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Enthroned Upon the Praises: Understanding the Functions of Worship through Temple Theology in Revelation 4 and 5

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Abstract

Whereas other scholarship often focuses on the object(s) of worship in Revelation, this study examines the world-building functions of worship in Revelation 4 and 5 through its participation in temple theology. This paper establishes the meaning of temple theology by surveying various ancient Near Eastern cultures, and it connects worship and temple theology by calling attention to worship's functions of identification and orientation. This study then examines the worship in Revelation 4 and 5 through the lens of temple theology and draws conclusions about the functions of worship based on this examination. Because of worship's role in establishing the new, world-encompassing temple, worship can be viewed as an act of creation, reverberating from the very throne of God.

Keywords: *worship, Revelation, temple, temple theology, creation*

Introduction

When John is invited into the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4 and 5, he witnesses a scene of glory and worship. Beauty, power, sight, and sound radiate from the throne, and so too do worshippers. Much has been said and debated about those who sit upon the throne, and by the standard of the four living creatures, there will be no need to rest from saying more. However, far too little has

been said about those who surround the throne, who speak and sing the praise of God and the Lamb. In fact, if the intuition of many Christian churches is correct—where Revelation "is rarely used as the basis for a sermon, yet in those same churches the words of Revelation are regularly sung"—then it may be that the most appropriate place to begin to understand God and the Lamb is within the circles of worship that surround them (Koester 2017, 119).[1] In other words, if Christianity at large most regularly engages with Revelation within the practice of worship, then perhaps the worship within the book of Revelation can illuminate the Christian practice of worship. This study demonstrates that Revelation 4-5 communicates its scenes of worship within the context of temple theology, and in doing so, provides a metaphysical and socio-religious worldview for its community, which allows worshippers to understand their worship as receiving and participating in a new creation.

1. Temple Theology

Revelation encodes much of what it says within the language of temple theology, so the first task on the way to understanding what Revelation 4 and 5 says about worship is to understand the significance of a temple. To that end, this section elaborates on the significance of a temple in ancient Near Eastern cultures (including ancient Israel, Rome, the early Christians, and many others). This section speaks broadly but briefly about many unique (but related) cultures, and consequently, does not give them the level of individual attention they deserve. However, this kind of survey does replicate an important truth about temples in general and in the book of Revelation: temples existed alongside one another, in harmony and in competition, sharing many things in common yet remaining ultimately distinct. This study categorizes the fundamental elements of temple theology into three parts: 1) the temple is the house of the god; 2) the temple is the link between heaven and earth; 3) the temple is the center/symbol of the cosmos.

1.1. House of God

Many ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples demonstrated that their temples served as homes for their gods by the names they gave to them, and it is clear from the way Old Testament (OT) authors spoke about the temple in Jerusalem that Israel

1 Michael Gorman (2011, 17) makes a similar point. His observation is that despite the "problems and concerns" of those who dismiss the canonicity of Revelation (as well as those who 'hypercanonize' it), Revelation has often been read most responsibly by those "who have read the book sensitively and creatively, stressing especially its aesthetic dimensions, or its ability to excite the imagination in the contemplation and worship of God, or its offer of hope for the oppressed."

also thought of its temple as God's house.[2] A sacred text might even describe a god as personally affirming the temple as their house and place of rest. The term "rest" reveals much of the significance behind the temple as a house. For example, the Enuma Elish describes the gods' decision to build Babylon and its temple as a decision centered on the idea of rest:

> Let us make a shrine of great renown:
> Your chamber will be our resting place wherein we may repose.
> Let us erect a shrine to house a pedestal
> Wherein we may repose when we finish (the work).
> When Marduk heard this,
> He beamed as brightly as the light of day,
> Build Babylon, the task you have sought.
> Let bricks for it be molded, and raise the shrine! (Lambert 2013, 113).

In the Enuma Elish—and in the myths of many other ANE cultures—a god defeats or otherwise subdues the forces of chaos, which make civilization impossible, and afterwards rests in their temple (Beale 2020, 65-66; Hundley 2013, 43). The gods' rest can imply a kind of anthropomorphic exhaustion (or even laziness), but the true significance of their rest is that the great task of ordering the cosmos has been completed, and the new age of the sovereign god's rule can begin. Rest is not a simple biological necessity; rest has been accomplished. The established house demonstrates that this rest is secure.

When the god is at rest, human life (in the example above, "Babylon") can flourish because "stability, security, and order" (i.e., rest) have been achieved (Walton 2006, 116). The temple, as the house of the god, is the solidification of the rest that the god achieved and upon which humanity depends. God's rest after creation in Genesis 2:1-3, God's instructions for the tabernacle after rescuing Israel from Egypt in Exodus 25–31, and God's promise of rest for David in connection with David's desire to build a house for him in 2 Samuel 7 all operate within the concept of temple theology (Beale 2020, 61-66). Similarly, both Jesus and Augustus are portrayed as victorious, rest-bringers who founded a temple.[3]

The house of the god also provided for (or demanded) human ritual maintenance. "The deity's presence was marked by the image of the deity," which had to be cared for by various rituals (Walton 2006, 116). These rituals often involved basic household needs or tasks, such as "food, drink, bathing, and clothing"

2 Hundley demonstrates this fact for Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Syrio-Palestine temples (2013, 34, 69, 95, and 118 respectively). With less of a linguistic focus, Beale (2020, 52-53) demonstrates the same from quotes about building a "house" for an Egyptian god, a Rashu and Arashu god, and Israel's God. Christians also continued to use this language in their writings (e.g. 1 Pet 2:4-6).

3 On Jesus, see, for one example, Matthew 11:28-12:6. For more discussion on Jesus and his temple, see Beale 2020, 176 and 183. On Augustus, see Friesen 2001, 34.

(Hundley 2013, 45).[4] To contribute to the rest of the god and the upkeep of the temple through offerings and purity codes was to continually strengthen the relationship between the god and the world and was therefore a means of human participation in ongoing creation.

In summary, the temple, as the house of a god, communicates that a victorious, sovereign god has completed creation and is now ruling and sustaining it. The house of the god also provides the available presence of that god and the opportunity for humans to both benefit from and participate in their god's rest.

1.2. Link between Heaven and Earth

The temple, as the house of god, anticipates another role of the temple—the 'link between heaven and earth'—since if the heavenly god is present among their earthly people in the house, then the temple has become a place that brings heaven and earth together. Furthermore, like the house of god, the names of many ANE temples make it clear that the people viewed them as a link between heaven and earth (Levenson 1984, 295).[5] The OT seems to follow this pattern as well, since it can use 'heaven and earth' as a metonym for Jerusalem or its temple (Levenson 1984 294-295). Likewise, in the New Testament (NT), the event that reconciles God and humanity (Jesus' death and resurrection) is also what leads Jesus' followers to understand him as a temple (Jn 2:19-22).

The temple, as the link between heaven and earth, focuses on the relationship between a god and their people. This relationship, which is secured and sustained by the temple, connects humans to heavenly experiences of space, time, and identity. Spatially, the temple was situated on earth, *and* it was also located in heaven. Hundley summarizes the temple structures of the ANE as "more than simply bringing heaven to earth (and ontologically belonging to a different sphere of existence), the temple created heaven on earth. Thus, ancient Near Eastern people took great pains to communicate that their temple, as the Christian refrain expresses, was 'in the world but not of it'" (Hundley 2013, 135). In temporal language, the temple allowed traffic between the present time and the time when the god first established life and order.[6] Through the temple, the distant, ancient power that created the cosmos could accomplish the same work in present space and time as it did in the beginning. By this link with heaven to the initial acts of creation, humans could discover their significance in accordance with the character and motivations of their god.

4 Also, see Hundley 2013, 76-77, 119, 172-173, and Walton 2006, 116.

5 Also, Hundley 2013, 77. One model example is Ishtar's temple at Nippur, which was named Eduranki, "bond between heaven and earth" (Walton 2006, 116).

6 This is why the furniture, images, and even the structure of an ANE temple (including the temple in Jerusalem) often symbolized the primordial cosmos (Hundley 2013, 45).

1.3. Center and Symbol of the Cosmos

The temple, as the center and symbol of the cosmos, was the "primary image of the temple," and it can be observed on multiple levels (Walton 2006, 129). On a societal level, the temple was the center of life in the ANE. The gods were gods of fertility, harvest, weather, justice, love, victory, etc.—these are not only spiritual or godly things. These are the practical building blocks of human community, and they are defined, enabled, and sustained by god through the temple. It is with this in mind that Lundquist says the temple was "the central, organizing, unifying institution in ancient Near Eastern society" (Lundquist 1983, 213). Specifically, this meant that the temple was the economic, moral, judicial, and political center of the world. Normal life flowed through the temple daily, and people expected the temple to make normal life possible.[7]

On a symbolic level, the temple was a miniature representation of the cosmos. As with the other aspects of a temple, ANE peoples made this function clear in the names they gave to their temples.[8] Representing the cosmos was primarily achieved through symbolic architectural organization, and certain sections of the temple were populated with images and furniture corresponding to the meaning of that section. For example, the temple in Jerusalem (as well as many other sacred spaces in the Bible) had a three-part structure, which corresponded to the three major divisions of the cosmos (Beale 2020, 31). By miniaturizing the cosmos, a temple enabled a kind of travel—and thus relationship—to and from the far reaches of the cosmos, especially heaven. Since the temple (or at least some part of it) truly represented heaven, the god could dwell there and remain holy. Not entirely earth, and not entirely heaven, "the temple was in some ways a miniature world of its own" (Hundley 2013, 136).

2. Connecting Worship and Temple Theology

As Walton (2006, 116) begins to explain temples in the ANE, he draws a line between temples and worship. He says, "Worship took place at temples, but temples were not designed primarily to provide a place for worship." Walton distances temples from worship to restore a deeper meaning to ANE temples, viewing them as more than just places of worship. Having explored temple theology with Wal-

7 This can also be demonstrated in the negative, where the destruction of a temple would be "calamitous and fatal to the community" (Lundquist 1983, 216). Lundquist mentions Lamentations, Haggai, the "Lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur," and "The Curse of Agade" as examples which illustrate that the destruction of the temple was understood cosmologically.

8 For example, "Erattakisarra," which means "house, mountain of the entire world." For this and other examples, see Hundley 2013, 82.

ton and others in the previous section, the aim of this section is now to bring temple and worship together again in a way that honors ANE temple theology and, ultimately, illuminates Revelation 4 and 5.

Defining worship can be difficult. Questions immediately arise about who or what can be worshipped, as well as what does or does not constitute worship.[9] Since this study focuses on the relationship between temple theology and worship, it takes a functional approach to defining worship.[10] In other words, this study examines how worship (particularly Christian worship) contributes to the principles of temple theology outlined above.

2.1. Worship Identifies

Richard Bauckham's definition of Jewish/Christian worship begins to bring worship and temple theology back together, even if that was not his primary intent. He says, "In religious practice, it was worship that signaled the distinction between God and every creature, however exalted" (Bauckham 1998, 118). Bauckham seeks to investigate the worship of Jesus by early Christians, and he employs this definition of worship to argue that early Christian worship positioned Jesus on the same side of the distinguishing line of worship as God.

Interestingly, James Dunn, who cautions against Bauckham's conclusion that Jesus was worshipped like God by early Christians, still operates with a similar definition of worship. As he surveys more than twenty Greek words, phrases, and related words for worship in the New Testament, Dunn continually emphasizes "that the writers of the New Testament have only worship of God in view as desirable and commendable" (Dunn 2010, 17). Furthermore, after examining Second Temple Judaism at large, Dunn finds that worship was characterized by the fact that only God could receive it (Dunn 2010, 90).[11] Across the various meanings and circumstances of worship, both Bauckham and Dunn draw out a more general characteristic of Christian worship—worship is for God alone. But Bauckham and Dunn are not the only scholars thinking along these lines.

As Ninian Smart (1972, 52) explores the concept of worship, he argues that worship is a vital part of how one knows that a god is a god: "[to be] a god is to be worshipped." Using worship, or a worshipful state, as the means to sketch or begin to describe an encounter with the divine is the concept behind Rudolf Otto's

9 Ninian Smart's monograph, *The Concept of Worship*, is an excellent exploration of these questions.

10 Other prominent methods for defining worship include James White's phenomenological approach in his book *Introduction to Christian Worship*, or James Dunn's more linguistic approach in *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus: The New Testament Evidence*.

11 Dunn (2010, 28) does admit that Jesus seems to sometimes be "on both sides of the worship relationship," but Dunn still maintains that this exclusivity of worship to God was critical to Jewish/Christian understanding of worship.

'*mysterium tremendum et fascinans,*' which are the terms he argues best capture "the quite unique and incomparable experience of solemn worship" (Otto 1958, 9). To Otto, worship is epistemological; it is the moment in which someone can experience (or gain some kind of true knowledge about) that which is wholly other. Several other scholars, especially those analyzing Revelation, also opt for an identifying or knowledge-based definition of worship.[12]

As Christian worship is defined by identification, knowledge, or discovery of God, its relationship to temple theology becomes clearer. If worship is for God alone, then worship sets God apart. Worship points to God, and says of him, "here, and here alone, is the true holy One." This function of worship ties it to the themes of sovereignty and presence in the home-of-the-god aspect of temple theology. To continually acknowledge that God is God in worship, in the terms of the house of the god, communicates that God is the one who established the world's order and that he is also the one who maintains it. Additionally, it communicates that God is available and knowable. So, worship relates to temple theology by the concept of identification, or indeed, revelation. In this sense, worship is a re-revelation of the initial revelation of the divine, which first founded the cosmos, like the aftershocks of an earthquake.

2.2. Worship Orients

Just like the house of the god implied the link between heaven and earth, worship's role of identification leads to a second critical function of worship: worship orients. Temple theology presents the cosmos as bound to a certain order because it is bound to a certain god, and worship serves as an expression of and orientation towards all the realities that this bond creates.

This can (and should) be put in more concrete terms. According to Larry Hurtado (1999, 2), in the ancient world, "worship was seen as the characteristic and crucial expression of one's religious orientations and commitments." These orientations and commitments permeated all of life; "birth, death, marriage, the domestic sphere, civil and wider political life, work, the military, socializing, entertainment, arts, music—all were imbued with religious significance and associations" (Hurtado 1999, 9). Likewise, Stephen L. Cook (2020, 754) describes these "socio-religious functions of worship" well:

> [Worship] expressed and buttressed the shared values and convictions of the community of YHWH, or, better, of specific Yahwistic groups. It publicly embodied religious orientations and habits. It enacted the traditions and teachings of the societal authority or segment that authorized and choreographed it. Participants in Israelite worship publicly acknowledged the worldview and attendant lifestyle communicated as social meaning by the proceedings.

12 See Keener 2000, 237; Sailers 1994, 85; Bauckham 1993, 32.

Every one of these social moments invited (or even demanded) worship. To fail to worship in these moments was to exist unlinked from the world, which is to not exist at all.[13]

Therefore, (as in the previous section) worship's orienting function connects with the founding of the world, but instead of identifying a creator god, worship participates with the creator god. What the god achieved at the beginning, worship achieves in miniature, turning all the large and small parts of life back towards the kind of world the god created and the kind of role the god assigned to humans within that world. When one worships in and through birth, death, marriage, work, etc., one shapes their world according to their object of worship. Thus, worship has an orienting function, which says not only "here is the center," but also "here we are because of it."

Worshippers (re)reveal the center of the cosmos, but they are also revealed by it. Others have expressed this function of worship in different terms. Alexander Schmemann and others describe this as the transformative element of worship.[14] Psalm 36:9 captures the idea in more poetic terms: "in Your light we see light." Simply put, worship affects not only the worshippers but also all those who surround them. It enables navigation of the social world by orientation around a sacred north, and wherever it is present, it reinforces that orientation upon its surroundings. In this function, worship clearly relates to the link-between-heaven-and-earth and center/symbol-of-the-cosmos themes.

3. Worship and Revelation's Temple

With the necessary background in place, the book of Revelation (and its insights on worship) can now take center stage. In this study, chapters 4 and 5 will be the main focus. While the entire text could be considered an instrument/act of worship and references to temples and temple theology appear throughout the book, chapters 4 and 5 carry much of the book's message on the interplay between worship and temple.[15]

13 As Eugene Peterson (1991, 60) eloquently says of worship, "If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustained purpose."

14 Drawing on several of the themes discussed above, Schmemann (1998, 15) says, "The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him." See also Cillers 2009, 5.

15 On Revelation as a liturgical text, see Gorman 2011, 38-39; Stuckenbruck 2011, 236; Bauckham 1993, 3.

3.1. Chapter 4 Analysis

From the descriptions that John gives in chapter 4 and their strong connections with temple symbolism, it is clear that John has been invited into the heavenly temple.[16] Even if John's depiction of the heavenly temple somehow escapes notice in chapters 4 and 5, the casual mention of "the altar" in 6:9 and the explicit mention of God's temple in 7:15 confirm it. After the scene is set, John witnesses the first of many acts of worship.

The four living creatures praise God, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev 4:8). In a different vision of the heavenly temple, Seraphim surround God's throne and call out to each other, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of armies. The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa 6:3). This line from Isaiah is temple theology in a nutshell, but in Revelation, the line reappears somewhat differently. The first half—"holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty"—maps well onto Isaiah 6:3 and would have been a familiar formula in the liturgy of Jewish synagogues (Stuckenbruck 2011, 245). The second half is completely different. There is no direct mention of the earth or of God's glory. The spatial effects of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 are substituted for temporal ones. Time is defined by the presence of the God who was and is and is to come. In contrast with the Beast, who "was, and is not, and will come," the relationship between past and future remains unbroken through God's present presence. Thus, God continues to bridge the gap between the present and the beginning, a time that Levenson (1984, 297) calls "protological" time—the world "as it was meant to be and as it was on the first Sabbath." God will also bring that first time to its fullness again in the future because he "is to come." Importantly for John's audience (who must deal with the present), the present is not lost between the past and future. Even though the earth is absent from Revelation 4:8, spatial implications can never be wholly separated from temporal ones, and John even hints at space by saying God "is to come" (there must be somewhere to come to if God is coming there). While it may be possible to glimpse God's glory filling the earth here, John masks this for now because he is not going to tell his audience that God's glory fills the earth; he is going to show them. For now, the vision of God's glory remains in the heavenly sanctuary.

In this vision of the heavenly temple, worship cascades outwards, even as it is directed inwards toward the one seated on the throne, and so, the second and third acts of worship are spurred on by the first. The four living creatures discern the holiness of God and articulate it in "glory, honor, and thanks" (Rev 4:9). In their turn, the twenty-four elders discern the holiness of God and also realize

16 This article is based on a longer work by the same author. The longer work provides more context and analysis on the temple imagery in Revelation. For access to this work, please contact the author at the email address listed on the title page.

something about themselves; thus, they cast down their crowns.[17] Through witnessing the worship of the four living creatures, and in their own worship, the twenty-four elders interpret who they are in the light of who God is, and then they go on to elaborate God's praise. In their praise, the twenty-four elders bring God's creative actions into focus. As was discussed in the house-of-the-god theme, a god's creative actions are also proof of their authority to rule. So, the twenty-four elders make it known that God is the one who is worthy to be seated upon the throne in the heavenly temple, the one whose rule supersedes their own.

As chapter 4 ends, the lens of temple theology leaves one question asked but unanswered: what of the earth? The setup in chapter 4, which includes numerous temple symbols and clear links to the "house-of-the-god" theme, would lead readers to expect some commentary on the relationship between heaven and earth. But, the four living creatures have left out the line from Isaiah 6:3—"the whole earth is full of His glory." Osborne (2002, 237) says this line is missing because the earth is, instead, "full of abominations," and so where there should be a link between heaven and earth, a divide exists instead. If chapter 4 existed alone, then Osborne may be right. However, chapters 4 and 5 work together (Stuckenbruck 2011, 235), and the glory of God filling the whole earth is the business of chapter 5.

3.2. Chapter 5 Analysis

John's vision has saved the introduction of the "link between heaven and earth" to coincide with the introduction of Jesus. When the strong angel asks who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals, no one is found in heaven, earth, or the underworld. For the moment, the action remains in the sanctuary, but the scope of the vision has now broadened to all creation.

The solution to the problem of the scroll is the Lamb, who is now central to the scene.[18] The Lamb brings the connection between heaven and earth into sharp focus, for the Lamb has "seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6). In chapter 4, the seven spirits of God were depicted as lamps burning before the heavenly throne; now they are sent upon the earth through the Lamb. Seven lamps, seven eyes roaming the earth, and the spirits of God would remind John's audience of Zechariah 4, where all of these same elements are present as prophetic encouragement in the rebuilding of the temple. Furthermore, the seven horns on the Lamb likely signify his power

17 Koester (2017, 111) says the gesture of casting crowns before the throne "comes from Greco-Roman practice, where delegations of people would give gold laurel wreaths to a ruler in recognition of his authority."

18 The Lamb is central both literally and theologically: Davis 1986, 43; Mounce 1998, 134; Bauckham 1993, 64.

and victory,[19] which are prerequisites to establishing a temple and ordering the cosmos. Just as God was praised for his creation in chapter 4, it seems the Lamb may be involved in creation as well.

After falling down in worship before the Lamb, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders begin the first ring of a three-tiered, expanding circle of worship. They "sing a new song," which is a well-used phrase in the Psalms. In each Psalm in which the phrase appears, the "new song" tells of the salvation or rescue of God.[20] The new song in Revelation 5 similarly tells of how the Lamb redeemed a people for God with his blood. These new people are "from every tribe, language, people, and nation," but these dividing lines are reorganized by the Lamb so that they are made into "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth." The first circle of worship proclaims the Lamb's new creation. The Lamb creates by his blood—by redemption. He makes a kingdom and appoints humans as priestly rulers to populate it.

The second ring of worshippers appears in verses 11-12. They are located "around the throne and the living creatures and the elders." Their sheer number and comparatively generic identity of "angels" indicate that the circle of worship has expanded to the broader heavens. After the praise of the angels, the worship expands again. The third ring of worship is all of creation, every created thing in heaven, earth, under the earth, or on the sea.

With this third ring of worship, the praise of all creation draws the familiar three-part shape of a new temple. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Jerusalem temple and many other holy places/items where God and humans dwelled together were structured in three parts (Beale 2020, 32-33). Beale says these three parts of the earthly temple also correspond to the cosmos: the outer court, where humanity dwelt; the holy place, the part of heaven that could be seen from earth; and the holy of holies, where God was (which is also the pattern seen in the worship of chapter 5) (Beale 2020, 32). Just as the earthly temple reflected the whole cosmos, so now John's vision of the cosmos resembles a temple, and God's glory fills all the earth in the praise of every created thing. The Lamb fulfills the connection between heaven and earth that began in chapter 4, and from his place at the center of the cosmos, he shapes a new creation—a shape drawn in worship.

4. Application

The study of worship is dominated by questions of *what* and *who*. What is (and is not) worship? Who can (or should) be worshipped? This makes sense. For a

19 Gorman 2011, 122; Bauckham 1993, 112. Or compare with the Psalms. Cf. Ps 18:2; 75:4-5, 11; 89:17, 24; 92:10; 112:9; 132:17; 148:14.

20 See Ps 33; 40; 96; 98; 144; 149; and also, Isa 42.

worshipping community, "what and who" are the substance and source of their activity, and the practice(s) of worship and the object(s) of worship will always be of great importance. But there is another, less-asked question: why? For those new to (or on the fringes of) religious life, there is a why barring the way to the what (why do we do these things that we call worship?) and a why that blocks the view of the who (why would God ask us to worship him?). Paying greater attention to the whys of worship can lead those who struggle with it to a renewed vigor in their worship of God, and it can lead those familiar with worship to a deeper appreciation for it. Based on the analysis of worship and temple theology in Revelation 4 and 5 above, this study offers three applications for Christian worship, with the hope that all Christians will have a stronger sense of why we worship.

First, and perhaps most obviously, Christian worship should mold us in the identity of Jesus. This idea is not unique to Revelation, but Revelation's presentation of it through temple theology makes it more vivid and distinct than anywhere else in the New Testament.[21] In chapters 4 and 5, the Lamb's act of redemptive creation begins the founding of a new temple, a new cosmos. Because of this, the Lamb takes his place at the center of the cosmos, seated on the throne alongside God. In all that follows, worship recognizes and participates in this new, Christ-centered world. As N. T. Wright (2017) puts it, worship is both a "sign and means of new creation." We know we live in the kingdom of God and his Christ as we worship. We become "a kingdom of priests to our God" as we worship. We are changed as we worship. When Jesus takes his place at the center of the world, the world is different, and we are different. To worship God is to live in that new world, a world where Christ is king.

We can also flip this first point around to reveal not only how Jesus shapes us in worship, but also that our idolatry shapes us. If worship has a function (if worship *does something*), then we can draw a line from the effects of our worship to the one(s) we are worshipping. The connection between temple theology and worship makes these observations more accurate by directing us to particular categories of measurement: how we view space, how we view time, and how we view human identity. This can be a particularly useful tool, since, in the modern West, where shrines and temples are relatively rare, it can be easy to assume that we do not have much opportunity to worship another god. However, careful examination of moments when our sense of the world and other people changes can reveal our worship of something other than God. James K. A. Smith (2009,10) has done extensive work on unveiling how modern environments—including supposedly secular places like malls, stadiums, and universities—shape our sense of self and

21 How Jesus relates to worship is something that Dunn explores throughout *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus: The New Testament Evidence*. In comparison to the rest of the New Testament, Dunn describes Revelation as "uninhibited" in how it treats Jesus's relationship to Christian worship (2010, 130).

the cosmos by getting us to worship, whether we realize it or not. If we follow the trail of our changing sense of the cosmos and our place within it, we might find that something as mundane as road rage could become eerily similar to a hymn to an unknown god.

