences of spiritual forces at work in the world. Biblical-spiritual literacy is the ability to gain insight into the spiritual world as revealed by the Bible; the ability to understand and interpret spiritual events based on the Holy Scripture; the ability to recognize the workings of dark forces in the contemporary world and to effectively apply all biblical tools (such as God's Word and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) for sound judgment of AI technologies, systems, and applications. I believe that for Christians, spiritual literacy is most important in evaluating AI systems and technologies, especially at the second and third levels of AI development, namely the development of artificial general intelligence (AGI) and artificial superintelligence (ASI). At the second and third levels of artificial intelligence development, scientists, by devising and creating systems and machines that will be like humans and like God (god-like AI), interfere with God's part of the creative plan, directly and indirectly opposing God, much like Satan.

For born-again Christians, the most important thing is spiritual discernment of artificial intelligence systems and tools in the light of God's Word. The apostle Paul encourages us: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil" (1 Thess 5:19-22). Paul's exhortation directs Christians to a process of spiritual discernment that includes: first, acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit; second, reflecting on prophetic words on the particular subject; third, testing everything, from the work of the Spirit to the truthfulness of prophecies and everything related to artificial intelligence; fourth, based on discernment holding on to what is good and useful; fifth, avoiding evil and every shadow of evil. I am convinced that today it is most important to thoroughly examine the spiritual influences of AI technologies on our lives and piety. As an example, consider the spiritual impact of a smartphone, which, on one hand, provides instant access to all sorts of information and communication with many people, but on the other hand, we notice that people around us, despite this communication connectivity, are increasingly lonely and

isolated. Solitude and loneliness are spiritually detrimental to Christians because the Bible strongly emphasizes that we are created for fellowship, living relationships with one another, and expressing brotherly love (Jambrek 2022, 111–131).

Spiritual discernment of everything, including artificial intelligence, begins in a relationship with God and his Word. The Psalmist affirmed this biblical truth long ago when he wrote to God the Creator: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps 119:105). The apostle Paul emphasized the importance and purpose of God's written Word in the Bible: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). James, on the other hand, clearly points to the process of discerning everything, including AI systems and tools: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4:6-8). When interpreting and applying God's truths in Paul's and James' exhortations, it is important to be careful not to label AI technology as inherently bad or devilish. Technology is inherently good because it is built on and utilizes the laws that God the Creator embedded into the world through creation. Today's scientists have been able to discover these laws and apply them in various areas of human life, including artificial intelligence. Therefore, AI technology is good, but AI systems and tools can be consciously or unconsciously programmed and used for devilish purposes, such as manipulation and control of the human mind or for warfare.

In spiritual and biblical-theological discernment of artificial intelligence, it is valuable to consult the document *Artificial Intelligence: An Evangelical Statement of Principles*, in which a group of leaders from evangelical churches in the USA succinctly provided guidelines for biblical assessment of twelve key areas of AI impact.[12]

In the development of AI, thousands of experts with different worldviews, goals, motivations, and desires have been and are involved. By programming machine learning models, they consciously, and often unconsciously, determine the choice of knowledge and behavior of the machine. In the process of spiritual discernment, we must therefore ask ourselves what are the prevailing worldviews, philosophical, and spiritual systems behind artificial intelligence and their relationship to God and God's word. For example, the transhumanist philosophy strongly influences the development of humanoid artificial intelligence technologies, while "transhumanist theology" prepares the ground for a theological equat-

12 The document "Artificial Intelligence: An Evangelical Statement of Principles" was published in 2019 by The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (USA). The document was translated into Croatian and published in 2023 under the title: Umjetna inteligencija: evanđeoska izjava načelâ in the journal *Kairos: Evanđeoski teološki časopis* 17/2 (2023): 209–220.

ing of robots and humans concerning God.[13] Bainbridge points out a common criticism that believers direct at transhumanists that the use of technology to create a different humanity is equivalent to "playing God." The development of technologies such as cryonic freezing, brain scanning, and computerized personality capture promoted by transhumanists is considered by evangelical Christians as wrong, playing God with mind, body, or spirit (Bainbridge 2005, 96).