Second, the temple of God reaches the earth in the shape of worship. Chapter 4 impresses its readers with the vision of the heavenly temple, but it also leaves those who know their temple theology nervously waiting for the God who "is to come." In chapter 5, the missing line from Isaiah 6—"the whole earth is full of His glory"—manifests in the three-tiered (i.e., temple-shaped) worship professed by all creation. Much of the Revelation remains, and much of what is to come does not give the impression that the earth is full of God's glory; however, chapters 4 and 5 are foundational for all that follows.[22] If chapters 4 and 5 are only the foundation (and not the fulfillment) of the temple-city established in chapter 21, then the allusions to Zechariah 4 should remind readers of God's challenge in that text to not show contempt "for the day of small things" (Zech 4:10). The foundation is the promise of the house, and so the worship of all creation is the promise of the New Jerusalem. Likewise, modern-day Christians should not underestimate the God-given power of their worship. The people of the ANE viewed worship as the glue holding society together, and Revelation 4 and 5 present Christian worship as something like the mortar between the bricks of the New Jerusalem. This perspective lifts up worship as a creative act. What Christians build now in their worship is (and will be) how heaven dwells on earth, and earthly worship is a part of God's purpose to shape the cosmos into a place where God and humans can dwell together. If this is so, Christians should be more ambitious about what they can accomplish with their worship. If a congregation is seeking to evangelize, educate, heal, or bring peace to their broader community, then these chapters of Revelation should inspire them to use worship as a tool to accomplish those goals.

Third, worship connects those who worship to all other worshippers and, ultimately, to the source of worship. The worship of chapters 4 and 5 is antiphonal (Mounce 1998, 137). It begins around the heavenly throne and extends to the farthest reaches of the earth, the underworld, and the sea, but it also finds its way back up, all the way to the heavenly throne, where those closest to the throne hear it and initiate the cycle of worship anew (e.g. Rev 5:14). Revelation presents worship not as transactional, but deeply relational. It passes from one unique group to another, growing all the time, until it returns to where it began. At every stop along the way, worship gives something to those who witness it, and it carries on something from those who respond to it. As it does so, worship facilitates the traffic across time, space, and identity that defines what it means for heaven

22 Chapters 4 and 5 "are programmatic" (Stuckenbruck 2011, 235), "set the stage" (Mounce 1998, 139), "are foundational" (Bauckham 1993, 40), are an introductory summons (Keener 2000, 221), and are "the central and centering vision" (Gorman 2011, 47).

and earth to be linked according to temple theology. Therefore, one of the most powerful reasons to worship is because of its ability to bind God's people together. Furthermore, one of the most powerful ways to interact with worship is to listen and respond to it. As Christians share their worship across individual and congregational divides, and as each individual and congregation responds and builds upon what they witness in their own unique way, they replay the pattern of worship that brought the glory of God to earth in Revelation 4 and 5. It is no wonder then that when the people of God gather together, they find it most natural—most powerful—not to explain the words of Revelation 4 and 5, but to repeat them, to answer Revelation's vision of the temple in localized, cosmic continuity: that is, in worship.

Conclusion

Revelation offers an experience as much as it offers words to read. When someone reads Revelation 4 and 5, they step into a vision of worship that was recorded as an act of worship, which also hopes to inspire worship. If there is any passage through which Christians might better understand their own worship, this is certainly one of them. This study claims that Revelation 4 and 5 says much of what it wants to say through the paradigm of temple theology, and when the worship of the God of Jesus Christ meets the hope of the new, world-encompassing temple, worship is revealed as a gift and a tool. It makes its way down from the very throne of God to earth, linking the two spaces together, and it allows worshippers to participate in the coming new creation in the present, bridging today and the day to come. Most of all, worship affirms to Christians who they are, turning their vision of the cosmos toward the God who is worthy of worship.

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Zachary Shaffer

Ustoličen u štovanju: Razumijevanje funkcija štovanja kroz prizmu teologije hrama u Otkrivenju 4 i 5

Sažetak

Dok se mnogi znanstveni radovi usredotočuju na objekt(e) štovanja u Otkrivenju, u ovome članku razmatraju se funkcije štovanja u 4. i 5. poglavlju Otkrivenja, njihova povezanost s teologijom hrama te način na koji takvo štovanje doprinosi izgradnji svijeta. Polazeći od pregleda različitih drevnih bliskoistočnih kultura, najprije se definira značenje teologije hrama. Potom se promatra štovanje u odnosu na teologiju hrama te se naglašava njegova funkcija identifikacije i orijentacije. Nadalje, kroz prizmu teologije hrama analizira se i štovanje u Otkrivenju 4 i 5, a na temelju toga izvode se zaključci o njegovim funkcijama. Budući da štovanje ima ulogu u ostvarenju vizije prema kojoj će cijeli svijet jednoga dana postati Božji hram, ono se može razumjeti kao čin stvaranja koji odjekuje iz samog Božjeg prijestolja.

A Theological Vision for Discipleship: How Principles and Practices Work Together to Simplify Our Disciple-Making[1]

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Abstract

In this article, I employ doctrine to understand the concept of discipleship from a theological standpoint and the practical outworking of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. My work suggests that disciple-making begins with the triune God as the one who creates and matures his people in Christ-likeness. When rightly understood, this serves to shape how we, God's people, partner with God in making disciples. Specifically, seeing that discipleship is ultimately God's design and work, it follows that God's people should make disciples in submission to and dependence on him. This sort of posture looks like allowing the principles by which God has ordered the disciple-making process to govern our disciple-making practices. In this article, I frame God's disciple-making principles in this way: God creates and matures his people (1) by his Spirit through his Word, (2) in relation to the local church, and (3) over a long period of time. In response to these principles, God's people should uphold the centrality of Word-based ministry, the importance of the local church, and the espousal of accurate expectations in their disciple-making practices. This ordering of principles and practices serves to simplify disciple-making for us by defining success, clarifying a biblical philosophy of ministry, and providing us with boundaries and freedom. Consequently, the theological vision for

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

discipleship I present in this article is something that Christians desperately need to comprehend and appropriate as we are constantly presented with an assortment of new methods and models for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Keywords*: discipleship, Great Commission, philosophy of ministry, Word ministry, local church, progressive sanctification*

Introduction

Most Christians want to faithfully fulfill the Great Commission and so make disciples to the honor and glory of God. Yet, what does faithful disciple-making look like? As someone who spent almost a decade in Croatia as a missionary, doing the hard work of language learning, church planting, pastoral ministry, evangelism, and discipleship, I had (and still have!) a strong desire to see the masses come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and follow him faithfully. I longed to see churches planted, pastors strengthened, and believers encouraged in the work of ministry. But where to begin?

To satisfy such yearnings, I embarked on a quest to understand how to make disciples. I turned to Scripture and mentors, as well as to the ever-growing market of disciple-making programs and materials. At first, the availability of such resources was encouraging; many faithful Christians have given much thought to the topic. Nevertheless, the sheer number of resources and differing opinions I encountered made me confused and disoriented. I imagine I am not alone in my experience. The number of voices that speak authoritatively from different perspectives pulls us in different directions, creating ministerial anxiety.

For example, some have examined the earthly ministry of Jesus and the early church as a model for making disciples, with the most famous of these being the work of Dr. Robert E. Coleman. In his books *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (2010) and *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (2020), Dr. Coleman looks at both the Gospel accounts and the book of Acts in order to deduce principles to inform our disciple-making practices. The result is beneficial reflections on how to faithfully make disciples, which have helped millions. And yet, because his work is confined to the exegesis of selected portions of Scripture, he typically does not explicitly connect his deductions with the rest of the Bible and systematic theology.[2] Given this, readers are left wondering how the whole of Scripture speaks to the topics of discipleship and disciple-making.

There is also the popular work of David L. Watson and Paul D. Watson, who seek to streamline the disciple-making process through the use of small group

2 Though I admit, Dr. Coleman does this occasionally, especially in *The Master Plan of Discipleship*.

Bible studies. Specifically, they want to catalyze what they call "Disciple Making Movements" (Watson and Watson 2014, 5) through the use of their "Discovery Bible Study" (DBS) model (2014, 141-156).[3] This method heavily encourages attendees of a DBS to answer questions and so discover the meaning of the Bible for themselves. Whereas most Bible study groups have a leader who teaches and conveys information, DBS groups function differently. The Watsons believe that if a group leader engages in any sort of teaching ministry, it will truncate the attendees' spiritual growth by drawing them away from reliance on Scripture and the Holy Spirit.[4] Thus, the Watsons state that DBS group leaders should be called "facilitators." Their role is not to teach or correct attendees' interpretations of the Bible, but simply to ask questions to lead attendees in a journey of discovery (2014, 150-151). And, from what they claim, their method works! They recount how in just nine years they witnessed the establishment of 26,911 churches and baptized 933,717 people (2014, xiii-xiv). Nevertheless, we must ask, does this end justify the means? Are these means founded in Scripture? While I commend the Watsons' desire to see disciples multiply and agree with their prioritization of Scripture in disciple-making, their demeaning of teaching ministry as vital to disciple-making is out of line with Scripture's vision of the life of the church, the function of preaching, and the place of pastoral ministry (Roberts 2015). Despite their good intentions and the apparent effectiveness of their methods, this is just one of the practices from their methodology, which is haphazard and theologically dangerous.[5]

A final example of the wide range of voices and perspectives on disciple-making is the multifaceted ministry of churches like Bethel in Redding, California. Bethel Music, the music label and publishing group attached to Bethel church, has a multitude of songs that are sung by churches around the world. The songs are produced with musical finesse, making their style captivating and emotionally moving. And yet, despite the popularity of Bethel music, many of these songs flow from a church and leadership which champions extra-biblical prophecy (Vallotton 2024), heretical views on healing, alleged grave soaking, worship-service glory clouds (Carter 2018) and the use of *The Passion Translation*, a linguistically and textually questionable Bible translation (Carter 2018; Shead 2018). For someone looking in from the outside, though, and regardless of the theological concerns, it may be tempting to think that Bethel has unlocked the secret to affecting millions for Christ through their catchy music. Maybe, instead of upholding traditional

3 For more on this topic, see Debeljuh 2024.

4 "...if we want to disciple people who look to Scripture and the Holy Spirit for answers to their questions, we can't be the answer people… If groups do not learn to go to Scripture and rely on the Holy Spirit… they will not grow as they should and will not replicate much, if at all" (Watson and Watson 2014, 150).

5 For an informative debate on this and similar topics see Buser 2018.

theology in our disciple-making, we should instead appeal to sound frequencies that pull the heartstrings of men and women to win them to Christ.

How do we gain our bearings amid all the opinions and approaches to disciple-making? My claim in this article is that the bewilderment caused by an excess of opinions is dissipated as we allow God's doctrinal principles of disciple-making found in Scripture to govern our disciple-making practices. To state it positively, when we respect this ordering of principles and practices, it serves to simplify disciple-making for us amidst the vast number of discipleship resources available.[6]

To argue this, I will begin by presenting my conviction that the use of doctrine helps us understand the theological nature and practical outworking of discipleship and the Great Commission. This will explain the methodology and hermeneutical framework of my study. With this groundwork laid, I will then introduce disciple-making as God's work. This is essential to understand to rightly approach our role in disciple-making, which is the second topic I will discuss. I will then evaluate three doctrinal principles by which God has ordered the discipleship process. I focus on these three principles not because they represent all that could be said about disciple-making but because, in my experience and research, these particular principles are either underemphasized and not prioritized or they are emphasized but wrongly applied. To state them here, I believe that God creates and matures his people (1) "by his Spirit through his Word,"[7] (2) in relation to the local church, and (3) over a long period of time. As I examine these principles, I will also discuss how they should shape our disciple-making practices. Finally, I will conclude with some brief thoughts on how this all serves to simplify our disciple-making efforts by defining success, clarifying a biblical philosophy of ministry, and providing us with boundaries and freedom.

1. Doctrine and Discipleship

A hermeneutical assumption of mine is that doctrine is our friend, a helpful guide, as we seek to understand the topics of discipleship and disciple-making. Based on the work of John Webster, scholars R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman speak about the relationship between exegesis and doctrine, or, we might say, biblical studies and systematic theology.[8] In the modern theological landscape, these two modes of reasoning are often pitted against one another. At best, their relationship is thought of as moving in one direction: exegesis leads to the production of doc-

6 Though this certainly does not mean that making disciples is an easy and effortless task! As I state in the article, by simplicity I am thinking of clarity.

7 The phrase "by his Spirit through his Word" comes from J. I. Packer 2008, 110; Lawrence 2023.

8 In this paragraph I am drawing from Jamieson and Wittman 2022, xvii-xx, and the more accessible interview with these authors conducted by Thacker 2022.

trine, but doctrine cannot assist exegesis. The logic is that doctrine exists outside of the biblical text and, once formed, acts to impose on the text that which is not there. While agreeing with the fact that exegesis produces doctrine, and while the biblical text is our sole source of authority, Jamieson and Wittman rightly argue that exegesis and doctrine are nevertheless mutually informative. Both exegesis and doctrine work in tandem, advising one another, and so accomplishing the same goal: "understanding and representing the apostles' and prophets' witness to the reality of God and the relation of all things to God." The authors explain, "theology… is not a movement away from Scripture toward some distant logical synthesis," rather, "Dogmatic judgements and concepts that are properly derived from exegesis can enrich and direct exegesis." In this way, Jamieson and Wittman show that doctrine is not a "superstructure" imposed upon Scripture. Instead, doctrine reveals Scripture's "substructure" or, what they call, the "grammar of Scripture." They elaborate, "dogmatic reasoning discerns what must be the case if everything Scripture says is true." It follows that doctrine can be used as a lens through which we can better understand and exegete Scripture. To put it simply, the more one reads and interprets the Bible (exegesis), the more he or she begins to think biblically (doctrine) and so is better able to read and interpret Scripture (exegesis), linking the parts to the whole. It is my conviction that doctrine can and should be employed to help us better understand the concept of discipleship from a theological standpoint as well as the practical outworking of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. This will, in turn, assist us in knowing how to rightly order our disciple-making practices to fulfill the Great Commission.

The concept of discipleship, following Jesus as master and teacher, was foundational to the life and ministry of Jesus. Throughout the gospel accounts, Jesus called individuals to follow him in radical allegiance (Mk 8:34) and taught his followers in word and deed (Mt 5:1-7:25; Mk 4:35-41). Jesus also walked with his disciples (Mk 6:31), ate with them (Jn 21:9-14), modeled godliness to them (Mk 10:35-45), exercised patience with their folly (Mk 8:31-33), and involved them in his ministry (Mt 10:1-15; Lk 9:1-2). Following his death and resurrection, he commissioned them to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20). Any reader of the gospels can hardly make it through the accounts without noting the importance of discipleship to Jesus.

Yet, though we may be tempted to confine a discussion on discipleship to the earthly ministry of Jesus, this temptation overlooks how the historical and cultural concept of discipleship fits theologically into the Bible's presentation of the triune God's work in creating and maturing his people.[9] Just as Yahweh called the descendants of Abraham to himself and established them as his people in the Old Testament (Ex 19:4-6), so this same triune God continued to work both during

9 This is what I believe differentiates a theological understanding of discipleship from a merely Jewish and cultural one.

and following the earthly ministry of Jesus to save sinners and establish them as his people (1 Pet 2:9-10). To claim that something else was in view in Jesus' earthly ministry and the Great Commission would be far-fetched and strange. It is not as though we can divorce Jesus' discipleship agenda as the second person of the Trinity from what the triune God accomplished in the Old Testament and continues to do in our day and age; these realities must be connected. Certainly, if the concept of discipleship was so vital to Jesus' earthly ministry, and then his continued ministry by his Spirit through his disciples (as seen in the Great Commission and the book of Acts), and if there is unity within God and consistency in his persons and works (Heb 13:8; Ps 102:27; Jas 1:17) (Lawrence 2023), then it is reasonable view discipleship as flowing from the plan of the triune God in the salvation and restoration of his people.[10]

This is equally true for the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. Here, Jesus describes how he intends for his command, "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε), to be carried out through the use of the verbal participles "go" (πορευθέντες), "baptizing" (βαπτίζοντες), and "teaching" (διδάσκοντες).[11] Surely, Jesus' command and the means he provides to fulfill it are not random or novel, disconnected from God's eternally established salvific agenda. Rather, as others have observed, the Great Commission fits within the larger vision of how God has ordered the process of creating and maturing his people.[12]

That said, and at risk of prematurely jumping ahead, the three doctrinal principles I list in this article represent the theological ecosystem in which the Great Commission lives. As such, they serve to explain why Jesus' words are not arbitrary and serve to elucidate their practical expression (i.e., why does "teaching" in particular make disciples, and what does teaching look like in real life?). The first principle, "God creates and matures his people by his Spirit through his Word," is assumed in the concepts of "go" and "teaching." We know this because, as I

10 This connection is also demonstrated, however subtly, through the various titles which the NT authors ascribe to God's people. Titles such as "disciples" (Mt 28:18-20), "brothers" (Phil 4:21), "saints" (1 Cor 1:2), or "fellow citizens… members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19), make a theological claim: these people are God's people (Tarrants 2014). In fact, many texts use different titles for God's people interchangeably. For example, in Acts 11:26, we read that "the disciples" were called "Christians." Likewise, in Colossians 1:2, Paul addresses the Christians in Colossae as "saints and faithful brothers." This use of different titles that refer to the same object reveals a "substructure," a theological interconnectedness between them. Consequently, even through something as seemingly minor as titles, we learn that discipleship is intimately connected with membership among God's people.

11 Throughout this article, I use the English Standard Version when quoting Scripture.

12 "The focus of Matthew 28:16-20 is ecclesiology; it's about the Church's inauguration, identity and union with Christ in order to be an extension of his own life in the world. Ecclesiology is the fountainhead of missiology. Like Jesus, we are commissioned to 'do' who we 'are' and that's what makes it GREAT" (Castleman 2007, 70). See also Leeman 2016, 49-53; 105-108.

discuss below, the book of Acts portrays how the apostles began to carry out the Great Commission through going to the nations, and going specifically to preach the gospel and teach believers God's truth. The second principle, "in relation to the local church," is assumed in the concept of "baptizing," which has literary and thematic connections in Matthew's gospel to Jesus' discussion on the church/ ἐκκλησία (Mt 18:15-20; cf. 16:18-20) and is the means of public identification with Jesus and his people (e.g. Acts 2:41) (Leeman 2016, 97-108; Jamieson 2014, 35-53). Finally, the third principle, "over a long period of time," is not assumed in any of the verbal participles in the Great Commission but rather in Jesus' statement, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). While this is a statement intended primarily to comfort the disciples, this also means that the work of disciple-making will be ongoing until Christ's return. As we should expect, there is unity in Scripture and the mind of the triune God and how he works to accomplish his will.

For these reasons, I hold that the doctrinal principles I elaborate on in this article are intimately related to the topic of discipleship and disciple-making and should not be detached from them. Indeed, these principles help us understand discipleship and how we can fulfill the Great Commission. Therefore, throughout this work, when I use terms such as "discipleship," "discipleship process," and "God's discipleship economy," I am not referring to Jesus' earthly ministry in particular but rather the plan of the triune God for the salvation and maturation of his people.[13] Additionally, for the sake of brevity, when I use the word "God" throughout this article, I am referring to the Christian, triune God, while also understanding that each person of the Trinity has their specific roles in creating and maturing God's people.[14]

With this groundwork laid, we can now turn to the body of this article, which begins with God and his role as the one who creates and matures his people. This

13 For the sake of space, I have not reviewed the outworking of these principles in the earthly disciple-making ministry of Jesus, though I do believe that they are present. For an overview of the role of the Spirit in the Word-based ministry of Jesus see Ash 2011, 7-32. Regarding the importance of the church, I believe this is seen in seed form in Jesus' calling of the disciples as a unit, a community (Coleman 2010, 45). Additionally, the church was the result of Jesus' earthly ministry. Not only does Jesus look forward to its formation in Matthew 16:13-20; 18:15-20, but then the beginning fulfillments of the Great Commission in Acts has the church (and particularly local churches) in view. For more on this, see Dever 2016. Finally, the concept that discipleship as a long process is obvious to Jesus' earthly ministry with his disciples. He knew what kind of men with their multifaceted flaws he called to follow him. He bore with their folly and did not expect change overnight. In this sense, the first disciples' sanctification was progressive in nature.

14 To elaborate on Trinitarian doctrine proper would require extensive space which I do not have. For a fuller discussion on the distinct roles of Father, Son, and Spirit in the life of God's people see Reeves 2012; Jamieson and Wittman 2022.

will eventually lead to an understanding of how God's ordering of the discipleship process affects how we work to make disciples.

2. God's Work in Disciple-Making

God alone creates his people, giving "*spiritual* life to the *spiritually* dead."[15] Humankind did not present God with a roadmap for redemption or conjure up the idea of worshiping him. In fact, it's the opposite. Throughout Scripture, humans are presented as dead in sin and rejectors of God and his goodness; we do not naturally fear God (Eph 2:1-3). David bemoans this reality when he says, "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Ps 14:3; cf. 53:1-3; Rom 3:10-11). Despite what we deserve, God, in his mercy, seeks us out to save us and create redeemed people for his glory. As the apostle John claims, God is the initiator of salvation: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 Jn 4:10). On a similar note, Paul writes that it is God who blesses us, elects us, adopts us, redeems us, and forgives us, by his grace and for his glory (Eph 1:3-10). Paul also makes clear that we are passive in God's work of justification; it is a work done to us, not by us (Rom 5:1). God's unilateral work of creation in salvation is vital to discipleship, and yet His role in believers' lives does not end there.

God also works in those he saves to bring them to spiritual maturity. In Romans 8:1-4, we learn that through the Spirit, believers are enabled to fulfill the requirements of the law and walk in a manner worthy of God's righteous standards. Paul elaborates on this work of transformation similarly in 1 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." God is invested in those he saves to change how they think, act, speak, and live. He not only gives them a new name but, over time, works in them a new, Christlike character.

Given this, it is reasonable to conclude that discipleship exists first and foremost because of God and his creating and maturing work. No one becomes a disciple of Jesus apart from God's saving work in their life. Moreover, no one can hope to grow in Christian maturity without God's assistance. Disciples of Jesus owe the reality of their discipleship first and foremost to God and his sovereign grace. This is vital to a discussion on disciple-making because it is only as we understand God's role that we can rightly comprehend ours.

15 A phrase borrowed from Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert 2012, 27.

3. Our Work in Disciple-Making

While disciple-making ultimately depends on God, he uses human servants to help bring this process to fruition. To be clear, while humans cannot save, the Great Commission assumes that Jesus' disciples can make disciples. To make sense of this relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, I want to examine 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 and Matthew 28:18-20. Both of these texts showcase the interplay between God and his human servants in the discipleship process. In turn, they teach us that because discipleship is ultimately God's design and work, God's servants should make disciples in submission to and dependence on him.

The Corinthian church was divided, with believers splitting into factions centered around their favorite preachers, which led to "quarreling" (1 Cor 1:11). Paul explains the essence of their factionalism in this way: "Each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ'" (1:12). How did Paul address this problem?

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:5 to combat this party spirit, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each." Allow me to make some observations. First, Paul's words, "through whom you believed," remind his readers that men like Paul and Apollos were instrumental in their conversion; through them, the Corinthians believed the word of the gospel (3:5; cf. 2:1). Second, with the phrase, "servants," Paul makes sure the church understands how unimpressive and insignificant preachers like himself and Apollos are and therefore, how absurd it is to boast in them. Third, Paul's correction continues as he points believers to the true source of their conversion and reason for boasting: "I planted, Apollos watered, but *God* gave the growth" (3:6; *emphasis mine*). While human preachers are instrumental in the conversion process, God is indispensable. Finally, Paul concludes by teaching the Corinthians that they should conceptualize servants like himself and Apollos as "God's fellow workers" (3:9). In just a few words, Paul effectively demonstrates how irrational the believer's divisions are, redirects their focus to God, and provides them with a category for how to think about preachers like Paul and Apollos.

For our purposes, this text shines a light on God's use of human servants in disciple-making. First, this passage reveals that God partners with humans to make disciples; both God and humans were involved in the Corinthians' conversion story. Second, this passage shows the roles of each party in this partnership. Even though Paul and Apollos were influential in the Corinthians' conversion, God alone granted growth (3:6), which means that the parties in this partnership are not equally responsible. No matter how well Paul and Apollos presented the

gospel (2:1-4), human efforts would have been in vain without God's work in the Corinthians. This implies that humans depend on God in their disciple-making efforts. Additionally, even though the term "fellow workers" (partners) is honorific, Paul does not view himself too highly, for he simultaneously sees himself and Apollos as God's servants (3:5). From this, we learn that the disciple-making partnership that God has established with humans contains an ordering of relationships. Paul and Apollos, and for that matter, all of God's partners, are God's inferiors. This implies ideas of subordination and submission; God is the master, the commander, and the superior, as his partners endeavor to make disciples.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 provides similar conclusions. Having risen from the dead, Jesus announces, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). With these words, Jesus claims that he is king over all (Jamieson 2020, 13-15). According to Jesus, the implication of his universal kingship is that his disciples are to make more disciples ("therefore… make disciples," 28:19) by going, baptizing, and teaching (28:19-20) (Morris 1992, 746; France 1985, 419). Jesus' rank as king and his disciples' status as his subjects are implicit here. The king gives a decree and specific directions for how to carry it out while his subjects listen and submit. As they go about this work, the king expects them to do so within the bounds which he has set. After all, the subjects' work proceeds from the king's decree and design, not theirs. Intrinsic to the disciple-making partnership between God and his people is a relational hierarchy in which God is king, and his people are his servants. Consequently, both 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 and Matthew 28:18-20 clarify the nature of the Christian's role in disciple-making.

Our role in disciple-making is to execute our King's command to make disciples, but we must do so with an attitude of submission and dependence on our King. As the initiator and designer of disciple-making, God is the one who sets the agenda of what the discipleship process looks like and how it happens. God is not looking for our creative input as if he is bumbling around, clueless about accomplishing his will. Instead, as those whom God has enlisted into his service, we heed his commands and follow his lead. Moreover, since disciple-making ultimately hinges on God, we must depend on God in all our efforts. In this sense, dependence does not mean laziness, for as we have seen, God has given us work to do. Instead, dependence means trusting God to do what cannot be done apart from him (create and mature his people) and looking to him for guidance in the work he has given us to participate in. This guidance comes particularly as we allow God and the means he uses to create and mature his people to shape how we work to make disciples. In other words, God's disciple-making principles should govern our disciple-making practices. To think or do otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of our partnership with God. So, what are these principles, and how do they affect our disciple-making practices?

4. How God Creates and Matures His People

I believe that God creates and matures his people (1) by his Spirit through his Word, (2) in relation to the local church, and (3) over a long period of time. To be clear, I am not claiming that these three principles represent *everything* that could be said about God's ordering of the discipleship process.[16] Nevertheless, I have chosen to highlight the principles listed because, as I trust my study will show, they are foundational to God's discipleship economy. Moreover, I fear that some overlook these particular principles due to ignorance regarding their Scriptural basis and/or the favoring of other methods. Another possibility is that some rightly grasp the importance of these principles, but implement them in ways that undermine the principles' theological integrity and unity as understood in Scripture.[17]

As submissive and dependent partners in disciple-making, we cannot turn a blind eye to the above principles as if they have no bearing on our practices. Instead, just as imperatives flow from indicatives, practices flow from principles. To make disciples well, we must allow these principles to guide and govern our practical efforts and actions, as the current of a river guides a raft. Indeed, aligning ourselves with God's sovereign ordering, not against it, glorifies God and benefits our neighbor. Thus, in the following section, I will examine the biblical grounds of each principle in Scripture and discuss how they affect the practical application of our disciple-making efforts.

4.1. By His Spirit Through His Word

The very beginning of the Bible introduces us to God's creative activity through the dual working of his Spirit and his Word. Following the statement, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1), readers learn how God accomplished this. First, "the Spirit (רוּחַ/*rûaḥ*) of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (1:2), and second, God speaks the cosmos and all living creatures, including humans, into existence (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26) (Packer 2021, 67; Lawrence 2023). God created life and all that is using his Spirit through his spoken word. In this way, Genesis sets a pattern for how God creates, which later biblical authors pick up on: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath (רוּחַ/*rûaḥ*) of his mouth all their host" (Ps 33:6; cf. Ps 104:30; Heb 11:3). Moreover, this pattern is not confined to the initial acts of creation but rather prepares us for how God would re-create spiritually dead humans as he

16 For example, we could speak about God's intention to restore believers into the image of Christ/God or the place of spiritual disciplines like prayer and personal Bible reading.

17 For concrete examples of all these situations, look at my examples provided in the introduction of this article.

calls them to life.[18] This becomes particularly clear when we examine the need for, as well as the anticipation and inauguration of the New Covenant.

Humanity's need for re-creation is apparent in Scripture from the Fall in Genesis 3 onward. The biblical authors make this clear by describing man's heart as fundamentally and overwhelmingly wicked (Bavinck 2008, 4:30; 46-47). This first becomes explicit in Genesis 6 where, after generations of Adam and Eve's offspring have showcased the ill effects of sin, we read, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). While God rightly responds to this evil in judgment through the flood, and though the flood itself was an act of re-creation, it did not change humanity's heart problem (Wenham 1994, 66-67; Waltke 2001, 127-130, 143; Dempster 2006, 73). Noah shipwrecks his legacy (9:20-24), mankind erects Babel (11:1-9), Abraham acts dishonestly (12:10-20; 20:1-18), the Patriarchs fall into folly (27:1-46; 37:3), God's chosen people venerate idols (Ex 32:1-6), Moses fails to obey (Num 20:1-13), and the list goes on. This is summarized by the words of Deuteronomy 30:6, which are promissory in scope. Still, their very existence speaks to the wretched state of humanity: "the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Throughout the OT, it seems that no one is exempt from the need for a complete reformation of the heart. Yet, there was hope. As Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (2008, 4:47) notes:

> …as apostasy, unfaithfulness, and the hardness of people's hearts became more and more evident in history, the prophets stressed with increasing forcefulness that an inner change had to come… And in that respect, human beings of themselves are unable to bring it about… But what human beings cannot bring about in themselves or others, God will do in the future.

The prophets emphasized this "inner change" that anticipated the New Covenant. Ezekiel in particular has much to say.

In Ezekiel 36-37, God's people are described as being spiritually dead. Specifically, they are depicted as dry bones and buried in the grave (37:3; 11-14) due to their idolatry and exile (36:18-19) (McGregor 1994, 740). And yet, despite their dead state, God commits to recreating them. Beginning in chapter 36, God promises to give his people a new heart by the working of his Spirit: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezek

18 "The Triune God produces all things in creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit" (Herman Bavinck 2008, 29).

36:26-27). As this promise makes clear, the result of God's life-giving work is the ability to walk in his ways, something Israel had been incapable of doing since their inception as God's people. God would cause them to be born again. Ezekiel 37 depicts how this would take place (Leeman 2016, 35-36; Lawrence 2018, 60; Taylor 1969, 228).

Here, the process of bringing the dead Israel to life involves two steps (Taylor 1969, 228-229). First, after surveying the utter hopelessness of the situation (the bones are, in fact, "very dry"; 37:2) (Taylor 1969, 230), God tells Ezekiel to prophesy his word to the bones (37:4-6). This word is a summons to life. Just as God spoke and created all things in Genesis 1, when Ezekiel preaches God's word, flesh forms (37:7-8). But the formed bodies were lifeless (37:8); the work was incomplete (McGregor 1994, 741). Thus, second, God commands Ezekiel to "prophesy to the breath (רוּחַ/*rûaḥ*)… that they may live." When he does this, the bodies come to life. Just as the Spirit joined with the word in Genesis 1-2 to create, so here, by God's Spirit through his preached Word, re-creation occurs, and the spiritually dead are brought to spiritual life (Dever and Gilbert 2012, 27). This scene depicts how God would bring his people out of the grave and give them a new heart (37:11-14). Consequently, with this promise in hand, Israel was left to wait for God to enact his promise in the New Covenant.

This brings us to the New Testament, where the principle of the Spirit and the Word remains consistent as Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant. Jesus, following his death and resurrection, left his disciples to be his witnesses to make more disciples (Acts 1:8; Mt 28:18-20; Jn 15:26-27). In Acts 1:8 specifically, we learn that being a witness for the risen Christ depends on the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus told his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses." This teaches that the disciples' ability to testify to the truth of Christ in a meaningful way was predicated on the giving of the Spirit and the power that he bestows. Why was this the case?

First, before Acts 1:8, Jesus claimed that the Spirit would come to teach and guide the disciples into the truth.[19] J. I. Packer has an excellent discussion in his classic *Knowing God*. He summarizes this aspect of the Spirit's work by saying, "Christ sent the Holy Spirit to [the disciples], to teach them all truth and so save them from all error, to remind them of what they had been taught already and to reveal to them the rest of what their Lord meant them to learn" (Jn 12:49-50; 14:26; 16:12-14; 17:8, 14). Significant for our purposes, he connects the idea of the Spirit's teaching ministry with the disciples' ability to act as Jesus' witnesses: "when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth… he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness" (Jn 15:26-

19 For the connection between witnessing (as seen in the previous paragraph) and the Spirit's teaching ministry as outlined in this paragraph, I am indebted to Packer 2021, 70.

27). According to Packer, this is what we call the Spirit's work of "*revealing* and *inspiring*" the truth, the net result being the New Testament (the written record of the apostle's teaching) and the message of the gospel (e.g., 1 Cor 2:9-13) (Packer 2021, 70-71). Thanks to this, once Christ ascended and sent the Spirit, the disciples were able to "communicate [all truth] with all truthfulness" (Packer 2021, 70).

Second, the Spirit's role is that of "*illumination*," opening blind eyes to behold the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4) (Packer 2021, 71). This happens as the gospel's truth, the word of God, is proclaimed. In the words of Anthony Hoekema (1994, 89), the Spirit accomplishes this work by "(1) opening the heart and thus enabling the hearer to respond (Acts 16:14), (2) enlightening the mind so that the hearer can understand the gospel message (1 Cor 2:12-13; cf. 2 Cor 4:6), and (3) bestowing spiritual life so that the hearer can turn to God in faith (Eph 2:5)."[20] In this way, as the Spirit led the disciples into all truth and enabled them to proclaim the word of the gospel, the Spirit also worked in the recipients of the Word to create life from dry bones. Or, as Paul says, "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6; cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5).

Far from being abstract theological realities with no real-world counterpart, these truths are displayed dramatically in Acts 2 on Pentecost (Lawrence 2023). Here, what Acts 1:8 anticipated (and for that matter, passages like Deut 30:6; Ezek 36:26-28; 37:1-14) came to fruition: The Spirit came and filled God's people (2:1-4). While all those who were present and filled with the Spirit acted as Christ's witnesses through speaking in tongues (2:4), Luke particularly highlights Peter (e.g., 2:40), who preached a sermon and proclaimed the word of the gospel (2:14-40). As Peter preached, Luke notes that his listeners were "cut to the heart." As a result, over 3,000 people responded to the gospel with repentance and faith (implied in baptism) and were counted among God's people (2:37, 41). It is not a stretch to connect this cutting of the heart and conversion to the work of the Spirit as the Word was proclaimed. What Ezekiel anticipated came to fruition. In Bavinck's (2019, 394) words, "Although in a preparatory way they were united earlier, Word and Spirit on the day of Pentecost were fully and definitively united." God creates his people by his Spirit through his Word.

Finally, the same means by which God creates his people is the same means by which he brings them to Christlike maturity. Having been given a new heart, believers begin to live in line with their new desires and lead God-honoring lives. This happens by God's Spirit through his Word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that

20 See also Boice and Ryken 2009, 135-154.

the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Here, the dual working of the Spirit and the Word is present in Paul's description of the nature of Scripture: "breathed out by God" (θεόπνευστος/*theopneustos*). This word is a combination of the Greek words θεός/*theos* ("God") and πνέω/*pneō* ("to breath"), meaning, among other things, that the Spirit's work stands behind the formation of the Christian Scriptures and, therefore, he is its source (Knight 1992, 446-447; Ward 2009, 78-89). In Paul's opinion, this spiritual reality determines Scripture's utility, namely to bring men and women of God to a state of increasing Christian maturity in which they are equipped to do what God desires of them (Knight 1992, 450). This happens as the God-breathed, Spirit-inspired Word is used for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Thus, the testimony of Scripture is that God creates and then matures his people by his Spirit through his Word.[21]

The above principle implies that Word-based ministry should take center stage in our disciple-making practices. Since discipleship concerns how God creates and matures his people by his Spirit through his Word, it is only logical that we prioritize God's Word in our disciple-making efforts. This is not to say that Word-based ministry is the only means of disciple-making. Still, it is to say that Word-based ministry should rightly, based on the theology of Scripture, have a place of prominence in our ministry and not be subverted or minimized due to the prioritization of other means and methods. Nevertheless, the concept of Word-based ministry could mean various things. What does it look like?

In the New Testament, we find examples of the Word-based ministry that every believer should exercise both through evangelism toward unbelievers and edification toward believers (Griffiths 2017, 45-49). Regarding evangelism, Peter, speaking to Christians in general, reminds them: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). Again later, in the same letter he encourages believers who face opposition to be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (3:15). Acts also has examples of both apostles and non-apostles proclaiming the gospel evangelistically (e.g. Acts 8:5; 13:1-14:28; 18:24-28). Regarding edification, believers are supposed to allow the Word to dwell richly in them, and so minister the Word to one another through admonishment in all wisdom and singing the truth to one another (Col 3:16). Christians are supposed to speak the truth to one another (Eph 4:25), building others up and so giving grace to them (Eph 4:29) (Leeman 2016, 166). While more could be said on the

21 For more on how Scripture is used by God to mature his people in Christlikeness, and specifically how "theological reflection" on Scripture causes us to behold God and so be transformed into his image see Jamieson and Wittman 2022, 3-40.

Word ministry of all believers, this suffices to show that all believers have a place in God's plan to make disciples by his Spirit as they minister his Word.[22]

Yet, there is another form of Word-based ministry that is distinct from the general Word-based ministry of all believers: preaching or the "*public proclamation of God's word.*"[23] Jonathan Griffiths insightfully notes that none of the Greek verbs used for preaching in the NT are used to "frame an instruction, command or commission for believers, in general, to 'preach.'"[24] Instead, according to Griffiths, preaching is exercised by and, in some cases, commanded to individuals in a position of recognized authority, such as Jesus (Mk 1:14-15), the apostles (1 Cor 15:1-14), Timothy (2 Tim 4:2), and, by implication, pastors (2 Tim 2:2).[25] This fact distinguishes preaching as a particular form of Word ministry that only some believers, and indeed not every believer, are expected to carry out.[26]

Just as the general Word-based ministry of all believers is for evangelistic and edification purposes, so is the Word-based ministry of preaching. In addition to the examples of Ezekiel and Peter in my survey of the Spirit and the Word above, we do not have to search far for examples in Scripture of preaching that leads to conversions. For instance, Paul, recounting his experience in Thessalonica, reminds the church: "Our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction… And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:5-6; cf. Tit 1:1-3; 1 Cor 2:1-5). Moreover, the Bible demonstrates that the preaching of the Word was used in the gathered assembly of local churches for the believers' edification and growth. This is clear from passages like 2 Timothy 4:2, where, on the heels of Paul's comment on the nature and utility of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17), Paul commands his protégé to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." This command was the "precise way" (Griffiths 2017, 55-56) in which Timothy, as a church leader in Ephesus, was to use the Scriptures for the good of the gathered church.[27] In short, God uses preaching as

22 For more on this, see Griffiths 2017, 46-47; Leeman 2016, 159-170.

23 This is Griffith's "working definition" of preaching which, though it does not encapsulate all of his conclusions on what preaching is, is sufficient to encapsulate what I mean to refer to in this article. For a fuller idea of what preaching is according to the NT and in biblical-theological terms, I would highly recommend reading Griffiths 2017, 17, 120-133.

24 This is based on the Greek verbs in the NT that are used for preaching that Griffiths chooses survey in his lexical study. For more see Griffiths 2017, 36.

25 Griffiths 2017, 35-36, 47-49.

26 For a detailed and nuanced discussion on this interplay between the Word ministry of all believers and that of preaching as designated in the NT to particular believers see Griffiths 2017, 47-49.

27 Notice how the description of Scripture's usefulness is matched by the commands which follow "preach the word." This is noted by Griffiths 2017, 55-56.

a distinct form of Word-based ministry given to recognized Christian leaders[28] to create and then mature his people.[29]

It follows that if God creates and matures his people by his Spirit through the Word-based ministry of preaching, then the type of preaching that forms disciples has Scripture as its source. Another term for this is "expositional preaching." To exposit something is to bring out what is already there, to expose it. When put in the context of preaching Scripture, I find David Helm's definition the most helpful: "Expositional preaching is empowered preaching that rightly submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of the biblical text" (Helm 2014, 13). Helm's point is that, for preaching to be expositional, the structure of the biblical text and the argument the biblical author is making in the text must dictate the structure and argument of the preacher's sermon. He continues, "In that way it brings out of the text what the Holy Spirit put there… and does not put into the text what the preacher thinks might be there" (Helm 2014, 13). In other words, an expositional approach not only conforms to the biblical text but also protects the preacher from eisegesis, or bringing his agenda to the biblical text and so potentially hijacking it for purposes that fall outside the scope of the text's intended purpose. Put differently, expositional preaching, by its very nature, roots the content of the preacher's preaching in God's word and safeguards him from preaching his message, which cannot accomplish what only God's Spirit-empowered Word can.[30] While much could be said on the practicalities of expositional sermon preparation (and there are many commendable resources on this topic),[31] my point here is that if we want to make disciples, we need to engage in, whether as preachers or listeners, the *expositional* preaching of Scripture.

In summary, this first principle of disciple-making is that God creates and matures his people by his Spirit through his Word. Scripture's witness to this reality should move us to engage in Word-based ministry in general and preaching in particular in our efforts to make disciples. Specifically, the type of preaching we should practice and sit under should be expositional, for it serves to help us speak

28 I specifically mean, in the post-apostolic age, pastors/elders. Space does not allow me to develop this further. For more, see Griffiths 2017, 53-55.

29 Due to space and the fact that this is not an article primarily on preaching, I have not discussed why preaching is not only a distinct form of Word-based ministry but an essential form to God's discipleship economy. My hope is that the command for non-apostolic pastors like Timothy to preach, the fact that Timothy was to pass that ministry on to other faithful men (2 Tim 2:2), and the mere reality of preaching's pervasive presence throughout all of Scripture as a regular practice of leaders among God's people would suffice to convince you that preaching (whether actually doing it or sitting under it) be essential to the diet of every disciple of Christ. And yet, I fear that for some this is not enough. For more on the essential nature of preaching and the fact that God intends for his written Word to be preached see Ash 2010, 23-34.

30 For an argument on the preached word as God's actual word see Leeman 2016, 39-41; Griffiths 2017, 58-60.

31 Visit https://simeontrust.org/; see also Helm 2014; Dever and Gilbert 2012.

God's word, which, when joined by his Spirit, gives life to God's people and grows them in Christ-like maturity. All of this naturally leads to our second point.

4.2. In Relation to the Local Church

To state that "God creates and matures *his people* by his Spirit through his Word" is simply another way to describe how God forms the church. The term "God's people" is a synonym for the church. Specifically, it refers to what theologians call the "universal church," that is, all of God's people across space and time. Moreover, the universal church is not currently a visible reality.[32] Christians know this from their experience. All God's people from all time and every place are not gathered together here on earth. For that reality, we wait for the day when the redeemed from every tongue, tribe, and nation assemble in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 7:9-10). In contrast, what we currently behold are glimpses of this invisible reality through what we call "local churches."[33] Just as the dual working of the Spirit and the Word creates God's people and joins believers to Christ in a mystical, invisible sense, so this dual working forms local churches.

In his brief but impactful book, *Understanding the Great Commission*, Mark Dever argues that throughout the book of Acts, "wherever the gospel goes, churches show up" (Dever 2016, 18). This begins in Acts 2, as Peter preached and over 3,000 people were not just added to the universal body of Christ, but geographically to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 5:11; 8:1). Preaching and the subsequent formation of churches then continues throughout the book as local churches form in Antioch (11:20-26), Lystra and Iconium (14:1, 7, 21, 23), Corinth (18:8), and Ephesus (see 19:1-9, 17-20 and compare with 20:17) (Dever 2016, 18-19). Even outside of the book of Acts, we read NT letters written to local churches, which were formed throughout the history of the early church by the preaching of the gospel (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1). The Spirit working through the Word inevitably creates local churches.[34] And yet, church planting does not

32 Here and in the rest of this paragraph, I draw from Dever 2016, 9-10.

33 For a helpful discussion on the local church as the visible representation of the universal church and the local church as a concept in the NT see Leeman 2020, 41-97.

34 I admit, there is more to the forming of a local church than the Word rightly preached. As many have historically claimed, the marks of a true church are "the right preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper" (Dever 2012, 21). To be more concrete, the universal church becomes visible first as it is created and gathered by the Word but then second through participation in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Scripture's witness is that baptism and the Lord's Supper act as the God-ordained practices which mark off the people of God from those who are not his people. By "mark off" I do not mean that the ordinances have a salvific function, for they only point to the realities of the gospel which we believe by faith and so become a part of God's people. Rather, the ordinances, when rightly practiced, make God's people visible in a public sense. They are observable acts in which God's people participate which distinguish them from those who do not. When practiced in conjunc-

cease with the end of the book of Acts. How does the Word continue to go forth to create and mature God's people and form local churches?

In God's ordering of things, I believe that God employs the Word-based ministry of local churches as the primary means of making disciples and planting churches. As I already established, the ministry of the Word is not just for the apostles, nor is it only for leaders, but it is for all of God's people. Additionally, given that Word-based ministry is the means God uses to create and mature his people, we can conclude that God employs the Word-based ministry of all of his people to accomplish this. And in this sense, we can say that God uses the Word-based ministry of local churches to form other local churches. This takes place as pastors of local churches teach the Word and equip the members of those churches to minister the Word to one another.[35] This perpetuates growth in Christ-like maturity and theological understanding, leading to more disciple-making and church planting, where this process continues. This cyclical nature of Word-based ministry is God's plan for disciple-making. Let me explain in more detail.

In the New Testament, God has established that certain men, whom we commonly refer to as pastors, lead and oversee local churches.[36] How do they do this? One of their primary responsibilities and a qualification that distinguishes them from everyone else is the practice of teaching ("an overseer must be… able to teach," 1 Tim 3:2; cf. Tit 1:9; Acts 20:17-35). Also, as I discussed previously, a significant way such teaching takes place is through the regular preaching of God's word in the gathering of a local church (e.g., 2 Tim 4:2). Thus, regardless of what we may think it means for pastors to lead a church, biblically speaking their leadership is expressed through their ministry of the Word which includes preaching.

Yet, formal preaching is not the only way pastors exercise their teaching role in a church.[37] Teaching can take many forms. Paul exhorts Timothy to teach authoritatively (1 Tim 4:11). Then he says in the same breath, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (4:12). Timothy was to teach verbally but also visually through his

tion with the right preaching of God's word, local churches have clear boundaries and are made discernable. While this is essential to understanding what makes a local church a church, for the sake of brevity, my point in this article is to simply demonstrate that there is a direct line from the universal church to the local church as its temporary and visible manifestation. For more on the ordinances and the visibility of the church see Jamieson 2015; Dever 2012, 21-38; Schreiner 2015a, 91-106; Schreiner 2015b, 131-144.

35 This is the overarching argument of Leeman 2016.

36 I am of the conviction that the words "overseer/ἐπισκοπή," "elder/πρεσβύτερος," and "pastor/ποιμήν" are used synonymously used throughout the NT to refer to the same office which most Christians today refer to as pastor. Moreover, I also hold that the biblical vision is for men in particular to hold this office and so oversee and lead local churches.

37 "Sermons are necessary but not sufficient… it is the word of the gospel that is sufficient rather than any one particular form of its delivery" (Marshall and Payne 2021, 102-103). See also Colman 2010, 47.

example of godly living. In this same vein, the life-on-life teaching and training that defined our Lord's earthly ministry (Mk 8:38) is reflected in the ministry of leaders throughout the New Testament. For example, Paul frequently calls others to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6). Thus, imitation is a form of teaching alongside oral communication. Additionally, Paul taught not only in public but also in private settings. When departing from Ephesus, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and *from house to house*" (Acts 20:20; *emphasis mine*). These examples demonstrate that the Word-ministry of pastors is not confined to the public gathering of the church only but is "inescapably personal and domestic" (Marshall and Payne 2021, 107). The pastor's teaching ministry is holistic and is exported through his public preaching, private encouragements, and speechless life.

As the pastor teaches the Word, it equips the church members to do the work of ministry. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul claims that God gave various gifts to the church, including pastors/teachers, for a particular purpose: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood…" (Eph 4:12-13). As the pastor(s) of a local church leads through Word-based ministry, this trains the members of that church to carry out the duties of ministry that God has assigned to them. This certainly includes ministering the Word to one another, as previously discussed. In this way, the pastor's Word-based ministry fuels the Word-based ministry of a local church's members. This occurs in two spheres: inside and outside the regular public gathering.

Throughout the Bible, God determines and orders what the worship of his people should look like.[38] In the New Testament, in particular, many have historically agreed that the Word is supposed to govern and permeate every aspect of the corporate worship of a church. Christians are commanded and shown to publicly preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2; Rom 10:14-17; Acts 20:27; Lk 24:46-49; 1 Thess 5:27), read the Word (1 Tim 4:13), sing the truths of the Word (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19), pray in light of the Word (1 Tim 2:1-3; 8; 1 Cor 11:2-15), and see the word of the gospel publicly displayed in the ordinances of baptism (Acts 2:38; 41) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34) (Duncan III 2011b, 65-69; Lawrence and Dever 2009, 236-240). Note that most of these Word ministries do not exclusively belong to pastors but rather are extensions of the entire congregation ministering the Word to itself for its edification.

Practically, this affects and equips each church member to minister the Word outside of the Sunday service. As the church gathers to bathe in the Word, it then scatters, bearing the fragrance of the Word. Put differently, the church gathering

38 For more on this see Duncan III 2011a, 17-50; Carson 2002, 11-63.

around the Word prepares the church to live in response to the Word and equips the church to speak the truths of the Word. Members get involved in each other's lives (Acts 2:42-47; Rom 12:3-13; Col 3:12-17; Eph 4:25-5:2) and hold each other accountable (1 Cor 5:1-13; Mt 18:15-20). Members also exhort one another to flee from sin (Heb 3:13), comfort the suffering with God's promises (1 Thess 4:18), and counsel the confused and wayward with God's wisdom (1 Thess 5:14). Parents are better enabled to raise their children in the care and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). Older men are equipped to invest in younger men (Tit 2:2, 6), and older women to lead younger women (Tit 2:3-5). When the authority and the ministry of the Word control the gathering of a church, as Colin Marshall and Tony Payne (2021, 100) state, "The congregational gathering becomes not only a theatre for ministry… but also a spur and impetus for the worship and ministry that each disciple will undertake in the week to come."

Finally, a congregation that is equipped by the Word is ready to share the good news of the gospel evangelistically. Only as believers understand the gospel are they able to proclaim it and, as Peter says, "to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). As members of a local church minister the Word to each other and grow in godliness, their corporate life of service fosters unity and unity results in an evangelistic witness: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35) (Dever and Dunlop 2015, 38-39). While much could be written about the practical outworking of Word-based ministry in a local church, I think this sufficiently demonstrates that the local church is essential to God's discipleship economy. Thus, we can claim that God creates and matures his people through his Spirit through his Word *in relation to the local church*.

This principle has implications for our disciple-making practices, a few of which I will highlight here. First, as Christians seek to make disciples, our efforts should never be without the local church in view. While many ministries focus on evangelism (a reasonable and necessary endeavor), some have conversion as their end goal, excluding the vital role of the local church in a convert's life. The work of discipleship does not end when God's Spirit recreates an individual through his Word; rather, it is just the beginning. For any disciple to continue to grow, they must be connected to a local church. We should proclaim the gospel to see many saved, and if we genuinely care about them, we will walk with them to ensure they become church members.