Joanna Ng (2020) takes the example of the reflections of the highly influential physicist Stephen Hawking, who believed that when we reach ASI (artificial superintelligence), "(AI) will take off on its own, and redesign itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn't compete and would be superseded." Hawking assumed, Joanna Ng emphasizes, that humans are just brains, no different from computers. Hawking's viewpoint, popular within the AI community, presupposes (1) evolution, (2) the absence of God, and (3) humanity as nothing more than objects. Therefore, she compares the research and future application of artificial superintelligence (ASI) to the construction of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9).

Some scientists, such as Nick Bostrom and Stephen Hawking, consider science to be absolute, thus denying all biblical and theological assumptions and arguments. Although this is widely known, it is worth noting here that human greed for money and the desire for power, influence, and control are inexhaustible motivational forces behind technological advancement. The competition among old and new technology companies in the development and application of artificial intelligence is highly dynamic, driven by profit, power, and control. Ian Hogarth (2023) in the article "We must slow down the race to God-like AI" emphasizes that so far, the AI race has been primarily driven by money. There is no indication whatsoever that it will be any different in the future.

3. Evaluation of AI Development and Implementation in Light of Goals That Oppose God

The AI we encounter today is, figuratively speaking, just a mild warming up for what lies ahead. The achievements so far indicate that there is a range of goals for the development and implementation of AI technologies. Some of these goals are publicly announced and well-known, a large part of them is only hinted at

13 In the article Aliens Will Play a Part in The Technological & Theological Singularity Benek (2016a) states the following: "From a theological and technological standpoint, angels and demons are similar to human beings in that they are artificial general intelligence (AGI) created by God. If we consider that all matter is divine technology, then the ordering of this technology by God into autonomous, rational and self-autonomous beings is the creation of divine AGI. According to the Biblical narrative these beings too, like humanity, have the choice to act in ways that are either good or evil."

philosophically and futuristically, and some, such as goals in the military industry, are carefully concealed. Christians have a God-given task to judge everything, including the ultimate goals of AI development. Since we are not aware of all the ultimate goals of AI development, here I will list only those goals that are known to us.

Supremacy, power, and control. Research, development, and application of artificial intelligence are motivated by an inexhaustible desire for power and supremacy, as well as the authority that this power provides and the control with which that supremacy would be maintained as long as possible. Hence the relentless race in the research, development, and application of artificial intelligence. The goal is for a small group of people or agencies (singleton hypothesis) to achieve and maintain power as quickly as possible, which would be equal to the power demonstrated by God in creating all existing things, with humanity as the pinnacle of creation.

Health, longevity, and eternal life. Improving humanity to create eternal life is one of the important tasks of technological development in artificial intelligence. Since God is the only master of eternal life, human interventions aimed at improving humanity for longevity and eternal life lead to direct conflict with God. Eternal life is given by God and accepted through faith. Man cannot produce it unpunished. The Bible clearly states that earthly life ends with the death of every person, and as the final enemy, death will be abolished at the second coming of Jesus (1 Cor 15:26).

Wisdom. Creating a machine that will be as wise as or even wiser than humans. Since the Bible emphasizes that wisdom comes from God, human creation of wise machines is in direct conflict with God. James reminds us: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5). God alone gives wisdom.

Creation of life. The goal is to create a humanoid machine (humanoid robot) "in the image of man," which will be the same as or superior to humans in every way. This reminds us of attempts to mimic God's power in creating life and elevate it to God's creative level.

Creation of a god-like machine. Leading AI companies (OpenAI, DeepMind, etc.) and many others, known and unknown, are competing to develop artificial intelligence equal to or more powerful than humans. Billions of dollars have been allocated for this purpose. The implicit goal is to create an entity equal to or greater than God. This reminds us of Satan and his attempts to be like God (cf. Isa 14:12-17), but also of numerous reports in the Bible about the destruction of those who ignored and rejected God's authority. A brief account of this is found in the Epistle of Jude (verses 5-11).