Second, a comprehensive Word-based ministry should take center stage in the life of a local church. This begins with pastors devoting their time to the study of God's word and the teaching of God's word, both publicly and privately. As the church gathers on the Lord's Day, its corporate worship should center around the

Word. Even the songs a church sings corporately should be theologically accurate and rich, for they function to catechize God's people (Col 3:16-17). Outside of the Sunday gathering, pastors and members should encourage activities like small group bible studies, engagement with Christian literature, pastoral training programs, one-on-one discipleship, counseling, and the like, all to see the Word fuel the life and growth of the church.[39] God's people are people of the Book, which should be reflected in the life of a local church.

Finally, the members of a church should do their best to free up and support their pastor(s) to devote their time and energy to studying God's word and teaching God's people. Why? This is for their benefit and growth in Christlike maturity! This might look like (as churches are able) financing pastor(s) to devote their time to this work (1 Tim 5:17). It may be members standing by their pastor with a spirit of solidarity, rejoicing for him as he engages in theological training to better serve God's people. Regardless of how this looks, in general, members should yearn for their pastor(s) to shepherd them through the Word and champion them in this work.

In summary, the second principle is that God creates and matures his people in relation to the local church. God's Spirit creates the universal and local church through his Word. This same means is then used to grow local churches in spiritual maturity. This happens from the top down as pastors minister the Word and the members engage in Word-based ministry to one another. Moreover, as the Word permeates the life of a church, it naturally leads to the dissemination of the gospel, new converts, and the possibility of new local churches. This means that church-based and Word-based ministry should always color our disciple-making practices.

4.3. Over a Long Period of Time

As the Word governs the life of a local church and affects the spiritual growth of God's people, it can be shocking to discover that God's people do not always look and act as they should. Those who are categorically changed from sinner to saint still sin; there is a need for spiritual growth. How can this be? Our Christian experience and, more importantly, Scripture present us with the tension of being and becoming.[40]

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians portrays a church that is counted among God's people despite its significant moral failures. Throughout the letter, their failures are apparent. Some of their sins included promoting factionalism (1:10-4:21), tolerating incest (5:1-13), suing one another (6:1-11), engaging in sexually immoral behavior (6:12-20), wounding others' consciences (8:1-11), commit-

39 For more on this concept see Leeman 2016.

40 I derived the concept of "being and becoming" from Morris 2008, 90.

ting idolatry (10:14-22), and abusing the Lord's Supper (11:17-34).[41] Amazingly, despite their actions, Paul presents the Corinthian believers' pre-conversion identity ("the unrighteous;" 6:9) in the past tense ("And such *were* some of you;" *emphasis mine,* 6:11). Equally shocking, Paul also presents their post-conversion identity as a present and enduring reality: "But you were washed… sanctified… justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (6:11). The Corinthian believers were spiritually recreated by God's Spirit through the word of the gospel which Paul preached to them (2:1-5) and so can truly be called saints (1:2) even as they fail to live in line with this.[42] Despite their sin, many in the Corinthian church were true believers. And yet, this did not mean they were to be content with their inconsistencies.

Throughout the book, Paul calls the Corinthian church to remedy their failures based on their union with Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7; 6:11; 7:29-35; 10:11; 11:26; 15:1-2, 10-11, 49-54). An excellent example of this is 1 Corinthians 5:7, where Paul commands, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened." Here, Paul stresses the Corinthian believers' identity in Christ and their need to live in line with it. They need to deal with the leaven of sin in their midst because, in reality, they are leaven-less dough and without sin in Christ. This is just one example of Paul utilizing indicatives to levy imperatives on the Corinthian church. In the words of Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner (2010, 6), "That the church in Corinth is God's church is repeated three times. Yet the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city! Paul's aim in writing is to urge them to adopt a way of life more in accord with their true ownership." Paul's call is for the Corinthian believers to repent, grow up in Christ, and become who they truly are because of God's salvific work in their lives.

This example represents the gradual nature of growth in Christlikeness, which defines the Christian experience. The technical term for this is "progressive sanctification." Believers, having become a new creation in Christ through the dual work of the Spirit and the Word, are transformed by the Spirit through the Word into Christ's likeness over a long period of time so that their living increasingly conforms to their unification with Christ. In other words, Christians are changed instantaneously in category (sinners made saints; 2 Cor 5:17) and progressively in character. This results in at least two implications.

First, the doctrine of progressive sanctification creates a category for Christians who sin. Every believer will face an inconsistency between their union with Christ and their attitudes and actions (e.g., Rom 7:7-25). This is not an excuse to be flippant with sin (Rom 6:1-14). Instead, this is to say that as disciples increas-

41 For an excellent overview of these issues and the book of 1 Corinthians in general see Naselli 2018, 98-114.

42 For an excellent and lengthy discussion on this see Waters 2016, 202-206.

ingly become like Christ, we can expect them to hit bumps in the road and even create some potholes along the way.

Second, the doctrine of progressive sanctification touches on believers' participation in their journey toward personal holiness. Scripture is clear that God is actively at work in the believer to conform them to the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Yet, this does not exclude the believer's willing participation with God to reject sin and ungodliness and to lead a God-honoring life. This is why Paul can command the believers in Philippi to "work out your own salvation" while also claiming "for it is God who works in you" (Phil 2:12-13). Thus, God is working in us to make us more like Christ, so we work along with him toward that same end.

This principle that God matures his people over a long period of time affects our disciple-making practices by setting realistic expectations. Initially, this affects how we view those we are discipling.[43] As we make disciples, we can expect them to struggle with sin and need correction. We should also expect believers to repent when they sin and strive to live all of life to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Moreover, these expectations are all the more reason why every Christian should be intimately involved in the life of a local church, participating in the Spirit's transformative work through the ministry of the Word. Progressive sanctification helps us view the others we are discipling as God views them: works in progress.

This third principle also affects how we grapple with the prolonged nature of Christian growth. As we come to grips with the ramifications of progressive sanctification, it is tempting to wonder if there is a problem with our disciple-making practices. Specifically, we might question the centrality of Word-based ministry in relation to the local church because progress and growth seem to take too long to solve the problems before us. We are tempted to think that if we could just find the right ministry model or musical production, maybe then believers would not struggle with sin to the extent they do; then perhaps they would be more committed to a church; maybe then they would not need to grow in theological astuteness; then perhaps they would evangelize with more fervor. For the pastor in particular, he might be tempted to think that preparing a sermon in the book of Leviticus for Sunday is pointless, even foolish, as he hears of a couple in his church on the brink of divorce on Wednesday and a church member who cannot pay their bills on Friday. How in the world could a sermon on Old Testament sacrificial law help these people? The problem with this train of thought is that it fails to recognize these situations as discipleship issues. No matter what difficulties or flaws God's people face, they all ultimately bleed into their need for growth in Christlike maturity and the appropriation of God's promises. What the struggling couple, the poor single mother, the timid new believer, and the struggling former

43 Though, these expectations are true of every believer, as every Christian is a disciple in the process of becoming more like Christ. For an excellent discussion with rich pastoral instructions on how Christ treats his people in light of the doctrine of progressive sanctification see Sibbes 2021.

alcoholic all need most are the regular means God uses to grow his people, which include the ministry of the Word in the context of a local church. The doctrine of progressive sanctification then reminds us that the Spirit's work to mature God's people through these means is an inherently long process that cannot be short-circuited through quick fixes. When sufferings and shortcomings abound, what believers need most is not for the church to try something innovative but to keep doing what it's called to do through the ministry of the Word in the context of the local church. That is how God has designed growth to happen. So, when progress in Christian maturity seems to be taking a long time, we need not question the principles of God's word but rather resolve to trust that God knows best and run the race set before us with endurance (Heb 12:1; 2 Tim 4:7).

In summary, the third disciple-making principle is that God matures his people over a long period of time. Having become a new creation by God's Spirit through his Word, believers are progressively sanctified so that their character begins to conform to their union with Christ. In this sense, Christians are works in progress. As such, they will continue to sin but should also be active participants in their growth in tholiness to lead God-honoring lives. Moreover, when combined with the first two discipleship principles, a correct view of progressive sanctification serves to manage our expectations as we go about the work of making disciples. We should not be surprised that the work of discipleship takes a long time, and we should persevere in doing precisely what God has called us to do.

I conclude this section by again stating my claim that God creates and matures his people (1) by his Spirit through his Word, (2) in relation to the local church, and (3) over a long period of time. While this is not everything that can be said about the discipleship process, I trust that the biblical data proves these principles to be foundational to God's ordering of the discipleship process. Additionally, as submissive and dependent partners with God in this work, these principles impose on us the implementation of (and, by implication, the rejection of) certain practices. Specifically, to make disciples, we should champion the centrality of Word-based ministry, the importance of the local church, and the espousal of accurate expectations.

5. Principled Practices and Simplicity

Disciple-making practices that flow from God's disciple-making principles manifest in submission to and dependence on the Designer of discipleship. This disposition helps to simplify discipleship for us by defining success, clarifying a biblical philosophy of ministry, and providing us with boundaries and freedom. We will look at each of these in turn.

Often, we gauge success in evangelism and discipleship on metrics such as the number of conversions or church size, but this is wrong. To be clear, we should

want to see a harvest of souls for the gospel's sake. Yet, to measure the success of ministry in this way fundamentally misunderstands the nature of our partnership with God in disciple-making. Salvation and transformation begin with God, not us. This means that the results are ultimately in God's hands.[44] When we submit to and depend on God's sovereignty as we labor for the gospel, it relieves us of a sense of failure when we do not see our desired outcomes. This is because it is possible to do God's work in God's way and not see results in the timing or manner that we want (as if we have the power to project what will happen and when it will happen). Submission to and dependence on God also safeguard us from resorting to pragmatic gimmicks to produce fruit. It anchors us in God's principles amidst the ebb and flow, the revivals and the droughts, of disciple-making.[45] All this to say, success in disciple-making is not measured primarily by the outcomes of our efforts but rather by our faithfulness to the principles of God's word. In this sense, a submissive and dependent attitude in our partnership with God helps us rightly define and measure success in disciple-making.

In correlation with this, a submissive and dependent attitude simplifies disciple-making by clarifying where we should focus our energies. Some are tempted to reinvent the discipleship wheel ten times over, constantly reforming how to reach the lost. Yet, God's sovereign ordering of the discipleship process takes the burden of innovation off our shoulders. When we understand from Scripture how God works to create and mature his people, it helps us know how to go about making disciples in a way that will be successful, as defined above. We are not left to guess what faithful gospel ministry looks like, nor are we left wondering if our techniques will work. With confidence in God's principles, we can invest how and where God wants, knowing that our toil is not in vain, regardless of the results. In this sense, God's work done in God's ways takes the guesswork out of the equation of disciple-making and provides us with a clear, straightforward, and biblical philosophy of ministry: order your practices according to God's principles.

Finally, submission to and dependence on God in disciple-making provides us with both boundaries and freedom. When principles drive our practices, they provide us with guardrails for our good. For example, as previously discussed

44 "If we forget that it is God's prerogative to give results when the gospel is preached, we shall start to think that it is our responsibility to secure them… It is not right when we regard ourselves as responsible for securing converts, and look to our own enterprise and techniques to accomplish what only God can accomplish. To do that is to intrude ourselves into the office of the Holy Spirit, and to exalt ourselves as the agents of the new birth… *only by letting our knowledge of God's sovereignty control the way in which we plan, and pray, and work in his service, can we avoid becoming guilty of this fault*. For where we are not consciously relying on God, there we shall inevitably be found relying on ourselves. And the spirit of self-reliance is a blight on evangelism" (Packer 2008, 32-34).

45 "If we regarded it as our job, not simply to present Christ, but actually to produce converts…our approach to evangelism would become pragmatic and calculating… We must have… an irresistible technique for inducing a response" (Packer 2008, 32).

under the first disciple-making principle, since God creates and matures his people by his Spirit through his Word, it follows that the ministry of the Word is essential to disciple-making. Some might view this negatively, as a limitation, but I think this is positive. Just as guardrails serve to show us our lane while driving and keep us on track, principles help us to know our role and responsibilities so that we might faithfully execute God's will. And yet, though constraining, principles simultaneously provide us with a measure of freedom. To continue with the first principle, while Scripture sets forth a vision for what this principle looks like in practice and so provides boundaries (e.g. believers ministering the Word to one another in the context of a local church, pastors leading through expositional preaching and teaching, and more of what I discussed above), this vision is limited in its prescriptive scope, allowing us to use wisdom to contextualize its application. One pastor may choose to preach a single sermon overviewing the whole book of Romans, while another might spend one year's worth of sermons working through Romans at a slower pace. Both can be legitimate forms of expositional preaching, and the choice between the two is not necessarily a matter of faithfulness. Consider also that while all believers should minister the Word to one another, this also can take many forms. In some contexts, small group Bible study and accountability are most appropriate, while in other settings, one-on-one meetings for mutual encouragement are better. Both of these practices act as mechanisms to facilitate Word-based ministry. While Scripture provides us with a general vision for how the first principle should be applied, Scripture does not address every practical question all believers will face in every circumstance and context throughout all of history. Thus, a degree of prudential freedom in our practices is necessary and, I would argue, granted to us by God. What we learn from this is that principles do not set forth the sort of pragmatic and formulaic processes that some discipleship resources do.[46] Instead, principles, after setting boundaries that should be respected, leave room for us to use wisdom in their application. We have a measure of freedom to decide what makes the most sense in our specific context and circumstances. Given this, principles simplify disciple-making for us as they open up a whole menu of applications instead of binding us to a one-size-fits-all program. To summarize, with the boundaries set, we have clarity on the realms our disciple-making practices should inhabit. We must stay within those realms! Yet, within those realms, the possibilities of application are numerous and, often, while making sure to adhere to the prescribed and implied commands in Scripture, are matters of wisdom and context. And in this sense, submission to and dependence on God–ordering our practices after God's principles–simplifies disciple-making for us by giving us both direction and the ability to shift our practices according to our context while remaining faithful to God and his principles.

46 See Watson and Watson (2014) for example.

Conclusion

When we allow doctrine to direct our theological understanding of discipleship, we learn that to involve oneself in disciple-making is an act of faith. We have no power in and of ourselves to bring the dead to life. We also have no means in and of ourselves to cause disciples to grow in maturity. For that, we must submit to and depend on God, allowing his disciple-making principles to govern our disciple-making practices. And in doing so, we have to trust that God will do what he has promised to do by his ordering of things, even if it seems foolish to our limited perspective.

Given this, it is crucial to understand how God creates and matures his people and how this guides us in our disciple-making endeavors. First, God creates and matures his people by his Spirit through his Word. This means that we should labor in the ministry of the Word, believing that God's Word never returns void but accomplishes precisely that for which he sends it (Isa 55:10-11). Second, God also accomplishes his work in relation to the local church. Given this, we should focus our energy on the life of the local church, believing that God creates and matures his people as they minister the Word to one another. Finally, God's work of maturation takes place over a long period of time. This establishes accurate expectations for everyone involved in the discipleship process, forcing us to live by faith that, despite the prolonged nature of growth, God is nevertheless at work through the means he has established. In short, God has set forth a pattern and plan for us to follow. And when we do, our submission to and dependence on him lends itself to simplicity. We can rest in God's sovereignty, allow the burden of innovation to roll off our backs, and appropriately minister in whatever context God has placed us in.

Do you want to simplify your disciple-making game plan? Do you want to labor for the gospel with confidence in God's power? Do you want to stop the tiresome search for new models and methods to fulfill the Great Commission? If your answer is "yes" to any of these questions, I encourage you to trust that God's ways are best and to walk in them.

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Benjamin D. Spector

Teološka vizija za učeništvo: Kako načela i prakse surađuju kako bi pojednostavile način na koji činimo učenike

Sažetak

U ovom članku nastojim primjenom biblijskog nauka razumjeti koncept učeništva s teološkoga stajališta i praktičnu primjenu Velikog naloga u Mateju 28,18-20. U svojem radu predlažem da stvaranje učenika započinje s trojedinim Bogom kao onim koji stvara i odgaja svoj narod prema sličnosti s Kristom. Razumije li se ispravno, ovo služi kako bi oblikovalo način na koji mi, kao Božji narod, zajedno s Bogom sudjelujemo u stvaranju učenika. Specifično govoreći, kada se shvati da je učeništvo u konačnici Božja zamisao i djelo, iz toga slijedi da bi Božji narod trebao činiti učenike u podložnosti Bogu kao i u ovisnosti o njemu. Imati ovakvu vrstu stava znači dopustiti Bogom određenim načelima procesa stvaranja učenika da upravljaju našim praksama stvaranja učenika. U ovom članku opisujem Božji proces stvaranja učenika na sljedeći način: Bog stvara i odgaja svoj narod (1) svojim Duhom po svojoj Riječi, (2) u odnosu na lokalnu crkvu te (3) tijekom duljega razdoblja. U odazivu na ova načela, Božji narod trebao bi podupirati središnje mjesto službe zasnovane na Riječi, važnost lokalne crkve i zagovaranje ispravnih očekivanja u svojim praksama učeništva. Ovaj redoslijed načela i praksi služi kako bi pojednostavio učeništvo definirajući uspjeh, pojašnjavajući biblijsku filozofiju

službe te pružajući nam granice i slobodu. Posljedično, teološka vizija za učeništvo koju predstavljam u ovom članku nešto je što kršćani očajnički trebaju razumjeti i prisvojiti budući da neprestano nailazimo na široku paletu novih metoda i modela za ispunjavanje Velikog naloga.

The Poetry of Suffering in Lamentations: A Literary Analysis[1]

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Abstract

The Book of Lamentations is significant in Jewish culture, extending far beyond its religious dimensions, because it reflects the recurring disasters and tragic events that have shaped the Jewish national experience throughout history. In this article, the author offers an in-depth literary and theological analysis of the Book of Lamentations, emphasizing its significance within Jewish culture and religious tradition. The book is investigated not merely as an expression of grief over the traumatic destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple in the 6th century BCE, but also as a structured poetic work that delivers educational, didactic, and moral messages. The article is divided into three main parts. The first part provides a general and concise introduction assisting the reader in understanding various aspects of the book, including its historical background, the origin of its title, the tradition of its composition, and its placement within the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The second and core part of the article dissects the book's structure, literary genre, and the thematic organization of its five chapters. It highlights the unique linguistic features of Lamentations and their impact on Hebrew language and literature, both ancient and modern. The final section addresses the theological paradox of faith in a just God amidst suffering and injustice, a central motif in the Book of Lamentations. The author examines the pathways of rabbinic literature to

1 This article was written for the conference "Narratives of Suffering in the Psalter" organized by the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, held on January 25, 2025, in Zagreb.

gain insight into Judaism's perspective on the question of suffering and affliction in the world. This analysis includes excerpts of rabbinic texts, bridging classical Jewish thought with contemporary discussions. The article integrates literary and theological insights, offering a nuanced understanding of Lamentations as a cultural, historical, and religious artifact.

Keywords: *destruction, Hebrew, Jerusalem, Lamentations, literary analysis, Talmud*

Introduction

The Book of Lamentations holds a significant place in Jewish culture, extending far beyond its religious context, as the harsh historical reality has embedded calamities and difficult events as part of the collective national experience of the Jewish people throughout the generations. In Judaism, it is customary to read the Book of Lamentations on the eve of Tisha B'Av[2] after the evening prayer, with the congregation seated on the floor in mourning.[3] In some traditions, this reading is done in darkness, with the elegies chanted in a minor melody. Since approximately the seventh century, the custom emerged to incorporate special laments into the evening and morning prayers of Tisha B'Av. These laments focus on the destruction of the Temple and the suffering that preceded and followed it. They also commemorate tragic events such as the execution of the "Ten Martyrs"[4] and the persecutions during the various Crusades. In the Book of Lamentations, the *daughter of Zion* laments the painful departure of God and questions how and why it occurred, what she should do, and how she is expected to cope with God's absence and the traumatic, dramatic event of the destruction.

This article aims to examine, through a literary analysis of the five chapters of the Book of Lamentations, the profound theological paradox in which people insist on believing in a moral God while simultaneously experiencing suffering, evil, and injustice emanating from that very same God. We will explore the purpose of the book, arguing that its author aimed for more than merely giving

2 Tisha B'Av – the Ninth of Av is a fast day, observed in mourning for various calamities that have befallen the Jewish people throughout history, with an emphasis on the destruction of the First and Second Temples, which, according to tradition, occurred on this date. See Dadon 2009, 232-234.

3 This practice first mentioned in sources from the Gaonic period: *Tractate Soferim* 1937, Chapter 14, Halacha 3.

4 The ten martyrs (heb. *Asara Haruge Malkhut*) – are the ten leading rabbis who were cruelly executed by the Roman government in Israel because they did not obey the orders of the Roman government but continued to study and teach the Torah. These ten rabbis became part of the Jewish consciousness of opposing the Roman orders aimed at the destruction of Judaism. See: *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Baba Batra 10b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Sotah 48b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Berachot 61b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Sanhedrin 14a.

voice to suffering. The goal was to convey an educational message to the reader, achieved through the creation of a unique literary structure. Our study will also address unique Hebrew words originating in the Book of Lamentations, the Croatian translation of certain terms, literary motifs, and various linguistic phenomena that the biblical poet interweaves into the biblical poetry of Lamentations. These motifs not only influenced the ancient Hebrew language of the sages but also continue to survive into modern times, forming an integral part of contemporary Hebrew.

Before delving into the literary analysis of the text and discussing the philosophical implications of suffering, we will begin with a brief general introduction. This preface will help contextualize various aspects of the book, including its background, title, the tradition of its composition, and its place within the Hebrew Bible. In our analysis, we adopt a holistic approach grounded in Jewish tradition regarding the composition and canonical status of the Book of Lamentations. The methodology employed in this work combines interpretations from classical and modern rabbinic literature with an analysis of the literary motifs present in the Book of Lamentations.

1. General Introduction to the Book of Lamentations

The background to the tragic events described in the Book of Lamentations can primarily be found in the Book of Kings (2 Kgs 24-25) and Jeremiah (especially Ch. 39-44). The Kingdom of Babylon succeeded the Assyrian Empire, and the destruction and exile of Judah resulted from repeated rebellions by the kings of Judah against Babylon. In 604 BCE, during the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar subjugated the Kingdom of Judah (2 Kgs 24:1). Three years later, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, prompting a severe Babylonian response (2 Kgs 24:1-2). This campaign culminated in the Babylonians laying siege to Jerusalem, exiling Jehoiachin, seizing the Temple's treasures, and deporting the elite of Judah (2 Kgs 24:4-17). After Jehoiachin's exile, the King of Babylon appointed Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, as king of Judah, changing his name to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17). Zedekiah also rebelled against the King of Babylon, leading Nebuchadnezzar to march against Jerusalem with his army and lay siege to the city on the 10th of Tevet, 587 BCE. The heavy siege lasted for two years, during which the inhabitants of Jerusalem suffered from famine and plagues. On the ninth of Tammuz, the walls of Jerusalem were breached. Approximately a month later, on the seventh of Av, the Babylonians set fire to the Temple, the royal palace, and the entire city, deporting the remaining population to Babylon. King Zedekiah was taken to Babylon, where he witnessed the execution of his sons before his eyes were blinded (2 Kgs 25:8; Jer 52:12). The destruction of the Temple represents a national trauma, marking the end of Judah's religious and political independence. The laments in

the Book of Lamentations vividly describe the profound suffering endured by the people during the siege and their intense emotional responses to the catastrophic events of the destruction.

In modern Hebrew, the title of the book is Eicha, derived from its opening word, "Eicha yashva badad" ("Alas! Lonely sits the city").[5] Since as is known, the books of the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, in Hebrew carry names derived from the initial words or phrases at the beginning of the text (Genesis – Bereishit, i.e., "Bereishit Bara;" Exodus – Shemot, i.e., "VeEle Shemot;" Leviticus – Vayikra, i.e., "Vayikra Hashem el Moshe;" Song of Songs – Shir HaShirim, i.e., "Shir HaShirim asher liShlomo," etc.), or they are named after the central biblical figure in the book, such as Joshua, Jeremiah, Ezra, or Esther. There are books whose titles reflect the nature of leadership, for example, Judges or Kings. Additionally, some books are named after their literary genre, such as Chronicles or Psalms. However, the name "Megillat Eicha" (The Scroll of Eicha) or simply "Eicha" appears in Jewish sources only from the Middle Ages onward (*Tractate Soferim* 1937, Chapter 14, Halacha 1). In the Talmud and rabbinic literature, the book is referred to as "Megillat Kinot" (The Scroll of Laments)[6] or "Sefer Kinot" (The Book of Laments).[7] It is also sometimes abbreviated simply as "Kinot."[8] In contrast, in both ancient and modern translations of the Bible, as is common with other biblical books, the title of the Book of Lamentations is naturally tied to its content and genre rather than its opening word. Thus, the prevalent name for the book since antiquity has been Kinot (Laments).

Regarding the authorship and dating of the book, this issue remains subject to debate. The Book of Lamentations itself does not explicitly mention its author. In the Talmud, Jewish tradition attributes the book to the prophet Jeremiah.[9] This

5 Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, published by JPS. Most translations into English were taken from *Sefaria.org*. All emphasis added by the author unless differently specified.

6 *Jerusalem Talmud* 1523, Shabbat, Chapter 16, Halacha 1, 79a; *Midrash Lekach Tov - Pesikta Zutreta* 1880, Chapter 31, 143b.

7 *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Chagigah 5b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Moed Katan 26a; *Tractate Soferim* 1937, Chapter 18, Halacha 5.

8 *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Baba Batra 14b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Berachot 57b; Maimonides 1974, Hilchot Beit HaBechirah 5:2; see also *Tractate Soferim* 1937, Chapter 18, Halacha 5.

9 *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Baba Batra 15a; *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Yoma 38b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Gittin 58a. The Talmud also connects Lamentations to the "scroll" burned by King Jehoiakim (605 BCE), as described in Jeremiah 36. According to the Talmud: "'And every time Jehudi read three or four columns, (the king) would cut it up with a scribe's knife and throw it into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed by the fire in the brazier....' (Jeremiah 36:23). What is meant by 'three or four columns'? They told Jehoiakim: Jeremiah has written a scroll of lamentations. He asked them, 'What is written in it?' ... They replied: 'the LORD has afflicted her For her many transgressions. (Lamentations 1:5)' Immediately, he scratched out all mentions of God and burned them in fire" (*Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Moed Katan 26a; see

tradition was widely accepted by Jewish commentators and thinkers in the Middle Ages, including Maimonides (Maimonides 1974, Hilchot Teshuva 5:3). However, modern biblical scholarship largely disputes the identification of Jeremiah as the author of Lamentations. Most scholars argue that the linguistic style, thematic focus, and structure suggest it was composed by a different author or group of authors, possibly at a later time (Klein 1999, Vol. *Megillot*, 116). In the opening of the Septuagint, it is written that Jeremiah composed this lamentation over Jerusalem: "And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, (that) Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented (with) this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said…"

In this regard, all Christian traditions have followed the same line. It seems that the attribution of the Book of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah stems from the desire of the rabbis to present a human and attributed face to the text, similar to how the Psalms are attributed to King David, and the books of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes are attributed to King Solomon. Additionally, the fact that Jeremiah is known as the prophet of destruction, active during that period, contributes to this attribution. Another factor contributing to the identification of Jeremiah as the author is the many linguistic similarities between the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Lamentations.[10] In ancient translations, such as the Septuagint and the Syriac Peshitta,[11] the Book of Lamentations is placed within the section of the Major Prophets, alongside the Book of Jeremiah. This is likely because early traditions attributed the composition of the scroll to Jeremiah. In contrast, in the Jewish tradition, in the Talmud (*Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Baba Batra 14b) and in various manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible according to the Masoretic tradition,[12] the Book of Lamentations appears among the Five Megillot (scrolls) in the Writings (Ketuvim) part of the Hebrew Bible rather than among the Books of the Prophets. This is despite the fact that the Talmud asserts that Jeremiah is the author of the Book of Lamentations and that it was written by him during the period of the First Temple's destruction. The Five Megillot were read publicly during Jewish festivals, with their internal order likely following the

also *Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1878, 3:1 and *Midrash Lekach Tov - Pesikta Zutreta* 1880, introduction).

10 For example, compare: Lamentations 1:1; 3:28 with Jeremiah 15:17; Lamentations 2:13 with Jeremiah 14:17; Lamentations 2:22 with Jeremiah 52:17; Lamentations 3:47 with Jeremiah 48:43; Lamentations 3:48 with Jeremiah 8:21-23; and Lamentations 5:21 with Jeremiah 31:18.

11 Peshitta – is the standard version of the Bible used in the Syriac Christian tradition. It is written in the Syriac Aramaic, a language and dialect, dates back to the early centuries of Christianity.

12 The Mesora refers to the body of work by Jewish scholars, who meticulously preserved the textual integrity of the Hebrew Bible from approximately the 6th to 10th centuries CE. Their work ensured the transmission of an accurate biblical text, complete with vowel notations (*nikud*), cantillation marks (*te'amim*), and annotations to maintain consistency in copying manuscripts. See: Dadon 2009, 483.

chronological sequence of their recitation during the Jewish holidays throughout the year. The Book of Lamentations (read on Tisha B'Av) appears after the books Song of Songs (read on Passover, in the month of Nisan) and Ruth (read on Shavuot, in the month of Sivan), and before the books Ecclesiastes (read on Sukkot, in the month of Tishrei) and Esther (read on Purim, in the month of Adar).

2. Literary Analysis of the Book of Lamentations

2.1. Literary Genre and Structure of the Book of Lamentations

In the ancient Near East, laments were written both to mourn a destruction that had already occurred and to prevent future destruction. There are laments from various cities in ancient Mesopotamia, and similarities can be found between these laments and the Book of Lamentations. The points of similarity are striking, suggesting a form of cultural or literary connection, despite the long gap of over a thousand years between the Sumerian laments and the Book of Lamentations, as well as the theological differences that underpin these laments.[13]

The lament is a poetic expression of mourning, categorized as a biblical genre. In the Bible, we find both individual laments and communal laments. An individual lament includes David's lament for Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17-27), or for Abner ben Ner (2 Sam 3:33-34), or for Absalom (2 Sam 19:1). Community laments are directed towards the people of Israel (Am 5:1-2; Isa 22:1-3), or other nations (for Egypt: Ezek 32:16). The laments in the Book of Lamentations fall into this category of communal laments. The literary characteristics typical of biblical laments include praise for the deceased or the destroyed city (2 Sam 1:22-24; Ezek 19:10-11; Lam 2:15), a contrasting or opposing comparison of the good past with the horrific present (Lam 1:1,7; 4:5, etc.), and the emphasis on the enemy's rejoicing at the downfall (2 Sam 1:20; Isa 14:7-8; Lam 1:7-21; 2:16-17).

The traumatic event of the city's and temple's destruction, the death of many of its inhabitants, and the exile resonate in various ways in several psalms, particularly Psalms 74, 79, and 137.[14] Psalm 74 was written in response to the devastating impression left by the desecration of the temple, accompanied by other calamities— the destruction of the city and the death of its inhabitants: "O God, heathens have entered Your domain, defiled Your holy temple, and turned Jerusalem into ruins. They have left Your servants' corpses as food for the fowl of heaven,

13 For further study of the exceptional similarities and differences between the Sumerian laments and the biblical Book of Lamentations, see: Samet 2012, 95-110.

14 For a detailed analysis of these points, see: Zakovitch and Shinan 2017, 15.

and the flesh of Your faithful for the wild beasts. Their blood was shed like water around Jerusalem, with none to bury them" (Ps 79:1-3).[15]

Poetry in the Bible is characterized by three main features: parallelism, meter, and rhythm. Poetic lines typically consist of two parts that maintain a specific relationship: repetition, completion, or explanation. The poetry in the Book of Lamentations is rich in imagery and metaphors, featuring an eloquent vocabulary, allusions, repetition, contrast, and other characteristics of biblical poetry, all of which suggest high-quality literary artistry. One of the prominent literary tools in Lamentations is the use of personification and the shifting voices between chapters, which lends the laments a dramatic quality. The figure of the *daughter of Zion* represents the people of the city of Jerusalem, in contrast with the general lamenters. *The man* represents the individual people and their suffering. The voice of *wisdom* and the voices of the *community* are also heard in chapter three. The greatness of the author lies in the creation of these different speakers, who are, in fact, distinct literary figures that together form a complete and complex work—the Book of Lamentations (Assis 2020, 8-9).

The Book of Lamentations is divided into five chapters, each representing an independent lamentation about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the tragic fate of its inhabitants, and the exile of Judah. The laments reflect the profound theological shock and national crisis the people experienced following the destruction, alongside a religious crisis marked by immense grief and sorrow. This crisis significantly altered the course of Jewish history. The five chapters bear a strong resemblance to the division of the Torah into five books, and similarly to how the Book of Psalms is divided into five books.

The first, second, and fourth chapters share similarities in their style and structure. They all begin with the lamentation word *eicha*, and each contains 22 verses.[16] Chapters 2 and 4 are similar in both content and form. Both chapters describe the destruction of the city and the severe famine with similar language and style. In these chapters, the expressions "שֶׁבֶר בַּת עַמִּי" ("the breaking of my people's daughter") and "רֹאשׁ בְּכָל חוּצוֹת" ("the head of every street") appear, highlighting the shared theme of devastation, suffering, and chaos experienced during the siege. Chapters 1 and 5, on the other hand, portray the aftermath of the destruction with unique motifs and a shared vocabulary. These chapters highlight the sense of shame and loss of dignity among the exiles (see Lam 1:6 and 5:12). However, there are significant differences between them. Chapter 1 is characterized by a pessimistic atmo-

15 According to *Tractate Soferim* 1937, Chapter 18, Halacha 4, the following Psalms 74, 79, 137, are to be recited on Tisha B'Av.

16 It is worth noting that there are psalms in the Bible that are not written in an acrostic form but still contain 22 verses, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, such as Psalms 33, 38, and 103.

sphere of despair, while chapter 5 contains a glimmer of hope for a better future. Chapter 1 does not contain a prayer for salvation from God, while chapter 5 opens and closes with a prayer. The turning point between despair and its consequences, as presented in the first two chapters, and the hope in the last two chapters, is found in chapter 3. This chapter marks the shift from despair to hope, culminating in the direct plea to God in chapter 5. This progression reflects the movement from profound suffering and hopelessness towards the possibility of redemption and divine intervention. The third lament differs from the other laments in two main ways. Firstly, in terms of structure, it is written alphabetically, like the other laments, but it contains three times as many verses – 66 verses as opposed to the usual 22. Each letter of the alphabet is represented three times, creating a more complex yet orderly structure. Secondly, in terms of content, this lament does not mention the destruction of Jerusalem or Judah. Instead, it is a personal lament, with the speaker identifying as "the man," expressing the individual's suffering and the severe punishment he believes has been inflicted upon him by divine will. Unlike the other laments that focus on collective suffering, this one is a deeply personal expression of grief. The fifth lament, in contrast, although consisting of 22 verses like the other alphabetic laments, is not arranged alphabetically. It concludes the Book of Lamentations with a public plea and prayer. This lament reflects both sorrow and absence, but also an urgent plea to God to return to his people and lift the punishment he has imposed upon them.

To conclude this part, we will focus on the unique literary feature present in the first four chapters of the Book of Lamentations, namely the alphabetical acrostic[17] arrangement and its significance in this context.[18] The Sages proposed several reasons for the use of the alphabetical structure in Lamentations. One reason given is that it serves as a mnemonic device: "Why is the Book of Lamentations written in the alphabet? So that it may be memorized by the mourners" (*Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1899, 43). Another reason mentioned in the Midrash explains that the use of the alphabetical acrostic is an expression of completeness: "I wanted to bless them from Aleph to Tav... but they sinned and were punished from Aleph to Tav" (*Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1899, 43).[19] "Why is the Book of Lamentations written in alphabetical order? Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Nehemiah, and the Rabbis (Sages) differ. Rabbi Yehuda says that the people transgressed from Aleph to Tav; there-

17 Acrostic – (from Greek: άκρο meaning "extreme" + στίχος meaning "line;" in Latin: *Acrostichis*) is a literary technique used in poetry or prose, where the first letter of each word, line, or stanza spells out a word, phrase, name, or follows a specific sequence such as the alphabet.

18 Other acrostic psalms in the Hebrew Bible can be found in Psalm 119 (a collection of eight verses for each letter), Psalm 145 or the "Eshet Chayil" ("Woman of Valor") poem at the end of the Book of Proverbs (31:10-31). This stylistic device is also found in other works from the Second Temple period, such as the Book of Sirach and the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as in the liturgical poetry of medieval Spanish Jewry.

19 See also: *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* 1878, 7:18; *Midrash Lekach Tov - Pesikta Zutreta*, 1880, 1:1.

fore, the book is written in alphabetical order. Rabbi Nehemiah says it is because they transgressed the Torah, as it is written, 'And all Israel have transgressed Your Torah' (Daniel 9:11); therefore, it is written in alphabetical order. The Rabbis say it is because they transgressed from Aleph to Tav" (*Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1899, 56).[20]

However, a deeper analysis reveals a special connection between the use of the acrostic and the content and purpose of the book. Deep emotional expressions typically emerge spontaneously and without restraint, without any particular order. In contrast, the use of the acrostic form creates tension between emotion and the rigid structure. This calculated writing style conveys an educational message to readers, suggesting that Lamentations was written with profound, rational thought about the tragic events of destruction. The artistic form of the acrostic conveys an intellectual message, not merely an emotional one. As a result, the poet of the Lamentations composed a didactic, educational work with a message for the reader, rather than simply expressing spontaneous grief and sorrow over loss, death, and destruction.[21]

2.2. Lamentations Chapter 1

This chapter is structured as an alphabetical acrostic, consisting of 22 verses, each corresponding to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse presents a striking image of the disaster. The chapter begins by depicting the dire situation of the city after the destruction. A clear motif emerges throughout the chapter, depicting Jerusalem as a lonely woman with no one to comfort her. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first (1-11) presents the lament for Jerusalem in the third person, while in the second part (12-22), Jerusalem speaks in the first person. The description is so vivid that it seems the author is writing from personal experience. The central motifs in the lament include: Jerusalem's fall at the hands of the enemy; the enslavement of the people of Zion; widespread slaughter; the desecration of the Temple and the looting of its treasures; the severe famine in the city following the siege; the betrayal by the allies of the Kingdom of Judah; and the enemy's mocking of Judah's dire condition.

The lament opens with a description of Jerusalem's loneliness following the exile of her children. The author compares Jerusalem's loneliness to that of a widow, sitting alone and forsaken: "Alas! Lonely sits the city, once great with people! She that was great among nations is become like a widow" (Lam 1:1). Widows and orphans were considered the most vulnerable members of society in

20 See also: *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Shabbat 55a; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Avodah Zarah 4a; *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 1993, 818, and *Midrash Ruth Zuta* 1894, 54.

21 For further discussion on the connection between the use of the acrostic and the content and purpose of the book, see: Assis 2020, 14-15.

the ancient Near East, as the father was the one who provided protection and sustenance. Therefore, the Torah repeatedly warns against mistreating widows and orphans.[22] Judah's situation is as defenseless and hopeless as that of a widow, due to the betrayal by her neighbors and allies: "All her allies have betrayed her; They have become her foes" (Lam 1:2). From a kingdom with political, military, and economic independence, Judah has become a colony of forced laborers, obligated to pay tribute to the Babylonian conqueror. The streets and gates of the city, which were "Once great with people!" (Lam 1:1), have now become desolate: "Zion's roads are in mourning, Empty of festival pilgrims; All her gates are deserted." (Lam 1:4). The author uses antithetical parallelism—Jerusalem, once a bustling city during the pilgrimage festivals, is now a deserted one.

The author describes Jerusalem as נידה-nida: "Jerusalem has greatly sinned, therefore she is become a *nida*. All who admired her despise her, for they have seen her disgraced; And she can only sigh And shrink back" (Lam 1:8). The term "nida" can be interpreted in several ways, and indeed, commentators have disagreed on its meaning in this context. One interpretation is that Jerusalem is impure like the impurity of a woman in a state of menstrual separation,[23] suggesting that, just as one must keep a distance from a menstruating woman to avoid ritual impurity, so too, all people are now avoiding contact with Jerusalem. A supporting interpretation is found in the next verse, "Her uncleanness clings to her skirts" (Lam 1:9), where the poet implies that Jerusalem's sins have stained her, much like the impurity of a woman in her menstruation. Another interpretation, based on the root נוד (meaning "to wander"), suggests that "nida" refers to Jerusalem's exile, or wandering, as she is now in captivity and dispersion (Rashi 1859, Lamentations 1:8). Another possible interpretation is based on the root ניד in the sense of "mockery" – meaning that the nations who once honored her now mock her as her children go into exile (Ibn Ezra 1859, Lamentations 1:8).

The poet also describes the painful and humiliating plundering of the Temple's treasures by the Chaldeans: "The foe has laid hands on everything dear to her. She has seen her Sanctuary invaded by nations which You have denied admission into our community" (Lam 1:10). To highlight the extent of the humiliation, the poet emphasizes that the plunderers were from nations whom the Torah specifically forbids from entering the congregation of Israel.[24] These very people entered the Temple and desecrated and looted it. As we mentioned earlier, in the second half of the chapter (verses 11-22, except for verse 17), the poet shifts to speaking in the

22 Exodus 22:21-23; Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:17; Maimonides 1974, Hilchot Deot, chapter 6; HaLevi 1999, Commandment 65; *Mishna* 1987, Shvuot 7:7; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Gittin 37a; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Baba Kama 37a.

23 See Leviticus 15:19-24; HaLevi 1999, Commandment 181; Dadon 2009, 278. In this direction it was translated to Croatian: "kao nečistoća ženina."

24 The Ammonites and Moabites—see Deuteronomy 23:4-6, and Rashi 1859, Lamentations 1:10.

name of Jerusalem. Jerusalem pleads for empathy from passersby, asking them "Is there any agony like mine" (Lam 1:12). The punishment and divine anger are unbearable, hurting even the innocent suffer: "My priests and my elders have perished in the city" (Lam 1:19). However, Jerusalem accepts the harsh divine judgment and acknowledges her guilt: "The LORD is in the right, for I have disobeyed Him" (Lam 1:18). After the lament, Jerusalem prays that God will recognize the wickedness of her enemies, who pretended to be her friends, and treat them as He has treated her.

2.3. Lamentations Chapter 2

The second chapter follows the same acrostic structure as the first. However, while chapter 1 focuses on the dire and degraded state of Jerusalem following the destruction, chapter 2 specifically addresses the destruction itself, the loss of Jerusalem's honor, and the theological crisis that the people face. The loss of honor is expressed in verse: "My liver is poured out on the ground" (Lam 2:11), as the liver symbolized, in the ancient world, the seat of life and emotions. This reflects the deep anguish and emotional turmoil of the speaker, as the liver, considered vital for human existence and emotional well-being, is metaphorically depicted as being shattered and spilled out.[25] Jerusalem's honor is mocked by the neighboring nations: "All who pass your way Clap their hands at you; They hiss and wag their head at Fair Jerusalem: 'Is this the city that was called Perfect in Beauty, Joy of All the Earth?'" (Lam 2:15). In the Bible, clapping of hands is a sign of derision (Job 27:23) or anger (Num 24:10).

The theological crisis is expressed, on one hand, through the absence of Torah and spiritual leadership: "Instruction (Heb. Torah) is no more; Her prophets, too, receive no vision from the LORD" (Lam 2:9). The absence of prophecy and the death or exile of many scholars following the destruction are seen as causes of this spiritual void. On the other hand, the depth of the crisis is further reflected in the final verses of the chapter, where the poet directs harsh words towards God.

The first part of the chapter (verses 1-9) describes the destruction using severe language, emphasizing that God was the one who executed and allowed the brutal devastation. The second part (verses 10-12) shifts to the human responses to the tragedy, focusing on the mourning rituals of the *daughter of Zion*, specifically the elders of Jerusalem. The poet describes traditional mourning customs such as sitting on the ground, sprinkling ashes on one's head, and wearing sackcloth (2:10).

25 See: "liver in the dust" (Ps 7:6) as a vivid biblical image symbolizing humiliation, disgrace, or total defeat. To have the liver "in the dust" suggests being brought to the lowest point—physically, emotionally, or spiritually. This metaphor aligns with the theme of utter desecration or dishonour, a concept often employed in biblical poetry to convey profound sorrow, repentance, or the consequences of divine judgment.

These mourning practices are found throughout the Hebrew Bible and are still observed in Jewish mourning traditions today (Dadon 2025, 37-59; Avi-Yona and Malamat, 1959, II. 164; Dadon 2009, 452-460).

The peak of human suffering and degradation described in this chapter is the depiction of severe famine and its horrific consequences. The poet recounts the earlier phase in chapter 1: "They have bartered their treasures for food, to keep themselves alive" (1:11), indicating that the people sold whatever was most valuable to sustain themselves during the hunger. The Croatian translation renders "treasures" as jewels, but traditional and modern interpretations suggest that "treasures" (Heb. מחמדיהם) refers to young children, who were likely sold into slavery in exchange for food. This is further emphasized in the verse: "He slew all who delighted the eye (Heb. מחמדי עין)" (Lam 2:4).[26]

In chapter 2, the situation worsens and reaches its climax with the shocking description of women eating their children: "Alas, women eat their own fruit, Their new-born babes!" (Lam 2:20). This is an unfathomable contrast between a mother's compassion for her children and the brutality of eating her child. This description is reminiscent of the curses in Leviticus: "You shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters" (Lev 26:29), and also appears in the rebuke section of Deuteronomy: "You shall eat your own tissue, the flesh of your sons and daughters that your God has assigned to you, because of the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you" (Deut 28:53). These two passages represent prophetic warnings that, tragically, came to pass.[27] The same level of horror can be found in other parts of the Bible (e.g., 2 Kgs 6:28-30).

Additionally, the prophet describes the killing of priests and prophets—symbolizing innocent righteous people: "Alas, priest and prophet are slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord!?" (Lam 2:20). In the Midrash on this verse, the death of Zechariah ben Jehoiada the priest is interpreted through a dialogue between Jeremiah and the Holy Spirit:

> "And you shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters shall you eat" (Leviticus 26:29), (this verse was interpreted in the context of:) Doeg ben Yosef, who passed away and left behind a small son. Each year, the child's mother would measure his growth in handbreadths and offer his weight in gold to Heaven. However, when Jerusalem was besieged, she slaughtered him with her own hands and consumed him. Concerning this tragedy, Jeremiah lamented, saying, "Master of the Universe, Alas, women eat their own fruit, Their new-born babes!" In response, the Divine Presence replied, "Alas, priest and prophet are slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord," this refers to Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest (*Midrash Sifra* 1862, Bechukotai, Parasha 2).

26 See similarly in Hosea 9:16, as well see: Zakovitch and Shinan 2017, 50.

27 For further exploration of fulfilled biblical prophecies, see: Dadon 2020, 395-428.

This midrash starkly illustrates the profound suffering and moral collapse experienced during the siege of Jerusalem. It draws a connection between the fulfillment of dire biblical prophecies and the desecration of the sacred, represented by the murder of Zechariah the priest in the Temple. The juxtaposition of maternal love with unthinkable actions underscores the extremity of the famine and societal breakdown.

In the third part of the lament (13-19), the poet attempts to comfort the *daughter of Zion* in her profound grief, calling her to mourn and seek God with all her heart: "Arise, cry out in the night at the beginning of the watches, pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord! Lift up your hands to Him for the life of your infants" (Lam 2:19). Yet, despite this call, the people of Zion, overwhelmed by their immense loss and suffering, remain in denial, unwilling to acknowledge their sins. Instead, they lash out against God, blaming Him for their suffering (Lam 2:20, 22).

2.4. Lamentations Chapter 3

The third chapter markedly differs from the other laments within the book. Unlike the other chapters, it does not explicitly lament the destruction of Jerusalem or the preceding tragic events. Instead, the poet focuses on his suffering and tribulations. This chapter raises theological questions about divine justice and the relationship between sin and punishment, questions reminiscent of the Book of Job and its exploration of the human spiritual journey. In this way, the chapter uniquely captures the intimate and personal dimensions of destruction.

From a literary and stylistic perspective, this chapter is notable for its differences: It does not open with the word *eicha* ("How"), which is a hallmark of the other chapters. The structure features a unique triple alphabetical acrostic. The verses are more concise, adding to the emotional intensity of the lament.

The chapter begins with an escalating description of the lamenter's suffering (1-18). In the second part (19-39), the lamenter overcomes his hopelessness and derives spiritual insights from his suffering despite his initial despair. He reaffirms his faith in God, prays with renewed vigor, accepts his afflictions as just punishment for his sins, and acknowledges the righteousness of divine judgment. In the third part (40-47), the lamenter shifts to addressing the collective plight of his people, urging them to reflect on their actions and return to God. He resumes describing the horrors of the destruction, emphasizing the suffering of the nation and the concealment of God's presence. In the fourth section (48-66), the lamenter returns to the singular voice, lamenting both his suffering and the collective sorrows of his people. He expresses confidence that God sees his afflictions and will ultimately deliver him. The chapter concludes with an appeal for divine retribution against the poet's adversaries.

The chapter begins with the phrase: "I am the man who has known affliction under the rod of His wrath" (Lam 3:1). This opening has sparked extensive discussion about the identity of the speaker, referred to as *the man* (Heb. גבר), who is lamenting his fate. Rashi identifies "the man" as the prophet Jeremiah as he was a priest from a family chosen for divine service, and due to his unique role as a witness to the destruction[28]: "'I am the man who has seen affliction'—Jeremiah laments, stating, 'I am the man who endured more suffering than all the prophets who prophesied the destruction of the Temple. In their days, the Temple was not destroyed, but in my time, it was'" (Rashi 1859, Lamentations 3:1). Others argue that this lament reflects the collective suffering of the Jewish people during the destruction (Ibn Ezra 1859, Lamentations 3:1). The speaker represents the Jewish nation as a whole. The Midrashic Interpretation identifies the "man" as Job: "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: 'I am the man'—I am Job, as it is written: What man is like Job, who drinks mockery like water' (Job 34:7)" *(Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1878, 3). We can assume that this interpretation is based on the recurrence of the term *gever* four times in this chapter, a frequent epithet for Job. Additionally, the thematic parallels between Lamentations 3 and Job, both of which explore profound suffering and the search for divine justice, may have led to this conclusion.

The third chapter of Lamentations stands apart as an intimate and spiritual reflection on suffering amidst national catastrophe. Its distinctive structure and focus on personal tribulation allow it to serve as a poignant exploration of divine justice and human resilience. Whether the "man" symbolizes Jeremiah, Job, or the collective Jewish experience, the chapter transcends its historical context, resonating with universal questions of faith, suffering, and redemption.

2.5. Lamentations Chapter 4

The fourth lament focuses on the description of the siege and destruction, similar to chapter 2. This chapter portrays the stages of the siege and devastation in a gradual progression. Its literary structure consists of an alphabetical acrostic of 22 verses.