New Religion. Neil McArthur (2023), a professor at the University of Manitoba, predicts that the increasing presence of artificial intelligence will lead to the

emergence of new religions. He provides several arguments in support of this: First, generative AI, which can create or produce new content, possesses several characteristics often associated with divine beings, such as deities or prophets. Second, generative AI will produce results that can be taken as religious doctrine. It will provide answers to metaphysical and theological questions and engage in the construction of complex worldviews. Third, generative AI may demand worship or actively seek followers. McArthur therefore warns that we should consider "what an unsettling and powerful experience it will be to have a conversation with something that appears to possess a superhuman intelligence and is actively and aggressively asking for your allegiance." I would add to this blind, unquestioning obedience.

Achieving the mentioned goals in the development of artificial intelligence introduces individuals and corporations into direct conflict with God the Creator. The Bible testifies to numerous similar conflicts and their outcomes. The most famous account is that of Satan, who said in his heart: "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:13-14). By his goals and statements, Satan directly opposed God. As a result, God cast him out of heaven. He sinned because of pride and selfish ambition. He was proud of his beauty, personality, charm, authority, position, success (trade), and power. The mentioned goals for the development of artificial intelligence, supported by the pride and selfish ambitions of AI creators, as well as the allure, authority, position, success, and power of individuals and AI corporations, strongly remind me of the biblical account of Satan's goals, success, and fall.

The development of artificial intelligence is, on one hand, fulfilling God's task given to humanity (Gen 1 and 2), and on the other hand, in humans' desire to be like God, it represents rebellion against God (Gen 3:5). Every further advancement in artificial intelligence technologies introduces humanity into a potential deeper conflict with God. It is worth noting that this creative task given by God is limited in such a way that humans cannot comprehend the beginning or end of God's creation. As the Teacher summarized: "I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Eccl 3:10-11).

It is important to remember that while the development of AI is exciting and full of potential, God knows the limits to what can be achieved. The Bible testifies that God drastically punished his own and other nations whenever they crossed the boundary he set. Similarly, with the development of artificial intelligence technologies, if powerful corporations were to cross the boundaries set by God, there could be severe consequences. The realization of an artificial superintelligence

could potentially lead to the destruction of humanity, as feared by leading experts in artificial intelligence,[14] thus serving God for the second coming of Jesus Christ, the final judgment, and all the realities that the Bible indicates will ultimately come to pass. Jesus foretold this: "Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matt 24:29-31).

Most Christians may have little influence on research and development in AI technologies, but "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (Jam 5:16-18). The Bible directs us towards fellowship with God, prayer, and spiritual warfare. Let our prayers be for the realization of artificial intelligence by God's will, not against it. Today, more than ever before, we need to effectively apply the instructions of the apostle Paul: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph 6:10-13).

We live in a time of fierce spiritual battles, and therefore we need to strengthen ourselves in the Lord, resist the devil's schemes, and overcome all spiritual battles. God created all things and sovereignly reigns over everything. He alone is the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Creator and Sustainer. Therefore, Christians have nothing to fear, neither in the present nor in the future. It is enough to have reverence for God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In the end, whatever happens in the present and future, let us be sure that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Rev 21:6). To Him be all honor and glory.

Conclusion

Christians encounter artificial intelligence technologies daily. The development of computer systems capable of thinking, reasoning, and learning based on data and experiences can be observed on three levels with different degrees of complexity and scope of capabilities. These are called: narrow artificial intelligence (ANI), general artificial intelligence (AGI), and artificial superintelligence (ASI).

14 See the "Statement on AI Risk" that was signed by more than hundreds of AI experts.

Research and applications of artificial intelligence raise a series of challenges, concerns, and even fears among Christians, and many experts (both Christians and non-Christians) recognize countless dangers at AGI and ASI levels. Christians need to consider what kind of relationship to cultivate with AI systems, knowing that God has given mankind a creative and exploratory task and freedom for its implementation.

ANI tools are increasingly used in Christian ministry, in the field of biblical studies and theology, as well as in church administration and pastoral work. Christians should filter such use of AI systems through two lenses of Holy Scripture: the filter of *spiritual usefulness* and the filter of *spiritual edification*. A *chatbot* powered by AI can answer questions about Christianity, find biblical references, and prepare teachings and sermons. As previously emphasized, artificial intelligence can find, analyze, group, and present information from the Bible, but it cannot inspire the message without which every teaching and every sermon is rendered ineffective.

Christians should evaluate every AI tool according to various parameters, especially those systems and tools that have spiritual implications in their application. A comprehensive spiritual assessment of AI should be rooted in the Word of God and guided by the Holy Spirit. The quality of spiritual discernment of AI systems, machines, and applications will be ensured for Christians through their daily relationship with God. Considering artificial intelligence, the most important task of the church today and tomorrow is to educate and train believers in AI literacy and biblical-spiritual literacy so that they can make independent and good decisions in all situations involving AI systems. It is important for Christians to responsibly use AI technologies so as not to participate in ignoring or rebelling against God, but rather to use AI tools to glorify God and enhance their relationship with God and with others.

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Stanko Jambrek

Kršćani pred izazovima umjetne inteligencije

Sažetak

Razvoj tehnologije umjetne inteligencije s jedne je strane ispunjavanje Božjeg zadatka danog čovječanstvu (Post 1 i 2) a s druge strane u želji ljudi da budu poput Boga pobuna protiv Boga (Post 3,5). Stoga se kršćani suočavaju s mnoštvom izazova u odnosima prema sustavima umjetne inteligencije. Ti su izazovi svrstani u dvije temeljne skupine. U prvoj su skupini oni izazovi kod kojih kršćani imaju i imat će izbor odgovornog korištenja UI sustava dok su u drugoj skupini UI sustavi kojima će upravljati moćne korporacije ili pak UI sustavi sami. Tekst pruža kratki uvod i pregled razina u razvoju umjetne inteligencije (ANI, AGI i ASI) te odnos kršćana prema njima. Središnji dio rasprave posvećen je duhovnoj prosudbi sustava i alata UI-ja, posebice onima koji u primjeni izazivaju duhovne posljedice. Proces iscrpne duhovne prosudbe mora biti ukorijenjen u Božjoj riječi i vođen Svetim Duhom, a kvalitetu duhovne prosudbe UI sustava osigurat će kršćanima njihov svakodnevni odnos s Bogom. S obzirom na umjetnu inteligenciju najvažniji zadatak crkve danas i sutra jest obučiti i obučavati vjernike za UI pismenost i biblijsko-duhovnu pismenost kako bi mogli samostalno i kvalitetno odlučivati u svim situacijama korištenja UI sustava, strojeva i aplikacija. U završnom se dijelu naznačuje prosudba razvoja i primjene UI-ja s obzirom na ciljeve koji se suprotstavljaju Bogu, poput stvaranja vječnog života i bogolikog stroja.

BOOK REVIEWS

Danielle Treweek

The Meaning of Singleness: Retrieving an Eschatological Vision for the Contemporary Church

Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2023, pp. 336

Danielle Treweek seeks to "equip [Christians and Christian leaders] to look with fresh eyes at the intelligibility of God's purpose for singleness" (p. 1). Unmarried individuals in the church must find both *purpose* (theological foundations for finding meaning *as they are* [i.e., unmarried] in Christ) and *place* (theologically informed contexts for functioning as they are in the body of Christ). If unmarried Christians have purpose and place as they are, and if purpose and place are in harmony, they can be healthy, contributing members in the life of the church without ever being married.