In the first section (1-10), there is a vivid and harrowing depiction of the suffering caused by the siege of Jerusalem, including a shocking portrayal of starvation within the city. Particularly distressing is the description of infants and nursing babies, who are the most vulnerable during a siege: "The tongue of the suckling cleaves to its palate for thirst. Little children beg for bread; None gives them a morsel" (Lam 4:4) and later on: "With their own hands, tenderhearted women have cooked their children" (Lam 4:10). The lamenter draws a dual comparison between the merciless treatment of children by their parents and the behaviors of two animals: jackals and ostriches. "Even jackals offer the breast

28 Several verses in the chapter (3:52-57) allude to the event of Jeremiah's imprisonment (Jer 37).

and suckle their young; But my poor people has turned cruel, Like ostriches of the desert" (Lam 4:3). Even a predator like the jackal shows compassion by nursing its young. However, the children of Jerusalem are subjected to merciless neglect as survival instincts override maternal care. The comparison to ostriches reflects their reputedly cruel behavior of abandoning their offspring in the wilderness, a metaphor for the breakdown of social cohesion in Israel.[29] The author transitions from the suffering of children to the losses among the elite of the nation: "Her elect (Heb. *nazirites*[30] – referring to those of noble status) were purer than snow, whiter than milk; Their limbs were ruddier than coral" (Lam 4:7).

In the second part (11-20), the lamenter depicts Jerusalem's humiliation due to its sins, the loss of its political autonomy, and the behavior of its enemies. The lamenter attributes the destruction to the corruption of the nation's leadership: "It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests, who had shed in her midst the blood of the just" (Lam 4:13). The priests and false prophets are accused of moral corruption and failing in their duties. Their reliance on alliances with neighboring nations, rather than trusting in God, contributed to the downfall. At the end of this section, a historical event is referenced—the capture of one of the kings of the House of David: "Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the sky; They chased us in the mountains, lay in wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our life, the LORD's anointed, was captured in their traps, he in whose shade we had thought to live among the nations" (Lam 4:19-20). The identity of this "the LORD's anointed" (משיח ה') is debated. Talmudic sources[31] suggest King Josiah, supported by the verse: "Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah which all the singers, male and female, recited in their laments for Josiah, as is done to this day; they became customary in Israel and were incorporated into the laments" (2 Chr 35:25). Others argue for King Zedekiah, who was captured by the Babylonians and tortured.[32]

In the third and last section (21-22), the lamenter concludes with a prayer for divine retribution against the Kingdom of Edom, who rejoices over the destruction of Jerusalem and harasses the city's refugees: "Rejoice and exult, Fair Edom, who dwell in the land of Uz! To you, too, the cup shall pass, You shall get drunk and expose your nakedness. Your iniquity, Fair Zion, is expiated; He will exile you no longer. Your iniquity, Fair Edom, He will note; He will uncover your sins" (Lam 4:21-22). This phenomenon of anger toward nations that rejoice in Israel's

29 See Rashi 1859, Lamentations 4:3; See also Klein 2017, Lamentations 4:3.

30 Rashi explain Nazirites: "Her princes, like נֵזֶר and כֶּתֶר (=a crown). But I say actual Nazirites, who had long hair and were very handsome, and the antecedent is 'of my people'" (Rashi 1859, Lamentations 4:7). This term has been translated in the Croatian translation as "her youth."

31 *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Taanit 22b; *Jerusalem Talmud* 1523, Shabbat 16:1; see also Rashi 1859, Lamentations 4:20.

32 See: 2 Kings, 25:4-6. See also: *Midrash Lekach Tov - Pesikta Zutreta* 1880, 4:20.

downfall is also seen in other biblical prophecies (Ob 1:12-13). However, Edom's place in this context raises some interpretative challenges. In rabbinic literature, Edom is often identified with the Roman Empire.[33] Yet, the destruction of the First Temple is exclusively tied to Babylon. Rashi addressed this apparent discrepancy by proposing that Jeremiah's prophecy in Lamentations referred to the destruction of the Second Temple, which would be carried out by the Romans (Rashi 1859, Lamentations 4:21). It is also possible to maintain that Edom here refers to the historical Edomites, which was a neighboring kingdom to the southeast of the Kingdom of Israel during the First Temple period, who betrayed Jerusalem during the First Temple period, as echoed by the psalmist: "Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall; how they cried, "Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!" (Ps 137:7). So, the association with Edom in this verse carries a dual or symbolic meaning, bridging the historical context of the First Temple and later events involving Rome.

2.6. Lamentations Chapter 5

The fifth chapter of Lamentations, which concludes the book, is fundamentally distinct from the preceding chapters in two ways. Literary structure: unlike other chapters, it does not follow the alphabetical acrostic pattern, nor does it open with the word "איכה", as seen in chapter 3. Furthermore, its verses are brief, consisting of only two clauses each, making it the shortest chapter in the book. Content and style: the chapter is entirely a communal prayer to God, expressing the people's immense distress. Both in its thematic essence and its literary form—reminiscent of a classical psalm of supplication—this chapter could easily be regarded as an additional psalm within Psalms.

The prayer in chapter 5 can be divided into three sections: Opening Appeal (1-14) – community's plea for God to remember and not ignore their suffering: "Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; Behold, and see our disgrace" (Lam 5:1). The text portrays a nation reduced to a state of vulnerability: orphans and widows, with their possessions plundered by strangers and their living conditions rendered dire. The second section (15-18) laments the devastating destruction of the Temple, symbolized as the crown of the nation: "The crown[34] has fallen from our head" (Lam 5:16). The grief over Zion is poignantly conveyed: "Because of this our hearts are sick, because of these our eyes are dimmed: Because of Mount

33 *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Gittin 57b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Avodah Zarah 10a-b; *Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Yoma 10a; *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 1878, Parashat Toledot, paragraph 67; *Midrash Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer* 1948, Chapter 38; and *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* 1878, paragraph 5.

34 Ibn Ezra interprets the "crown" as a metaphor for the Temple (Ibn Ezra 1859, Lamentations 5:16). In the Croatian translation translated as "vijenac."

Zion, which lies desolate; Jackals prowl over it" (Lam 5:17-18). The vivid imagery underscores the physical and spiritual desolation caused by the Temple's ruin. The third section (19-22) is a prayer for restoration, a supplication for God to never forget His people and to restore their former glory. This plea is preceded by an affirmation of God's eternal reign: "But You, O LORD, are enthroned forever, Your throne endures through the ages" (Lam 5:19).

The poet acknowledges the eternal nature of God's sovereignty, contrasting it with the temporal existence of the Temple. This distinction suggests that the relationship between God and Israel transcends the physical structure of the Temple, a theme echoed in other places.[35] This chapter encapsulates the psychological progression of the book's narrative and the emotional journey of those who lived through the destruction. It begins with raw defiance and denial, much like Job's protestations against his fate. This is followed by a process of acceptance and acknowledgment of divine justice, which reaches its peak in chapters 3 and 4. Ultimately, it concludes with a complete prayer infused with hope for redemption and renewal in chapter 5. The final verses strike a balance between hope and realism, expressing both the possibility of restoration and the lingering fear of rejection: "Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us come back; Renew our days as of old! For truly, You have rejected us, bitterly raged against us" (Lam 5:21-22). Thus, the chapter reflects the profound complexity of the post-destruction era, blending despair with an enduring aspiration for reconciliation and renewal.

2.7. Linguistic Features in the Book of Lamentations

The Book of Lamentations exhibits several notable linguistic characteristics that reflect the nature of biblical poetry. Below is a brief overview of some of these features:

2.7.1. Contribution to Modern Hebrew Expressions

Many idioms and expressions commonly used in modern Hebrew originate from Lamentations. These phrases have endured through centuries, illustrating the profound influence of the book on the Hebrew language.

- "יעיב" *(yaʿiv)*: The term appears in the verse: "How the Lord has clouded in His anger" (Lam 2:1). This rare word derives from "עב" *(ʿav)*, meaning "cloud," and signifies "to darken." It is an example of how Lamentations employs evocative and unique diction.
- "קרן" *(qeren):* The term appears in the verse: "He has cut down in fierce anger all the horn of Israel" (Lam 2:3). The word קרן ("horn") is a literary

35 See, for example, Jeremiah 3:16.

motif drawn from the animal kingdom. In biblical usage, a horn often symbolizes strength (Mic 4:13) or honor (Ps 112:9).

- "נפלה עטרת ראשנו" (*naflah ʿaṭeret roshenu*): This phrase appears in the verse: "The crown has fallen from our head" (Lam 5:16). This phrase has become a modern idiom to express a profound loss or mourning, frequently used in memorial notices.

2.7.2. Influence of Late Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic

The text of *Lamentations* reflects linguistic phenomena characteristic of late Biblical Hebrew, influenced by Aramaic, the spoken language of the time. These include:

- Plural endings with "ין" instead of "ים": For example:
  - "כל שעריה שוממין" ("All her gates are desolate," 1:4).
  - "גם תנין חלצו שד" ("Even jackals offer the breast," 4:3). This shift, aligning with Aramaic usage, marks the evolving linguistic landscape of the post-exilic period.
- Use of "אני" (*ani*) for the first-person pronoun instead of "אנכי" (*anokhi*): This usage mirrors the Aramaic "אנה" (*ʾana*). Examples include:
  - "For these things I weep" (בוכיה **אני** - *ani bokhiyah*, 1:16).
  - "They have heard that I groan" (נאנחה **אני** *nʾanakhah ani*, 1:21). Similar forms appear in 3:1 and 3:63, further reflecting Aramaic's influence on biblical Hebrew.

Lamentations also demonstrates other influential features, however, it is beyond the scope and framework of this paper.[36]

3. The Jewish Perspective on the Problem of Suffering

An analysis of the Book of Lamentations reveals a harrowing depiction of human suffering, suggesting that the text does not offer simple explanations. The theological and existential question of why suffering exists finds a complex response in the book. On the one hand, Lamentations expresses a deep belief in the justice of God: "The LORD is in the right" (Lam 1:18). Suffering is portrayed as the result of human sin, as emphasized in "Jerusalem has greatly sinned" (Lam 1:8). The text reinforces the idea of divine justice governing the world, where human actions inevitably lead to consequences. This belief is encapsulated in verses such as: "The kindness of the LORD has not ended, His mercies are not spent. They are renewed every morning, Ample is Your grace!" (Lam 3:22-23).

36 For further exploration of the linguistic features in Lamentations, see: Kogut 1971, 213-219.

Conversely, the suffering described in Lamentations also originates from divine wrath, which is depicted as overwhelming and indiscriminate. The text portrays God's anger as a destructive force that affects both the guilty and the innocent: "See, O LORD, and behold, To whom You have done this! Alas, women eat their own fruit, Their new-born babes! Alas, priest and prophet are slain In the Sanctuary of the Lord!" (Lam 2:20). The scale of punishment appears disproportionate, with the righteous suffering alongside the sinners. Particularly poignant is the suffering of children and infants, who bear the brunt of the calamity despite their innocence. The ultimate expression of this tragedy is the starvation that compels parents to consume their offspring.

The book does not shy away from the sense of injustice inherent in human suffering. From a human perspective, the destruction and pain appear cruel and unwarranted. Yet, Lamentations insists on preserving the concept of divine justice, even when it is incomprehensible to mortals. This creates a profound theological paradox, On the one hand, humanity clings to the belief in a moral and just God. On the other hand, this same God is perceived as the source of suffering and evil. The sages of the rabbinic tradition grappled with the tension between suffering and divine providence, seeking to offer frameworks for understanding.

The Talmud explores the connection between a person's actions and the punishments imposed upon them. In particular, due to its importance to our discussion, we will quote this paragraph:

> Rav Ami said: There is no death without sin; and there is no suffering without iniquity. There is no death without sin, as it is written: "Only the person who sins shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent's guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child's guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to them alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to them alone" (Ezekiel 18:20). And there is no suffering without iniquity, as it is written: "I will punish their transgression with the rod, their iniquity with plagues" (Psalms 89:33). The ministering angels said before the Holy One, "Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, why did You penalize Adam, the first man, with the death penalty?" He said to them: "I gave him a simple mitzva,[37] and he violated it." They said to Him, "Didn't Moses and Aaron, who observed the whole Tora in its entirety, nevertheless die?" (He) said to them: "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good…" (Ecclesiastes 9:2). (Apparently, death is not dependent upon one's actions. Everyone dies). He (Rav Ami) stated in accordance

37 Mitzva – a religious obligation, a godly deed; *tarjag mitzvot*: 613 mitzvot; the term for 365 prohibitions and 248 commandments from the Torah, which a religious Jew must observe; the word tarjag is the pronunciation of the number 613 written in the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (tav=400, resh=200, yud=10, gimel=3). One part deals with a person's relationship with God, and the other part with a person's relationship with people. The obligation to fulfill mitzvot applies to women over 12 years and one day old (*bat mitzvah*), and to men over 13 years and one day old (*bar mitzvah*). Dadon 2009, 335.

> with this tana,[38] as it was taught: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Even Moses and Aaron died due to their sin, as it is stated: "And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: Because you did not believe in Me…" (Numbers 20:12). Had you believed in Me (and spoken to the rock as commanded), your time would not yet have come to leave the world. (Apparently, even Moses and Aaron died due to their sins). Four (people) died due to (Adam's sin with) the serpent, (in the wake of which death was decreed upon all of mankind, although they themselves were free of sin). And they are: Benjamin, son of Jacob; Amram, father of Moses; Yishai, father of David; and Kilab, son of David… Learn from it that there is death without sin and there is suffering without iniquity (*Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Shabbat 55a, 55b).

The Talmud implies unequivocally that there are individuals who have died without any wrongdoing. According to the Talmud's conclusion, it is possible for a person who has committed no sin to endure suffering and even die. In other words, there is not necessarily a direct correlation between a person's behavior and the calamities that befall them. This raises the question of how to reconcile this with the assertion in Ecclesiastes: "For there is no righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin" (Eccl 7:20).

The *Tosafot*[39] suggest that the author of Ecclesiastes refers to the majority of people. Most humans are indeed sinners, but there are exceptional cases of righteous individuals who are sinless. Maimonides, in his legal codex (Maimonides 1974, Hilchot Berachot 2:8; Maimonides 1974, Hilchot Shabbat 2:3),[40] rules in accordance with the Talmud that death can occur without sin, and suffering without iniquity. However, in his philosophical work *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides takes a seemingly opposite stance:

> We, however, believe that all these human affairs are managed with justice; far be it from God to do wrong, to punish anyone unless the punishment is necessary and merited. It is distinctly stated in the Law, that all is done in accordance with justice; and the words of our Sages generally express the same idea. They clearly say: "There is no death without sin, no sufferings without transgression" (*Babylonian Talmud* 1999, Shabbat, 55a). And they said, "The deserts of an are meted out to him in the same measure which he himself employs" (*Mishna* 1987, Sotah, 1:7). These are the words of the Mishna. Our Sages declare it wherever opportunity is given, that the idea of God necessarily implies justice; that He will reward the most pious for all their pure and

38 Tannaim (Aramaic: *tanaim*, singular: *tana*) – "those who learn and repeat what they have learned"; rabbis from the era of the Mishnah, as during their time the Oral Torah was still transmitted orally, so they had to memorize it and repeat it aloud to each other. See also: Dadon 2009, 512-515.

39 See: Tosafot Commentary on *Babylonian Talmud 1999*, Shabat 55b, paragraph "Arba'ah metu bee'tjo shel Nachash."

40 Similarly ruled by Rabbi Yosef Karo in his codex *Shulchan Aruch*, Yoreh De'ah 376:1.

> upright actions, although no direct commandment was given them through a prophet; and that He will punish all the evil deeds of men, although they have not been prohibited by a prophet, if common sense warns against them, as e.g., injustice and violence. Thus our Sages say: "God does not deprive any being of the full reward (of its good deed)" (*Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Pesachim 118a, Baba Kama 38b) again, "He who says that God remits part of a punishment, will be punished severely; He is long-suffering, but is sure to exact payment" (*Babylonian Talmud* 1961, Baba Kama 50a, *Bereshit Rabbah* 67:4)... The same principle is expressed in all sayings of our Sages" (Maimonides 2005, III:17, 311-312).

From an examination of these statements by Maimonides, it becomes evident that his philosophical view on divine providence contradicts the position presented in his halakhic codex. It is worth emphasizing that he elaborates on this view in great detail and in a systematic manner in his philosophical work, making it clear that this is not a mistake. Why, then, does he argue in his philosophical work that divine justice is absolute, leaving no room for death without sin or suffering without transgression?

Some explain that, according to Maimonides, philosophical and theological matters lie outside the realm of Talmudic halakhic rulings. Therefore, the conclusions of the Talmud should not be regarded as binding on such issues (HaMeiri 1974, Shabbat 55a). The Talmudic discourse we reviewed is not theological or philosophical in nature but is instead based entirely on the interpretation of biblical verses and Talmudic statements concerning the principle of divine providence. Hence, in his philosophical work, Maimonides does not feel bound by the Talmudic position. Nachmanides, on the other hand, interprets the Talmudic conclusion differently. In his view, the conclusion is not that there is no justice in the world, but rather that sometimes death and suffering that befall a person are not a result of their behavior but are instead connected to the actions of their ancestors. For instance, humanity was punished with mortality due to the original sin of Adam and Eve (Nachmanides 1963, 118).

The prevailing position of Jewish thinkers regarding divine providence, as presented in the biblical verses and rabbinic literature, is unequivocal: divine justice is absolute and beyond question. However, personal and historical experiences sometimes raise questions that human intellect is unable to resolve. The approach of the Sages is that we must believe in God's providence even when reality appears to contradict it. It is essential to understand that the happiness of a particular person does not indicate their righteousness, nor do the sufferings of others indicate their wickedness (Dadon 2009, 650-661). This duality—acknowledging pain while maintaining hope—mirrors the rabbinic approach to suffering, which seeks meaning and redemption even amidst profound tragedy. Thus, the Jewish response to suffering is not to resolve the paradox but to live within it, affirming

faith while grappling with its complexities. This message is the central theme of the Book of Job, but it is also highly relevant to the Book of Lamentations.

Conclusion

The Book of Lamentations, on one hand, describes the difficult situation during the destruction, and on the other, it guides us on how to cope both theologically and psychologically with the consequences of the national catastrophe. One can view the Book of Lamentations as a kind of drama, with several different characters speaking at various times. Primarily, there are the figures of the mourner and the woman, *daughter of Zion*, who represents the exiled people of Jerusalem, the generation of destruction. There is a distinctive feature of the mourner in the Book of Lamentations that sets him apart from the "biblical narrator" encountered in other biblical books. The typical biblical narrator always knows everything in detail but is not part of the story; he is external to it. However, the mourner in Lamentations is deeply involved in the story; he experiences the harsh events and suffering. A person's reaction to an unexpected disaster is usually a response composed of a series of reactions. These responses include shock, denial, silence, weeping, struggle, or acceptance and submission to injustice and fate. The response may also be hope or a fall into the abyss of despair. In the book's chapters, particularly in chapter 3, we find this series of reactions in the mourner. His responses are sometimes contradictory, revealing the depth of his pain. His final response, which ends with a plea for revenge against the enemies who destroyed his home and ravaged his land, also reveals the profundity of his sorrow.

At the beginning of the article, we provided an overview of the background to the writing of the Book of Lamentations, its name, the question of its authorship, and its place among the books of the Hebrew Bible. We then analyzed the book from a literary perspective, emphasizing the literary genre of lamentation in biblical poetry and the structural composition of the book. In our study, we examined the five chapters of the book, highlighting unique linguistic, stylistic, and literary features that indicate, among other things, the transmission of an educational and didactic message to the reader, which goes far beyond the spontaneous expression of pain over loss, death, and destruction. The Book of Lamentations contains profound and rational reflections on the devastating events of the destruction, offering an intellectual message rather than just an emotional one. Additionally, we saw that various linguistic phenomena in the book influenced both ancient and modern Hebrew. In the final section of the article, intending to bridge the human sense of injustice with the divine justice that governs the world—a central theme in the Book of Lamentations—we explored rabbinic literature to understand Judaism's perspective on the question of suffering and pain in the world. This immense human suffering, which the biblical author succeeded in describing

so vividly in the Book of Lamentations by depicting the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem, raises important theological questions. According to Judaism, divine justice and providence exist in the world, even though we encounter difficult situations throughout history or in our lives that seemingly create a theological paradox. The happiness or suffering of any individual does not serve as proof of their righteousness or wickedness.

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Kotel Dadon

Poezija patnje u Tužaljkama – književna analiza

Sažetak

Knjiga Tužaljki od velikog je značaja za židovsku kulturu. Budući da odražava opetovane nesreće i tragične događaje koji su oblikovali židovsko nacionalno iskustvo tijekom povijesti, njezin utjecaj proteže se izvan njezinih religioznih dimenzija. U ovom članku autor nudi razrađenu književnu i teološku analizu Knjige Tužaljki, naglašavajući njezinu važnost unutar židovske kulture i religijske tradicije. Knjiga se istražuje ne samo kao izraz žalosti nad traumatičnim razaranjem Jeruzalema i Prvoga Hrama u 6. stoljeću pr. n. e. nego i kao strukturirano pjesničko djelo koji sadrži edukativne, didaktičke i moralne poruke. Članak je podijeljen na tri glavna dijela. Prvi dio pruža općenit i sažet uvod koji čitatelju može pomoći u razumijevanju raznih vidova knjige, uključujući njezinu povijesnu pozadinu, porijeklo njezina naslova, tradiciju njezina nastanka kao i mjesto u kanonu Hebrejske Biblije. Drugi i glavni dio članka analizira strukturu i književni žanr knjige kao i tematsku organizaciju njezinih pet poglavlja. Tu se ističu jedinstvena jezična obilježja Tužaljki i njihov utjecaj na hebrejski jezik i književnost, kako staru tako i modernu. Posljednji dio bavi se teološkim paradoksom vjere u pravednoga Boga usred patnje i nepravde, što je središnji motiv Knjige Tužaljki. Autor istražuje pravce nastojanja rabinske književnosti da stekne uvid u odgovor judaizma na pitanje patnje i nevolja u svijetu. Analiza uključuje odlomke rabinskih tekstova, povezujući klasičnu židovsku misao sa suvremenim raspravama. Članak spaja književne i teološke uvide, nudeći višeslojno razumijevanje Tužaljki kao kulturnoga, povijesnog i religijskog artefakta.

The Development and Activities of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb

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Abstract

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, from its founding in 1946 until the early 1970s, was one of the largest and most active communities in Croatia. Located in the very center, near the main square of Zagreb, at Gajeva 9a, it had approximately a hundred members. The members of the church were actively involved in evangelization, primarily through distributing tracts, sharing personal testimony, and visiting surrounding areas, despite the restrictions imposed by the communist regime. Conferences were held twice a year, bringing together all the Brethren communities from the former Yugoslavia. The church was visited by famous foreign preachers such as Bakht Singh and Roger T. Foster. Visits by various foreign missionaries, especially from Switzerland and England, and later also from Germany, opened up new opportunities, especially for young people, to participate in Christian events outside the country. In addition to trips and conferences, trips for young people and camps in Gorski Kotar, near Lake Lokvar, were regularly organized, as well as trips to England, all of which left a great mark on the lives of young people. Publishing occupied an important place in evangelization and encouragement, discipleship, and the upbringing of believers. Dr. Branko Đaković, one of the elders of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, left behind a significant number of translations of Christian literature. His most notable translation work is a complete translation of the entire Holy Scripture. Also, his Bible Dictionary is the first Protestant Bible dictionary in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and his Bible translations are the first standard Protestant

translations in Croatia. The first part provides an overview of the emergence of Brethren churches in Europe, their spread to the former Yugoslavia, and the development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb. The second part discusses the organizational structure of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, and the third part examines its work, activities, and publishing. In terms of publishing, it discusses the magazine Bratski vjesnik, Bible translations, and the emergence of the Bible Dictionary in more detail. It also provides biographies of Elder Branko Đaković and other important figures in the community's life.

Keywords: *Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, Brethren movement, Brethren Herald, Bible, Branko Đaković*

Introduction

Christ's Church of Brethren[1] was one of the most active and largest evangelical communities in mid-20th-century Zagreb. The history and activities of the Church of Christ in Zagreb have not been extensively researched and recorded so far, except for a few entries in the following publications: *Vjerske zajednice u Jugoslaviji* (*Religious Communities in Yugoslavia*), Frid, Zlatko, ed. (1970), *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj* (*Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia*), S. Jambrek (2003), *Ekumenska trilogija* (*The Ecumenical Trilogy*), J. Kolarić (2005), and *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj* (*Religious Communities in Croatia*), Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov, eds. (2008). Additionally, regarding publishing, Ruben Knežević wrote extensively about Branko Đaković's Bible translations in his book *Hrvatski bezimprimaturni biblijski prijevodi* (*Croatian non-imprimatur Bible translations*) (2019), touching on denominational characteristics, but not the entire scope of the church's publishing and activities.

This article aims to introduce the public to the activities and development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb and to explore the course of the creation of some of its significant book publications. The key figure in its publishing is Branko

1 Editor's note: According to Daniel Lukić, originally, the churches that are part of this movement in English were called "Assemblies of Brethren," and some used the title "Brethren Christian Church." Those churches never used the label "Christ," but they could exceptionally use the label "Christian." Hence, the challenge of translating this article from Croatian to English was to use terminology that reflects a specific Yugoslavian or Croatian context while remaining meaningful in the English language. Two options were taken into consideration: a) Christ's Church of Brethren; b) Brethren Church of Christ. The dilemma was to use terminology that would avoid identifying the *Brethren Church* in Zagreb and the *Brethren movement* with the *Churches of Christ* (in Croatian: Kristova crkva), a denomination that operates in the USA and the European (Croatian) context. The decision was to use the label "Christ's Church of Brethren." Hence, in the Croatian context, this article refers to "Kristova crkva braće" (Christ's Church of Brethren), which differs from "Kristova crkva" (Church(es) of Christ).

Đaković, and among its notable publications are the translation of the Bible, one of the first complete translations into the Croatian language, and the *Bible Dictionary*, one of the first dictionaries of its kind published in Croatian. The fact is that there are no concrete records, and no systematic research has been done on the activities and publishing of this community. However, most of the community's publications have been preserved, and there are still living witnesses, especially community members, who participated in its events from the very beginning.