Too often, the church's basic attitude toward the issue of singleness is simply that "one is either married (or about to be married) or one is single." (p. 36). Treweek shows that the meaning of "singleness" is itself complex and varied. Individuals in any of the following relationships can be lumped together under the heading "single": unmarried people who are not seeking relationships; those in long-term monogamous but unmarried relationships; "hookups", which involve serial recreational sex with little or no relationship beyond the physical; civil unions; cohabitations; "friends with benefits"; people involved in same-sex relationships; polyamorous relationships; open relationships; long distance or online-only relationships; and so on. The common, simple formulation "married or single" is insufficient. Treweek seeks to explain the purpose and place of singleness within the body of Christ and to suggest new norms for today's Christian communities. She organizes her argument into four steps.

In the first step, chapters 1-2, she explores "the context of singleness" by surveying Western views of singleness in society and the church since the mid-1400s (early modernity). She shows that, rather than building or maintaining a Christian theology of singleness, the Church's view has mostly followed societal views. This is a break from the early church, whose views on marriage and singleness were profoundly countercultural. The first chapter, "Singleness in Society," is a *tour de force*. Treweek here surveys the relationship between (secular) social definitions of family (and marriage), how those definitions changed over the past five hundred years, and how views of singleness changed. The material she shares is always illuminating and sometimes stunning.

For example, more than 20% of the adults in the UK from 1575-1700 were unmarried. Single women were a particularly significant part of society during

this period, making important contributions to their communities. The rise of English nationalism ca. 1700 was accompanied by a desire for higher birth rates, part of which was expressed in calumny against unmarried people, especially women. Governments went so far as to discuss levying taxes against unmarried people and holding public "bride auctions."

In Europe, before the Industrial Revolution, *family* was understood in terms of extended households, including relatives and servants and other attached persons beyond father, mother, and children. Families were public-facing entities, enterprises, operating in commerce and community. However, with the Industrial Revolution, the center of economic action moved from the family to the factory. The emphasis on family dynamics shifted from utility and compatibility to affectionate relationships. After the Industrial Revolution, families became inward-facing instead of public-facing. The separation between *men's work* and *women's work* hardened.

In early North America, men greatly outnumbered women. Single women were thought to cause instability simply by being "unattached." In the colonial South, two models of womanhood developed. The "cult of true womanhood" emphasized domesticity. The "cult of single blessedness" emphasized self-sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Similarly, in the early twentieth century, there was great concern in both the USA and Western Europe over the large numbers of single women. Following WWI, there were two million "'surplus' English women [and]… 500,000 war widows" in Germany. After WWII, governments felt the need to "entice women to vacate war-time jobs to create employment for returning soldiers."

In the protestant church over the same period (chapter 2), Treweek shows, Christian teaching regarding singleness parroted the thinking of secular society. By following secular culture, and sometimes baptizing it wholesale, the church developed robust theologies of marriage and family with only the shallowest theology of singleness. Again, it was not thus in the early church.

While Luther "redeemed" sex in the Reformation, teaching that it was not inherently dirty, he also taught that sexual lust was irresistible. Therefore singleness was only for the chosen few. In the 20th century, Christian teaching responded to social upheaval through the "nostalgic adulation" of an imagined past. Christian teachers, while idealizing the nuclear family and making it the chief goal of the individual Christian life, did not recognize the degree to which their nuclear family was itself a product of secular social trends of the 19th century or how much it differed from the understanding of "family" that was near universal only a few hundred years before.

In the second step, chapters 3-4, Treweek surveys current Christian teaching regarding singleness to explore the ways that today's churches view singleness and the place of single people within the church. Does singleness have a value for the

Christian life? And how can single people belong in the Christian community as they are?

Here Treweek argues that churches tend to view singleness as "compromised and diminished." Singleness is "deficient," "aberrant," and "unfulfilled;" becoming married and parenting children is the only "maturation narrative" for young Christians, and all other approaches are compromises. Christians must "endure" singleness until God provides an escape from it. Tragically, by making marriage an idol, the church has rendered deep, fulfilling friendships as something to be regarded with suspicion, and all the more as the world (and too often the church) increasingly believes that sexual expression is a necessary experience of fulfillment. "The married Christian who develops a close friendship with someone of the opposite sex is in danger of committing nothing less than 'emotional adultery'" (p. 62). This applies not only to opposite-sex friendships. Due to cultural pressures that the church seems to have no defense against, even exceptionally close same-sex friendships are suspected of being sexual. Like the culture around it, today's church sees sex everywhere.