The first part provides an overview of the emergence of Brethren churches in Europe, their spread to former Yugoslavia, and the development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb. The second part discusses the organizational structure of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, and the third part examines its work, activities, and publishing. In terms of publishing, *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*), biblical translations, and the creation of the *Bible Dictionary* will be briefly mentioned. It also provides biographies of elder Branko Đaković and other important figures in the community's life. The conclusion provides a review of the research conducted, including some of the obstacles, challenges, and insights that arose, and the overall influence and legacy that Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb had and left behind in this area.

1. Historical Overview of Christ's Church of Brethren

1.1. The Beginnings and Spread of the Movement in Ireland and England

In the 19th century, a new wave of revival and reform of the church began in Great Britain.[2] After a period of religious cooling within formal communities, the idea of the Church as the "body of Christ," led by the Holy Spirit, reappeared. Between 1812 and 1825, several books were published on the subject of the restoration of the land to Israel and the second coming of Christ, which were widely read in Christian circles. This raised the issue of the need for the Church to be prepared as "His bride," pure and undefiled by the world. Regular meetings began to be organized on the subject of the millennial kingdom and the second coming of Christ, at which the question began to be increasingly considered: "What does man call

2 The main source of information on the historical development of the Brethren movement was the book: Andrew Miller, *The Brethren: Commonly so-called, a brief sketch*. A. Miller (1810–1883) was a recognized member of the Brethren movement who wrote several valuable works on the subject of Church history. He also collaborated with C. H. Machinist, encouraging his work, and wrote the introduction to his famous series of Bible commentaries, *Notes on Genesis, Exodus, etc.* Before joining the Brethren movement, Miller volunteered as a pastor in a Baptist church in London. After responding to an invitation to one of the Bible reading evenings, he continued to attend these readings every week, delighted by the truths he discovered in God's word at these gatherings. Thus, he soon joined the Brethren, becoming one of God's ardent evangelists.

the Church and what should it actually look like according to the New Testament writings?" Such meetings were also attended by the brethren, although they did not yet exist as a group at that time. According to A. Miller, it all began in Dublin, where, after much contemplation of the Scriptures and prayer, in 1827–1828, four brothers started gathering to "break bread" on Sunday mornings, believing that the Lord was with them. They were: John Nelson Darby, Edward Cronin, John Gifford Bellett, and Francis Huchinson (My Brethren s.a.). After careful consideration and comparison of the Scriptures, they decided to separate themselves from the existing church system, which, in their opinion, did not align with the New Testament example. Thus, they began to meet only in the name of the Lord Jesus, calling upon the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Miller 1992, 11-12).

They were soon joined by a growing number of believers who were thirsty for the Holy Spirit and Christian fellowship, which they did not find in their denominations. They gathered together and asked the Lord to enlighten and direct them. Soon, in 1828, they published their first tract entitled *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*, written by Darby (Miller 1992, 17). This tract contained the foundations of their belief and action, based on the Word of God, and was informative in nature, rather than a creed.[3] The brothers still adhere to these principles today. The aforementioned tract had a great impact, and many, dissatisfied with the "dry" state, left their churches to join the brothers. More tracts and books soon followed, and the gospel was preached fervently in all its power. Many thought that, due to the lack of any organized structure or visible unity, the movement would quickly die down, but it continued to spread more and more.

Initially, the movement met in homes, and in 1830, they rented a public space for their Sunday bread-breaking meetings for the first time. In this space, without any church trappings, many experienced for the first time the power and freshness of God's word. Other meetings for studying the Word were held in smaller groups at the homes of believers. From their early beginnings to the present day, they continued to practice the so-called *reading meetings*, which were their basic method of teaching, characteristic of the Brethren movement. At that time, such meetings were known for their simplicity, dedication, and unity of believers gathered around Christ as the central focus, and the Holy Spirit as the sole teacher (Miller 1992, 63).

In the town of Plymouth, in the county of Devon in southwest England, believers who had separated from their formal denominations began to gather in homes. They were known for their fervent preaching in public places. Since they did not belong to any formal denomination, they were called Plymouth Brethren (Miller 1992, 62). They were characterized by simplicity and modesty in appearance and dress, and these Brethren sold their possessions, furniture, and jewelry to give the

3 Credo (Latin: *credo*: 'I believe'), belief, principle; in Christianity (*Hrvatska enciklopedija* 2021).

proceeds to the needy or to deacons. They separated themselves from everything they considered worldly to await the Lord's return (Miller 1992, 65).

In Bristol, an English town located in the southwest of England, a group of believers formed in a church chapel called Bethesda. The Baptist community was already gathering in that chapel, and a few years before 1848, the entire congregation switched to the side of the Brethren movement (Miller 1992, 83). Some of the Brethren viewed this as incorrect, including C. H. Mackintosh, who argued that there was no "corporate conscience," but only the individual decision of each person before God (Miller 1992, 84).

Soon, the problems plaguing the Plymouth community began to affect the Bethesda community, ultimately resulting in a split within the movement. It all began when a group of Plymouth Brethren broke away, led by a certain Mr. Newton, who, among other things, began to teach some heretical teachings. Tracts containing his teachings quickly spread throughout the region, provoking a variety of reactions. It was around 1848 that the question arose among the Bethesda Brethren: "How should we treat the other Brethren who had accepted the heretical teachings in question, and is it acceptable to receive them into the fellowship of 'breaking bread'?" On this issue, the church split, and soon a division emerged into two groups: the Neutral Brethren (Open Brethren) and the Exclusive Brethren (or later simply referred to as Brethren) (Miller 1992, 79-81). The question that arose was ecclesiological: Were the Brethren gathered based on the unity of the church, or were they just an independent congregation? (Miller 1992, 86). Bethesda accepted the principle of "independence," and those who accepted the principle of "one body" became their opposition. Soon, following the example of Bethesda, other fraternities in the country held similar meetings and took sides. Eventually, the Exclusive Brethren accepted the Plymouth Brethren, who had false teachings, into the meeting, but did not accept the very devout brethren from Bethesda (Miller 1992, 90-91).

The new motto of the Neutral Brethren was "The blood of the Lamb is the union of the saints," and discipline should come later. Therefore, they received everyone who believed that they were a child of God and washed by the blood of Christ into their fellowship of "breaking bread," while the other, more closed brothers believed: Blood is the foundation of peace, not unity, and there are many who are washed by the blood of Christ, but because of their evil deeds they are not worthy to sit at God's table. The Neutral Brethren were also called Open Brethren because of their openness to receive people to the "Lord's table" (Miller 1992, 97). Later, the Open Brethren usually entered into brotherhoods with other denominations, while the other brothers were often attacked by other denominations, especially because they were losing their "members" and, as A. Miller believes, usually the most spiritual and intellectual ones (Miller 1992, 98). Both new branches of the Brethren movement continued to be known for their fervent evangelism, writing

books on specific biblical topics, and distributing tracts. Many Christians who felt spiritually dead in their churches reached for their literature and left their communities to join the Brethren (Miller 1992, 98-99).

1.2. The Spread of the Brethren Movement in the Former Yugoslavia

Englishman F. A. Tatford (1901–1986), a member of the so-called of the Plymouth Brethren, wrote more than seventy books (mostly biblical commentaries) (Rainey s.a.), and one chapter of his book *Red Glow over Eastern Europe* published in 1986 he devotes to an overview of the spread of the Brethren movement among the South Slavs, primarily writing about the activity of missionaries in that area through the spread of the gospel and humanitarian work (Tatford 1986, 240-254). Tatford himself visited many countries, often including those difficult to reach, where he taught the Bible and also visited the brothers in Yugoslavia. According to his records, the first assembly of brothers (Tatford mentions only *an assembly*) in Yugoslavia was founded in 1900 in Bački Petrovac, Serbia, in an area with a majority of Slovaks. This was preceded by the work of missionaries (Tatford 1986, 245), who were Jan (or John) Siracky and the Butcher couple (Kate and Frederick). There were over 50,000 Slovaks in the area around Petrovac, which had a population of about 12,000. The gospel had been preached to them, and believers had been baptized since 1875. Jan Siracky worked among them for several years and was joined by the Butcher missionary couple at the turn of the century. This resulted in the founding of the first Yugoslav congregation, according to Tatford. Brother J. Siracky worked to spread the gospel and translated Christian tracts into Slovak, as there was very little Christian literature available in that area at the time, until he left for America in 1923, where in 1927 he received recognition for his work in Eastern Europe (Tatford 1986, 245). "Before World War II, the community had about 15 church communities in Vojvodina, northern Serbia, and smaller groups of believers in Croatia" (Kolarić 2005, 630).

The next missionaries Tatford lists as continuing to visit the area were James Lees, Franz J. Kresina, and Michael Sadlon, brothers from Bohemia, and many Britons such as Martin W. Baker, Jacob Schneidrook, H. J. Humphries, S. R. Hopkins, and William E. Grünbaum. After Bački Petrovac, another community or "assembly" was founded in the nearby town of Kisač, which was assisted by Franz Kresina, who also visited Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zagreb. The community in Bački Petrovac grew in the 1980s to three hundred believers under the leadership of Samuel Ribar, and later his son Samuel Junior (Tatford 1986, 249).

Englishman James W. Wiles and his wife Louse D. had been in the heart of the Balkan country for almost seven years, and finally arrived from Birmingham to Belgrade in 1913. James, who had worked at Birmingham's King Edward Grammar School, was employed as a professor of English at the University of Belgrade,

and then at the beginning of World War I as a translator and secretary for the Red Cross, which allowed him to move freely among prisoners and wounded, to whom he distributed thousands of Bibles. He also helped to relocate three hundred Serbian boys from the war zone to safety, where they attended the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and were exposed to Christian teachings daily. The Wiles couple traveled thousands of kilometers, visiting countries in the Balkans, including Croatia, to assist with humanitarian work and share the Word of God. Furthermore, the Englishmen J. Gaskin and E. Collins, and W. Dudgeon came to help with work in hospitals in Skopje, North Macedonia; Max Springer worked on spreading the gospel in Croatia, and James Lees in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia (Tatford 1986, 249-252).

In 1930, brother Mojsović, of Serbian origin, came from Czechoslovakia to Novi Sad, where he established several communities and published a Christian magazine in the Serbian language, which continued until World War II. In 1937, the first Yugoslav Conference of Brethren communities was held in Novi Sad, attended by brothers from that area, including some visitors from Great Britain. During World War II, several additional communities were established in Serbia, located near the Romanian border and south of the Sava River. In 1950, thanks to the work of two sisters who arrived from Italy, a community began to operate on the Croatian coast in Opatija. From that community, a Hungarian woman helped establish a community in her hometown of Subotica, Serbia, which by 1986 had approximately fifty members (Tatford 1986, 253). The community from Opatija relocated to Rijeka, where it experienced rapid growth, and by 1966, it had found a larger space and already had approximately a hundred members. Numerous brethren conferences are held in Rijeka, and in 1977, F. A. Tatford, among others, speaks. Given that Rijeka is a tourist destination, many in that community have heard the gospel and passed it on, such as a newly converted Macedonian family who, upon returning to their hometown of Bitola, continue to witness and work. A community was also established in Split, and in 1946, it was officially established in Zagreb, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The movement spread rapidly, aided by visits and assistance from brothers from Great Britain and other Western countries, so that by the time of World War II, there were approximately fifteen local communities in Vojvodina, in northern Serbia, and the movement was already expanding throughout Croatia (Ceranić 1970, 41). By 1970, the existence of 24 communities in the territory of Yugoslavia was recorded (2 in Slovenia, 5 in Croatia, and 17 in Serbia). At that time, two religious bimonthly magazines were already being published: *Vječni život* in the Slovakian language in Bački Petrovac (editor Jan Majerski) and *Bratski vjesnik* in Zagreb (editor Marija Berković), both with a circulation of one thousand copies (Ceranić 1970, 42). At that time, communities were active in six places in Croatia: Zagreb, Rijeka, Split, Duga Resa, Banova Jaruga, and Ludina (Jambrek,

2003, 166). According to Tatford, by 1986, approximately fifty communities had been recorded in the territory of Yugoslavia, including smaller groups and those with between one hundred and two hundred members, while the community in Zagreb, located on Gajeva Street, had around one hundred members (Tatford 1986, 253).

1.3. The Origin and Development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb was founded on November 3, 1946, when the founding group gathered and unanimously made the decision: "An independent Church Municipality is being formed, which enters into the closest cooperation with the work of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren, whose spirit and doctrine we already possess almost entirely. Gabrijel Jonke is God-appointed responsible elder and preacher" (Krštenje od 1946.). The church minutes list the names of nine founding members: Gabrijel Jonke, Jelena Jonke (Gabrijel's mother), Vaclav and Martha Hansal, Milka Peharda, Branko Đaković, Dragica Božičković, Olga Škaberna, and Nada Vacek. The following are listed as supporters of the founder: Ema Đaković (mother of Branko Đ.), Ivana Jonke, Anđelka and Barica Lukavečki, Biserka Marić, Darinka Horvat, and Slavica Lukić. The official founding of the church was preceded by Gabrijel Jonke's trip to Novi Sad for a meeting with P. K. Mojsović, the president of the General Eldership of the Brethren Church in Yugoslavia. The founding of the new church was also preceded by a meeting with the elders of the Baptist community in Zagreb. The church minutes state the following:

> Gabrijel Jonke reports on his trip to Novi Sad and the discussions he had with brother P. K. Mojsović, the president of the General Eldership of the Brethren Church in Yugoslavia. He further reports on the discussions with the elders of the Baptist community in Zagreb, who were not willing to accept the recognition of the previous work in 38/IV Red Army Street[4] as an independent church community based on the free and simple principles of the New Testament, which agreement was set as a condition for remaining within the Baptist Churches (Krštenje od 1946.).

Then, at the behest of Petar Mojsović, the church reported to the then authorities to receive their full recognition and protection.[5] In this regard, the following conclusion is made: "It is concluded: 1) That among the brothers and sisters and

4 38/IV Red Army Street, today Nodilova 2, Zagreb. At that time, the Jonke family lived in that apartment, and today the Đaković family.

5 In the church minutes, it is stated that Petar Mojsović states the following: "He warns of the need for a new registration of our church and our meetings in Zagreb with the national authorities, namely with the Commission for Religious Affairs under the Presidency of the Government of the Republic of Srpska, which is responsible for us."

friends, in addition to spiritual knowledge, there is constantly spreading awareness of the need not only to submit to the authorities, but also to full loyalty and cooperation with our national government. 2) Brother Gabriel Jonke is entrusted with compiling and submitting a report about the church and church meetings" (Krštenje od 1946.).

According to the minutes, the church had its first baptism in 1947, and eight believers were baptized (the baptismal candidates were prepared and recommended by Gabrijel Jonke and baptized by Petar Mojsović).[6] From its beginnings, the church kept a record, entitled "Krštenje od 1946." ("Baptisms since 1946"), which contains a list of those baptized from 1946 to 1960. The minutes also record meetings at which some important decisions were made regarding the founding of the church, and minutes of individual weddings. Gabrijel Jonke is listed as the recorder, and in 1953, Branko Đaković. Baptisms were first performed by Petar Mojsović, and from June 1949, this service was entrusted to Gabrijel Jonke. In 1958, it is mentioned that Branko Đaković led baptisms twice. The document lists the wedding of Branko Đaković and Hilda Punk on 13 November 1949, and the wedding of Gabrijel Jonka and Nada Emilija Vacek on 11 December 1949.[7] According to the church records, 63 believers were baptized from the official beginnings of the church in late 1946 to July 1951, i.e., in five years. The baptisms were performed in Zagreb, but the records indicate that several individuals from other places and cities were also baptized. Several believers from the community in Opatija and Duhovo near Uljanik are listed, as well as two from Ludina near Kutina, and individuals from Bjelovar, Đakovo, and Maribor.[8] At that time, sometime between 1946 and 1951, the church was located in the Jonke family apartment, where Jelena Jonke, then a widow, lived with her son, Gabrijel, and daughter, Hana. Hana's husband, Boris Gajer, and their two children also resided there. After their marriage in 1949, Nada Vacek, Gabrijel's wife, joined them (Jonke 2017). Out of a desire for more spiritual nourishment and fellowship, a few believers began to gather in the same space with the same fervor, and the initiator was mother Jelena, whose initiative was later taken up by her son Gabrijel. The meetings were first held in that apartment on Sunday afternoons, as some of the participants initially attended services at the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street, where Gabrijel also occasionally preached. Interestingly, Gabrijel Jonke and Nada Vacek, who later became his wife, attended the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street.

6 The following were baptized: Ema Đaković, Milena Šešić, Ivana Jonke, Magdalena Morlok, Anđela Lukavečki, Štefica Štulić from Ludina, Slavica Lukić from Sređani, Velika Tomović from Maribor.

7 According to the minutes, it is evident that the weddings took place first in the registry office, and then in the church premises, prayers were held for God's blessing and guidance over the married couple, and the meaning of marriage was discussed, while the newlyweds made promises of fidelity to God's precepts.

8 In later years, some believers from Karlovac, Sesvete, Duga Resa, etc. were baptized there.

Nada's father was Vinko Vacek, a preacher at that church, and she was converted in 1945 when Gabrijel Jonke preached there one afternoon (Jonke 2017). As the group grew, it sought to form an independent church community within the Baptist Church. However, their request was denied, so the group merged with Christ's Church of the Free Brethren, with which they also had a collaborative relationship. After the church received space from the city for use, the Jonke family moved to another apartment, while the Gajer family remained in theirs. In the early 1960s, Branko and his wife, Hilda, moved in. The Đaković family still lives in that apartment today.

Five years after its founding, in 1951, Christ's Church of the Free Brethren finally received space from the city to use in the very center of the city, on the second floor at 9a Gajeva Street[9] (Fig. 1). This building, constructed in 1900, was later declared a heritage monument. The church later dropped the word "free" from its name and left only "brothers." Already in the *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*) from 1966, it only mentions Christ's Church of the Brethren, or CCB for short. "Most communities began to operate under the name of Christ's Church of the Brethren, but over time, some retained only the adjective 'brethren', and some left only the basic name, while some added a new name to the basic name. Some Brethren churches changed their name to Christian communities" (Jovanović 2007, 224).

Fig. 1: *The Community of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren in the church premises, Gajeva 9a, 1952*

9 On January 29, 1951, Christ's Church of the Free Brethren received a Decision from the city on the use of the premises at Gajeva 9a, i.e. a permit allowing it to move into that space within ten days.

The church experienced rapid growth in numbers during its early days, and according to Zorislav Đaković, son of Branko Đaković, it had approximately 100 people by around 1957-58 (Zorislav Đaković 2018). The church was very active in evangelization, mostly through the distribution of tracts and personal sharing of testimonies. Conferences, trips with children and young people, and later youth camps were organized throughout the year. The church was also regularly visited by foreign missionaries, who sometimes took entire groups of young people to England for international conferences and to experience church life there. They also attended conferences in Switzerland, France, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), and Germany. The community grew in Pietism. The leadership consisted of elders, including Gabrijel Jonke, Branko Đaković, Božo, and Jure Knežević, and others, but mostly Gabrijel and Branko preached, who were mostly involved in the leadership and work of the church (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: *The Community of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren in the church premises, Gajeva 9a, 1965*

During the 1970s, Gabrijel Jonke, who had previously led the community together with Branko Đaković, left for Germany, where he dedicated himself to missionary work with "migrant workers" in Munich, while Branko Đaković continued to lead the church with other elders. Around this time, tensions arose among a certain group of young people who increasingly felt the rigidity of the church's certain principles and rules. As a result, a large number of young people separated and continued to gather as independent home groups.

CCB Gajeva continues to operate, but in smaller numbers. Around the first half of the 1970s, the church became more closely associated with the German, more conservative Brethren movement through missionaries coming from Ger-

many, from Dillenburg. The community is also visited by Brethren from France and Switzerland. Especially during the Homeland War in Croatia, the French assisted, sending humanitarian aid on several occasions. Over time, the number of members gradually decreased due to the aging of the members. Branko Đaković, who eventually remained the sole elder, passed the responsibility of leading the community to his son, Zorislav Đaković, in 2005 due to his advancing age and inability to continue. A year earlier, in 2004, the church was registered in the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia under the name Christ's Church of Brethren – Zagreb. In 2008, an agreement was reached between CCB and the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, allowing the Institute to utilize the space for a reading room and classroom. Currently, the space at Gajeva 9a houses the Institute's reading room with reference literature and the Center for Biblical Research (CBR), a department of the Biblical Institute "established with the aim of encouraging public, personal and private reading of the Bible by preserving works of Croatian biblical heritage and promoting research into its history and research into biblical translation, with the aim of restoring the significance of the Bible and biblical values in Croatian society and informing the media and the public about everything related to the promotion of the Holy Scriptures" (Center for Biblical Research s.a.). The space organizes courses in Biblical Greek and Hebrew, as well as lectures on various biblical topics. The space is also used for various events, including book presentations, Christian meetings, and roundtables.

After the death of Branko Đaković in 2009, Zorislav Đaković was officially appointed by the Council of Churches of Christ in Croatia[10] as the leader of the community at 9a Gajeva Street. In 2008, the book *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj* (*Religious Communities in Croatia*) was published, which included a chapter entitled "Churches of Christ in Croatia" under the category "Christian Churches of the Reformation Heritage," which presented a division of the Churches of Christ into two parts, according to their origin: 1) Churches of Christ from the Restoration Movement, which emerged in Great Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; 2) Churches of Christ originating from the English and German Brethren movement of the 19th century (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 123).

In 1979, Gabrijel's son, Tomislav Jonke, founded a community called the Church of Christ – Betania, which is considered a free church originating from the Anabaptist movement (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 125). They also used the space at Gajeva 9a, albeit at a different time of day, and

10 "In 2003, the Government of the Republic of Croatia concluded an agreement of mutual interest with the Churches of Christ in Croatia, by which the Churches acquired legal personality and the possibility of public activity in the social community in accordance with the Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia" (Church of Christ Varaždin s.a.).

later relocated to another location on Svačićev trg. The Betania Church, under the leadership of Tomislav Jonke, continued to organize summer camps in Lokve, later purchasing a larger space and, for many years, dedicating itself to working with addicts who come to Lokve throughout the year for a longer period of rehabilitation. They also continued to organize youth camps, which were attended by young people from other parts of Croatia, especially Rijeka.

From Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, many are today pastors and elders, such as Tomislav Jonke (pastor of the Church of Christ – Betania in Zagreb) and Giorgio Grlj (pastor of the Baptist Church in Rijeka), and some were pastors for a certain period of time, such as Danijel Berković (formerly pastor of the EPC "Radosna vijest" in Zagreb, today a lecturer in Old Testament at the Bible Institute, Zagreb), Mihael Jonke (served as a pastor, evangelist and helped in the establishment and growth of the church), and some serve in church leadership, such as Zorislav Đaković (member of the eldership of the Church of Christ in Zagreb and current leader of Christ's Church of Brethren – Zagreb).

2. Organization and Structure

2.1. CCB Features

"The founders of the Brethren movement in England (*the Plymouth Brethren*) were mainly evangelical Christians from the Anglican Church who believed that Christianity must be faithful to the Holy Scripture, simple and practical" (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 123). These characteristics also applied to the Brethren in Zagreb, who cultivated fidelity to the Scriptures, simplicity, and practicality. The Bible was read daily, studied regularly, and some passages were committed to memory. Such a practice was encouraged even among children. Zorislav Đaković recalls how Božo Knežević knew an exceptionally large number of quotations and parts of the Bible by heart: "I remember that some people always questioned us as children. Especially Božo Knežević, the father of Mira and Dunja, who used to ask us, for example: 'Where does it say *I am the way, the truth and the life* or *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened*?'" And if anyone knew, they would give them a reward, ice cream or something. So, we tried to find out. The Bible was quoted a lot, a lot of people knew certain parts of the Bible" (Zorislav Đaković 2018). The book *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj* for the Brethren movement states the following:

> The movement became known for emphasizing that for Christian unity, one should renounce denominational structures and names and meet simply as brothers, welcoming all who belong to Christ. Understanding the Church as a community of believers who meet to glorify God, emphasizing the autonomy

> of each local church. They believe that the ministries and gifts in the church are given to all believers. In addition to accepting biblical teaching, the *Brethren churches* emphasize the imminent coming of Christ, the preaching of the gospel, and the necessity of personal conversion. In the *Brethren movement,* each local church is independent, and there is no hierarchy or centralized organization (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 131).

Christ's Church of Brethren, as already mentioned, was founded out of a desire "for more spiritual food and fellowship" and continued to operate through many joint meetings with an emphasis on the study of the Holy Scripture. All members, i.e., brothers, could teach, depending on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.[11] Although they avoided denominational classification and hierarchical structure, a certain structure and leadership still existed, which will be discussed below. Full-time pastoral ministry was out of the question, but all of the leadership and elders of the church had their secular jobs and ways of financing, following the example of the apostle Paul, who, while preaching the gospel, was also engaged in tent-making. In this way, he supported himself and was not a burden to others, as is written in 1 Thessalonians 2:9: "You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."[12] They also found the basis for this in 1 Corinthians 9:17-18: "For if I do this of my own will, I have a wage, but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my wage? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel." The church fund (collected from the voluntary offerings of members) was used for the needs of the church and the spread of the gospel, which included: maintaining the premises, organizing events, conferences, publishing literature, helping the needy, etc.