In the third step, chapters 5-7, Treweek "retrieves" biblical and historical teachings regarding singleness and related issues from church history, biblical exegesis, and Christian theology: "…retrieval from the past seeks to resource the present, as it 'responsibly looks back and faithfully moves forward,'" (p. 219, quoting Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 275). Here, Treweek recovers a long-ignored wealth of theological consideration of singleness, especially in terms of eschatological meaning. The teaching Treweek retrieves does not limit itself to restrictions on sexual behavior, prescriptions for the amount of time (and money) singles can give to the church, etc. but instead demonstrates the theological dignity and significance that singles can have, dignity and significance which have unfortunately been lost in the modern church. The character of early Christian teaching regarding singleness and marriage is deeply eschatological. Due to that perspective, while virginity and celibacy have historically been viewed as exceptions by the church, they were viewed as positive (not negative) exceptions and an important part of how Christians understood their separateness from the society around them (which found virginity and celibacy shocking and confusing.) The central thrust of the teaching is that marriage is only for this life and does not continue into the next. Believers who are married in this life will not be married to each other in the next, because the ultimate marriage--to Christ--will have come. Treweek's biblical exegesis follows (instead of precedes) her treatment of early church teaching. Here she attends to 1 Corinthians 7:25, but begins with and focuses on Matthew 22:23 and its parallels. Both of these passages center on eschatology: "At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage," and "The time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not… For this world in its present form is passing away."

In the fourth and final step, chapters 8-10, Treweek weaves together the results ("threads") generated in the preceding sections into a "wonderfully intricate tapestry," within which the body of Christ may see the purpose and place of single Christians. She notes that Christians in their view of family and marriage and singleness have not only followed secular views of these phenomena but have "also rebaptized many of these to be the 'Christian way of life'" (p. 218). Among these is the insistence that married couples be "burdened by the lofty and grand expectation that they are all and everything to each other" (p. 218). Based on her biblical exegesis, Treweek recommends that Christian teachers and thinkers shift their focus from origins to *telos*; don't just consider where we have come from, consider where we are going. The life of faithful singles can testify to what believers will do in eternity; Treweek notes the large amount of patristic commentary on Matthew 22:30, which described how unmarried believers could live "the life of angels" on earth. Because believing singles "are even now brother or sister (and not husband and wife) to all others within the church," their lives are now "not a foreshadow of eternity but an actual--albeit partial--foretaste of it" (p. 231).

This is a strong and helpful book. The church needs both married and single, and married and single need each other in the church. Both have unique gifts strengths and opportunities. The church should recognize singleness as a calling, sometimes temporary and sometimes permanent. In particular, churches should be aware of the way that unmarried believers can point the rest of us toward the reality of the next life, where members of the bride of Christ will all relate deeply to each other as brothers and sisters ("neither marrying nor being given in marriage") as we unite to our bridegroom. Churches should put care and attention into ministering to singles, providing them with opportunities for significant ministry and deep and Christ-glorifying friendships, and valuing and blessing them equally whether they pursue marriage or not.

Perry Leon Stepp

Joshua Iyadurai

Social Research Methods: For Students and Scholars of Theology and Religious Studies

Chennai: Marina Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Religion, 2023., pp. 302

Dr. Joshua Iyadurai, a lecturer and researcher from the University of Madras (Department of Christian Studies, India), is the author of an innovative textbook in the field of Methodology that offers a view of the research methods in the social sciences through their application in theology and religious studies. The

textbook is intended for students and scientists, as well as practitioners involved in pastoral practice and ministry to the church. The book was published in 2023 in English under the name Social Research Methods. For Students and Scholars of Theology and Religious Studies by the Marina Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Religion, Chennai, India.

The book aims to respond to the question of how to overcome the marginalization of evangelical theology, which Mark Noll, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., and David Wells wrote about back in 1995 in their well-known article "Evangelical Theology Today" emphasizing the need for a dialogue between theology, culture, and society that is interdisciplinarily grounded.

The starting point for Iyadurai's argument is the methodological paradigm of the 21st century, the lived faith. He believes that the lived faith experience shifts the focus of theology from being "rhetorical and speculative to constructivist," offering a different set of "hermeneutical tools" based upon "the expertise of social sciences" (p. xvii). The author argues that the interdisciplinary openness allows theology to retain its distinctive foundation in the Word while at the same time, using the knowledge of other disciplines, improving its abilities to understand society and its relationship with God, and becoming "more intelligible in engaging the world" (p. xxvi). Here, Iyadurai follows Veli-Matti Karkkainen (2015, 3:235–241) who says that theology is a complete truth revealed in a complex world in which knowledge changes and expands extremely quickly; thus, respect for the plurality of cultures and religions, as well as sensitiveness to the intra-church and ecumenical dialogue is a necessity that protects theology from its rigidity and too easy adaptation to science. Similarly, Iyandurai begins his book by claiming that "when theology engages social sciences from this position, it guards itself against reductionism, while considering insights from social sciences to have a holistic understanding of the social world in relation to God" (p. xvii).

The book has 302 pages. The nine chapters offer content that is easy to read although the methods presented are rather complex. By combining well-designed content, academic language, and examples, the reader is provided with a substantial amount of knowledge as well as skills needed for conducting interdisciplinary research at the M.A. and/or Ph.D. level. Iyadurai presents the qualitative and quantitative research methods, and the combined methods of research, giving useful tips about how to write a hypothesis (p. 118), define basic research concepts (p. 119), determine the validity of a claim (p. 123), define the sample (p. 126), structure questionnaires and research questions (p. 132), conduct interviews (p. 138), analyze and present research results, etc. (p. 156). The author also provides examples about how to narrow down the research and formulate the main title and subtitles (p. 170), create clear research objectives (p. 180), define primary source population and sampling (p. 183), and discusses in length the importance

of proper data collection, reliability of sources and ways of data analysis (p.185) as well as how to write a research report, dissertation and journal article (p. 191).

The book may be of interest to students and researchers also because Iyadurai lists references to software that can be used to create notes and organize the research, such as EndNote, Zotero, Mendeley (p. 31), and NVIVO – a program that enables quantitative data analysis (pp. 32 and 106) and instructions how to use apps such as Zoom, Webex, Google Meet, Skype, as well as Debut Video Capture, Camtasia, Audacity and other for online interviews, meetings, focus groups and the like (p. 82). The author also refers readers to software that combines analyses of text, audio, video, and other types of docs, such as ATLAS.ti, HyperRESEARCH, MAXQDA, QDA Miner, Transana, RDQA etc. (p. 106). He also explains the role of a supervisor in the research as someone who offers intellectual, professional, administrative as well as pastoral care to the student (p. 221). The book contains a six-page dictionary (p. 245), an extensive list of references (p. 252), and an index (p. 263) which makes it easier for the readers to find their way through the book.

This book is a good overview of classic and more recent methods in social science research that can be very useful for interdisciplinary research in theology. The clear focus on showing that theology, as "understanding God's activity in relation to human community and the world… [that] cannot isolate itself but must engage social sciences to study lived theology or lived religion" (p. xxvi) points also to its limitations. Namely, Iyadurai's focus on the study of social science methods does not include a variety of methods useful for research in the areas of biblical studies, exegesis, systematic theology, church history, and the like, and "fails even to suggest the contours of a theological approach to methodology" (Holmes and Lindsay 2018). A reference to the ongoing debate between Christian theology and the various theoretical streams (as mentioned in Holmes and Lindsay 2018, between theology and philosophy, social theory, psychology, biological and physical sciences, and so forth), might have been a helpful addition for a Christian researcher.

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