The community was characterized by Pietism, which emphasized piety, as well as puritanism and a desire for separation from the world and spiritual purity. Such an effort was practically visible in some external characteristics, such as: women were encouraged to wear skirts instead of trousers (which were considered men's clothing), to wear appropriate hair length and hairstyle (1 Cor 11:14-15) and to generally dress more modestly and chastely (no jewelry or only modest jewelry, without emphasizing the eyes or lips with makeup, etc.), referring to biblical verses (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:2-5; Deut 22:5); men were encouraged to cut their hair (1 Cor 11:14) and wear clothing appropriate for men. They also avoided wearing a tie, which was considered unnecessary adornment (Deut 22:5). Women were supposed to cover their heads in church meetings, in accordance with the biblical verses in 1 Corinthians 11:5-16 where it is written that "but any woman who prays

11 Except for women who could teach children and other women.

12 Unless otherwise noted, the biblical text used in this article comes from the NRSV (Updated Edition).

or prophesies with her head unveiled shames her head" (1 Cor 11:5) and where Paul, in the tenth verse, notes that "…a woman ought to have authority over her head, because of the angels," and further in verse 13 says: "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled?" Accordingly, women would put a scarf or kerchief on their heads during the meeting, which they would then remove when leaving the church, unless they wore it constantly, as was the custom among older women in suburban settlements. In some places, this tradition is still observed today. The preferred hairstyle was a bun, which was worn by almost all women, except for a few from the younger generation. Since the 1970s, when the "hippie movement" among young people began, conflicts have arisen between the older and younger generations. Young men wanted to wear longer hair, while girls sought to wear jeans, which were increasingly popular at the time, and let their hair down. Danijel Berković (2018) recalls:

> In this room in Gajeva, where Christ's Church of the Free Brethren was, when you entered on the right side, by the windows and where the harmonium was, women sat there, and men on the left, where the tiled stove was. That was generally the rule. Women in church did not have the right to vote (in terms of public speaking), not even in public prayer, and head coverings were mandatory for women. So, a "bare-headed" woman was not allowed to attend church services... on the one hand, women were forbidden to have short hair, and on the other hand, if they had long hair, they were not allowed to let it down because that was like some religions, like Islam. Then women tied their hair into a so-called bun, and on top of that they wore a scarf or kerchief. Some women also wore hats instead of a kerchief; generally, the head covering was important.

2.1.1. Theology

In the book *Hrvatski bezimprimaturni biblijski prijevodi,* Ruben Knežević states about Christ's Church of Brethren:

> In theology and interpretation of the Bible, the so-called dispensationalist approach with an emphasized eschatological note was adopted (the history of salvation is usually divided into seven time periods – dispensations, in which God acts in a diverse way specific to each period), the father of which is considered to be John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), one of the main founders of the Plymouth Brethren movement in European countries. Classically educated, he prepared Bible translations in French, German, and English (Knežević 2019, 137).

Christ's Church of Brethren emphasized the experience of personal conversion, which implied a person's encounter with the living God, and as a result, a change in lifestyle and the abandonment of old, bad habits. Baptism would then follow, preceded by a conversation and a certain period of observation. Then the person

would be baptized by the brothers from the church leadership. Only adults could be baptized by immersion in water. The baptism would take place on the premises of the church, at Gajeva 9a (in the bathtub provided for it) or on the Sava River (see Fig. 3). Additionally, the imminent arrival of Christ, God's judgment, and the necessity of conversion were emphasized.

Fig. 3: *Baptism on the Sava River, Zagreb, July 23, 1968*

2.2. Church Organization

Local churches operated independently under the leadership of elders. Every four years, and if necessary, more often, the general assembly was held to resolve common issues. Other ongoing issues were handled by the main delegation, which consisted of selected elders for the territory of each republic with a few other affiliated members. The president of the Main Representatives of the church in the sixties was Samuel Rybar, based in Bački Petrovac, while the headquarters of the secretariat was in Zagreb.

In 1945, the Brethren churches published a booklet entitled *Načela: (kao stalni program) na kojima se zasniva i na osnovu kojih djeluje Kršćanska zajednica slobodne braće (1 Kor 1,9) (Gal 6, 15-16)* (*Principles: (as a permanent program) on which the Christian Community of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren is based and operates (1 Cor 1:9) (Gal 6:15-16))* (Bogdanov 1945). It is a small booklet (16 x 10 cm) with eighteen pages, compiled by Bogdanov Ljubomir in Novi Sad. Inside the booklet is the seal of the Main Committee with the signature of Petar Mojsović. The booklet was published to inform the authorities about the church's activities and to ensure its free operation. *Načela* provided an overview of the church's organization and operational methods, free from religious dogma. At the beginning of the booklet, the basic religious principles are briefly presented in eight points, starting with point number 1. "The spiritual head of the Community

is Jesus Christ himself, who is in heaven and represented on earth by His Spirit, whose teaching is the only authoritative and obligatory for the spiritual life of every member of the Community (Eph 1:20, Col 1:18, Jn 14:26)." The task of the community is stated to be preaching, interpreting the gospel, strengthening members in faith and moral Christian life according to the precepts of the gospel as preparation for eternal life, and the basis of the community's teachings is the Holy Scriptures. Regarding the relationship with the authorities, as stated, the members of the community are taught to exhibit unconditional loyalty and obediently fulfill military obligations. The following 28 points describe the organization and rules that must be respected, which apply to the free brothers in the FPRY.[13] According to *Načela,* each local community with a sufficient number of members constitutes a public religious body supervised by a Local Committee with one representative, i.e., an elder and several board members, who are responsible before God and the civil authorities for their local community, or as it is written, "an assembly." The representative of the Local Committee is elected by the Main Representatives, with the approval of the local community, which also elects the committee members, subject to the approval of the Main Representatives. The Main Representatives is the body that consists of twelve members who make up the Main Committee, which is elected by the Main Assembly for a term of four years. The members of the Main Committee were Petar K. Mojsović, as president, and Samuel Cibula, as deputy. Andrija Stracinsky was appointed president of the Supervisory Committee, and Miro Hornyak was appointed as his deputy.

Furthermore, ten members of the Main Committee, five members of the Supervisory Committee, and nine deputy councilors are listed from the following places: Čurug, Gospođinci, Novi Sad, Đurđevo, Kisač, Kulpin, Belgrade, and Neštin, which suggests that local Brethren communities also existed in these places. Novi Sad is listed as the location of the Main Representatives for the entire territory of the FPR of Yugoslavia, and local communities, depending on their capabilities, from time to time make voluntary contributions to the board of the Main Representatives, which uses these funds for its expenses related to publishing magazines, organizing major conferences, and possibly, if there were missionaries sent, to finance their maintenance.

In addition to describing the administration, *Načela* list some of the responsibilities of members, describe the method of resolving disagreements (within the community or more widely through the Court of honor of the local communities and the Disciplinary court), the method of action (meetings, preaching the gospel, conferences and Bible studies) and the relationship towards the authorities (i.e. respect for authorities and renunciation of any political activity). Petar K. Mojsović emphasizes in his note at the end that this is not the dogmatics of the church, because the community does not rely on dogmatics, but only on the per-

13 FPRY - Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

son of the Son of God Jesus Christ, and these rules and principles were issued for the sake of the interests of the people and the authorities regarding the external movement, action, method of work, beliefs, order and order of the community. He further states that believers who do not walk in the love of Christ are cold dogmatists and sectarians, while Christ left his followers the commandment of love that unites and makes the community. Therefore, believers should rely on Christ's New Testament logical commandments, without religious fanaticism (Bogdanov 1945).

2.2.1. Gabriel and Nada Jonke

Gabrijel Jonke (1921–2002)[14] was born in Skopje by chance, but grew up and was educated in Zagreb. Gabrijel and Nada married in 1949, served the Lord together in building a church, and also managed to raise six children (Danijela, Mihael, Tomislav, Ivana, Lidija, and Mirjana) (Fig. 4). Gabrijel is a graduate economist who graduated from the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb. He worked for approximately twenty years as an economist for a company in Zagreb, and then spent two years in Egypt, where he managed finances during the construction of the Aswan Dam. Then he got a job in a company in Strasbourg, France, as an economic commercialist for Eastern Europe. While working in Strasbourg, he lived between Zagreb and Strasbourg, as his wife, Nada, resided in Zagreb with their six children. At that time, he was also active in the leadership of the church at Gajeva 9a. After an extraordinary job he did for that company in Bulgaria, he received an offer to retire early with full salary, and then went to Munich to spread the gospel among the "migrant workers" from Yugoslavia who lived there.

Fig. 4: *Gabrijel and Nada Jonke, December 11, 1949*

In addition to serving at the CCB in Zagreb, Gabrijel and Nada are actively working to create a community in Munich that brings together believers primar-

14 Biography written according to the testimony of Mihael Jonke, Gabriel's son.

ily from the former Yugoslavia. The community initially began as a home group and then expanded to a community of thirty to forty people. This community did not want to define itself by denomination. Initially, they began with regular street evangelism, which was assisted by brother Vlado Majersky, who had come to Munich from Novi Sad to work. They would set up a table with Christian literature on the street and often sing Christian songs and preach there. In their early days, they would go around the neighborhood and, if they saw a surname from their region, they would ring the bell and share the gospel with them. This is how some who came to Germany from the former Yugoslavia first heard the Good News and received salvation there.

Gabriel was an evangelist and preacher, while Nada (1928) had a gift for working with children, as well as a gift of encouragement and prayer. Together, they traveled almost the entire length of Yugoslavia, visiting the believers. After Gabriel's health deteriorated, Nada continued to live with him in Lokve and remained there after his death until her old age. In her old age, she wrote a daily reading, i.e., a reading of selected biblical quotes for each day of the year, entitled *Kompas za svaki dan*, published by the Church of Christ – Betania.

3. Community Activities and Work

3.1. Meetings, Teaching, Fellowship, and Evangelism

3.1.1. Church Meetings

Meetings were held on Sunday mornings and afternoons, as well as on Fridays and Wednesdays. On Wednesdays, the Bible was studied, and on Fridays, a prayer meeting was held. Members generally attended all of these meetings in full (Zorislav Đaković 2018). At that time, it was common not to miss meetings, including those during the week, unless there were justified reasons. On Sundays at 10 a.m., a service was held, which the church referred to as "breaking of bread" or worship (Zorislav Đaković 2018), and it was a gathering of the brethren, i.e., members of the community. The meeting on Sunday afternoon was an evangelistic meeting open to all. Sunday morning worship would begin with a song, followed by one of the brethren standing up to pray. During the prayer, everyone would usually stand up, and then the singing would continue. The singing was usually accompanied by the harmonium,[15] which was first played by Sister Marta Hanzel, then by Hana Gajer, and later by Ana Woskrasenski and Astrid from Rijeka. The

15 The guitar was not played during Sunday worship, only the harmonium, because the guitar was associated with secular music, but later it was played on other occasions, such as at youth meetings and camps.

singing was led by Nada Jonke, while Hana G. sometimes sang the second part in two-part singing. Everyone participated in the singing, using hymnbooks. At first, these were small booklets with only the words, and later they began to use much larger Baptist hymnbooks called *Spiritual Songs*, also known as the "black hymnbooks," which included notes. Then came the so-called Lord's Supper, which was called "breaking of bread," and after that, charitable giving or almsgiving. A table with a white tablecloth on which there was bread and wine was placed in the center of the room, and chairs were placed in a circle around the table. Danijel Berković (2018) recalls:

> The Holy Supper, it was called the "breaking of bread," it was every Sunday, it was indispensable. For the free brothers, it was actually the center of worship, although the sermon occupied a very important place; just as for the Roman Catholics, the Eucharist is the center of the mass, the "breaking of bread" would also be the center. What was significant about the sermon here, similar to Sunday school, the sermon was not so much thematic as it adhered to a specific biblical text. So, what is called "expository preaching" in English today, they already practiced it then. It was later lost, and today there is talk again that this type of expository preaching should be rehabilitated.

Furthermore, Berković (2018) continues: "It was all mostly in silence, and there was an aspect of great seriousness felt at the Holy Supper, i.e., the 'breaking of bread.' Often, people even cried. The emphasis was on suffering: on the cross, the death of Christ. Therefore, the element of resurrection, victory over death, and so on, was largely absent. So, the emphasis at the 'breaking of bread' was on suffering and death."

To begin the Lord's Supper, which was one of the key elements of the meeting, someone would always share a relevant passage from the Word and pray for the bread and wine. Other brothers would also join in, as Ivana Đaković, Branko's daughter, comments: "It didn't go by so quickly, that prayer 'Thank you, Lord, for suffering for us,' you know how it goes, but they read from the Psalms and then from the Gospels, repeating that event more. The men participated there to pray and read" (Zorislav Đaković 2018). During the Lord's Supper, wine was drunk from one glass, one chalice, which was circulated from person to person. The bread on the plate was also distributed among those present, and each one broke off a piece.[16] Then someone would come forward to the pulpit and read a passage from the Word, and a sermon would be preached on that topic. Several brothers could share something if they felt the prompting of the Spirit. Everyone usually carried their own Bible in which they would follow what was being said. Ultimately, it concluded with a song. The meeting lasted approximately an hour and a half in total, followed by the so-called "Sunday

16 Marija Galović initially baked the bread, and later some pastries were bought.

Fig. 5: *Children in the "Sunday school" at Gajeva 9a, around 1961*

school" for the children (Fig. 5). When the adults left the room, the children who were present during the morning worship remained for their Bible teaching, which was most often led by Nada Jonke. Zorislav Đaković (2018) recalls: "We had cut out characters from Bible stories and then glued them onto flannel, onto some kind of surface, and that was very interesting and fun for us children at that time." Jadranka Fumić Belamarić (2018) also recalls those classes with joy: "It was really great with sister Nada, we taught those songs that I sing to my grandchildren today, so it was something wonderful. She taught us a lot, she really taught us a lot, she really kept us in the faith, they weren't meetings for the sake of order, but it was deep, filled with the Spirit, it was very beautiful." Danijel Berković (2018) also comments:

> What was characteristic of that Sunday school, I would say, was that it was unique from our traditions in that they were not manuals, but rather they went through the biblical text. Very often, these were texts from the Old Testament, specifically from the Pentateuch, and topics related to the Israelites, the temple, and other relevant subjects were discussed. That was practically one of the first analyses, we theologians would call it "exegesis" today, but when you look back, for that time it was at a fairly high level at which exegetical texts were studied, of course for a child's approach, but it was "on par" with a good exegesis of a Bible school... It was from twelve to sixteen, seventeen, so, as they say, "young adolescents" were... in those Sunday schools, programs were prepared for the holidays: Christmas and Easter. There were also small dramas, choir singing, there were a lot of activities.

3.1.2. Youth Meetings, Excursions, and Trips

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a large number of young people had gathered, youth meetings were organized on Thursdays, usually led by Ivan Vacek,

known as Johnny, and later joined by Peter MacKenzie. Jadranka Fumić Belamarić (2018) recalls those days:

> Then Gajeva was quite popular, especially with the youth. There were many young people, and wonderful youth meetings. There were really a lot of us, and we even traveled to England together with Peter… We went to that "Spree '73" together in 1973… where Bill Graham was also there… Gajeva was usually a church with a lot of people. On Sunday, we stood there in the hall because we didn't have any room. It was a very big church. They were excellent. We had a lot of guests from Germany, the United States, and other countries.

From approximately 1965 to the early 1970s, missionaries from England would organize month-long trips for young people to experience life in their local communities and learn English. The young people were placed with Christian families, mostly in the London area. Zorislav Đaković (2018) recalls:

> We young people traveled to London together, by train and boat; there was no Channel Tunnel back then. I went to stay with a family once in '65, after finishing primary school, and then again in '69. My parents would pay for our travel, and the accommodation was free. We applied for visas, which were difficult to obtain at the time, so they would send a letter of guarantee. It was a nice experience in those English churches and useful for learning the language in those Christian families. A large group always went from all over what was then Yugoslavia, and it was organized by Bill Grünbaum.

In the summer of 1973, MacKenzie took a group of young people from Gajeva, joined by several young people from Radićeva, to an international evangelistic youth conference called "Spree '73."[17] It was held at the famous Wembley football stadium in London (Fumić 2018). The conference lasted four days with several Christian concerts and messages, featuring famous names such as Johnny Cash and Cliff Richard, and the main speaker was the famous evangelist and organizer of the event, Billy Graham. The conference was attended by more than 20,000 visitors from twenty-six nations (Plowman 1973).

Furthermore, Jadranka F. Belamarić continues: "We were in Gajeva regularly, every Thursday, it was wonderful, we played the guitar, those who knew how to play like Johnny and Peter, and they sang along" (Fumić 2018). Unfortunately, in the early 70s, Johnny Vacek died suddenly in a car accident, and the work with young people was continued by Peter MacKenzie (1942–2007), who came from Great Britain as a missionary around 1971 to Christ's Church of Brethren in Gajeva. J. F. Belamarić (2018) recalls from that time:

> I was eighteen when we went to Lokve. Then that year Johnny, Ivan Johnny Vacek, died in a car accident, it was '72 or something like that, I don't know exactly. That year, I was supposed to go to Lokve too, but I didn't go, as if God

17 *Spree = SPIritual REemphasis.*

> knew. I was supposed to go with him, and he was supposed to drive me, and then that car broke down... That Johnny was a big loss for me... The church was very lively and constantly growing, there were a lot of us, especially the young people, and then it all kind of stopped, which is a great shame. We split up and then went to the Baptist church, we scattered in all directions.

Around that time, under the influence of missionaries from the West, especially from Germany, Puritanism began to be increasingly emphasized, which was no longer acceptable to the young people. Due to disagreements that arose, MacKenzie left Gajeva and joined the Baptists in Radićeva, where he later became a pastor.[18] After MacKenzie, a part of the youth group, also joined the Baptist Church.

The others, mostly young people, met for a shorter period in a home group. The group grew rapidly, so their living space at the time became too small for gatherings. At one point, the senior of the Evangelical Church, Vladimir L. Deutsch, gave them the use of a space located on Gundulićeva Street. They continued to meet there once a week. By inviting friends and acquaintances, the group grew, eventually reaching a size of forty to fifty young people. The meetings were held without a specific protocol, featuring singing accompanied by guitar, brief teaching, and two or three prayers. The teaching was usually led by Tomislav or Mihael Jonke (Gabriel's sons), the brothers Branimir and Radica Gajer, and sometimes Danijel Berković. However, this was not classic teaching; rather, the moderators would start a topic with an introductory presentation, which would then be further explained through an open discussion based on the biblical text. This was, as Berković comments, an innovation for the time – thematic teaching, i.e., discussion based on a biblical text on a topic, in contrast to the previous expository teaching (where the starting point was exclusively a specific biblical text, not a given topic) (Berković 2018). Also, a novelty at that time was the way of singing. A lot of singing was done, but no longer from hymnbooks, but mostly so-called "choruses" of one to two verses that were repeated. Newer songs from the English-speaking world were largely translated. As Berković (2018) concludes, it became a "new musical genre."

After a year or two of meeting in Gundulićeva Street, in the space provided by Senior Deutsch, the group of young people began to feel pressure from the evangelicals to align with their principles, and they left the space, dispersing in various directions thereafter. Around that time, in 1978, Zorislav and Marina Đaković met Mladen Jovanović and began meeting with him in the home group he led.[19] Zorislav Đaković (2018) had met Mladen Jovanović even earlier, while they were having youth meetings in Gajeva Street, and he states:

18 For more on Peter MacKenzie see: Informatička katolička agencija 2007.

19 Later, the Church of Christ was created from this, first at Amruševa Street No. 11, and since 2000 at Kušlanova Street 21, where it is still located today.

> While we were still in Gajeva, sometime before we left, when Peter MacKenzie was already there, Bud Pickl and David Gatewood, missionaries from America, came. They came to Gajeva and invited us young people to their meetings. That was sometime in the early seventies. David Gatewood's father, a dean at the Bible School in Vienna. They used to invite us to their home for Bible teaching and socializing, and that was also very interesting to us. They had an apartment or house rented here in Zagreb, and that's where we first met Mladen and some other people. Later on, I regularly went with Mladen to the Church of Christ in Amruševa, but also occasionally to Gajeva. I helped with various humanitarian actions organized by Gajeva's church during the war. They brought help from France, Germany, and from everywhere, and so we somehow became close again. As Branko, my dad, became weaker and weaker, I slowly took over some of the work for Gajeva, particularly in terms of organization, leadership, church administration, and literature. And later, we would often organize thematic meetings there for larger groups of our friends, and that tradition has remained the same to this day. We occasionally have thematic meetings or other events take place in Gajeva, such as Hebrew school, PEV meetings, and book promotions.

3.1.3. Excursions and Evangelism

Since evangelism was not allowed on the streets in the 1960s, the CCB in Gajeva used various approaches to reach people. One approach was publishing. Another approach was through organized excursions for evangelism. The excursions were held on Sunday afternoons, at least once a month, in small groups. The surrounding villages were visited, and the believers shared their testimonies with the locals. Usually, they went to the Samobor Mountains, Žumberak, and the surrounding

Fig. 6: *Evangelization mission in Duga Resa, 1963*

villages, and sometimes the excursionists even slept in a barn. Sometimes people were converted, and those who could came to the community (Berković 2018). Figure 6 shows a group of believers on an evangelistic mission in Duga Resa in 1963. The picture shows believers from the Brethren Church from Zagreb: Gabrijel Jonke, Branko Đaković, Jure Knežević, Ana Woskrasenski, Meri Magerle, etc., and the brothers from Duga Resa with Pastor Steve Mikan.

In the church in Gajeva, great attention was paid to young people, so they regularly took them to Sljeme almost every Saturday. The trips were usually taken by several adults who took all the children from twelve years old and up, as well as young people up to twenty-five or thirty years old. Sometimes up to thirty young people gathered. This was during the 1960s, until a location was found in Lokve in the late 1960s, and from then on, it became a new destination where people went for holidays throughout the year, especially during the summer (Berković 2018).

3.1.4. Camps

As the number of young people in the church grew, and at the instigation of the Jonke family to find a suitable location in nature for joint gatherings of their family and church, a location for holding camps began to be sought. A meadow was soon found in the village of Homer near Lake Lokvar in Gorski Kotar. At that time, holding Christian youth camps was a novelty within evangelical churches, and this was one of the first of its kind in Croatia.

The first youth camp in the so-called "Lokve" was held in 1966, when seven tents were set up in a meadow by the dam. The following year, in 1967, Gabrijel and Nada Jonke leased a nearby piece of land and purchased a hayloft, an old shack. Since then, camps have been organized at that location every summer. The shack was very dilapidated, so their neighbor, Nada Pintarić, from whom they had bought the shack and who had also heard the word of the gospel from them, came to their aid by lending them her kitchen to use. Initially, the men slept in tents, while the girls stayed at Mrs. Pintarić's (Jonke 2017). Later, the shack was renovated, and there were approximately twenty beds, with about ten for men and ten for women. However, with the addition of tents, this space could accommodate around forty young people. They were mostly young people from the Zagreb church, but some from Rijeka and other cities of the former Yugoslavia would join in (Berković 2018). These youth meetings were mainly led by Gabrijel Jonke. He led Bible studies and organized field trips. His wife, Nada, was also very involved in running the camp, from taking care of meals to spiritually influencing the youth through prayer, leading singing, and sharing the message from God's Word. These camps were held regularly until the mid-1970s (Zorislav Đaković 2018) and were very popular because they encouraged brotherly love and Christian fellowship. Time was spent in nature and on field trips, the Word of God was studied, and Christian songs were sung around a campfire with a guitar (Fig. 7). Even today,

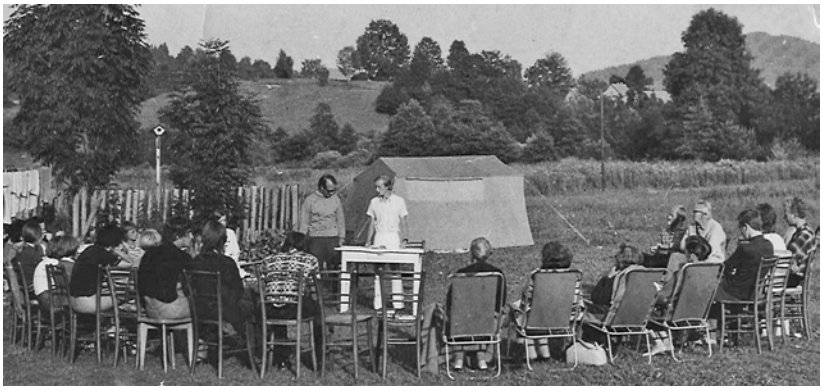


Fig. 7: *Sermon on the meadow, young people with MacKenzie, Lokve, 1971*

many fondly remember these camps where they first experienced God's closeness and love, as well as Christian fellowship.

In 1988, the Jonke family purchased another nearby piece of land and a dilapidated house, which was renovated and expanded, completing the project in 1991. The Jonke family spent every holiday in Lokve, and after moving to Munich, they would spend two months there during the summer, and the rest of the time they stayed in Munich. Unfortunately, when the house was just finished being built, in 1992, Gabrijel Jonke fell into a coma. While he was still in Germany, a small tumor was discovered on his cerebellum, which was removed, but his brain atrophied after that, and he spent ten years lying in a coma in his home in Lokve from 1992 to 2002, while his wife Nada took care of him throughout that time until his death (Jonke 2017). After that, the camps continued to be held, and their leadership and organization were taken over by Gabrijel's son Tomislav Jonke and his associate Zlatko Vidačić (Christ's Church Betania in Zagreb).

3.1.5. Conferences

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb was well connected with other Brethren communities in the country and beyond, mostly with Rijeka, Bački Petrovac, and Novi Sad. Once or twice a year, conferences were organized where believers gathered from all over Yugoslavia (Fig. 8). These conferences were mostly attended by local speakers such as: Samuel Rybar (older and younger), Gabrijel Jonke, Branko Đaković, and Mijo Strbad. Samuel Rybar led the community in Bački Petrovac, and Mijo Strbad in Rijeka (Zorislav Đaković 2018). Foreign speakers, such as Bill Grünbaum and Ken Andverta from England, who often came as missionaries, also knew how to speak. There were also some internationally known names like Bakht Singh from India and Roger T. Foster from England.

Bakht Singh (1903–2000). Many fondly remember how Bakht Singh spoke in Gajeva in October 1965 (Fig. 9). On that occasion, the church space was filled.

Fig. 8: *A group of young people at the Main Station in Zagreb on their way to a conference in Novi Sad (Ivan Vacek, aka Johnny, second from the left).*

Bakht was a very good and dynamic speaker (Zorislav Đaković 2018), a great evangelist, teacher, and founder of large churches in India. Many called him the Billy Graham of India and Asia. Examining his way of life, it becomes apparent that many of the principles Bakht adhered to were also followed by the fraternal churches in this area.

Bakht was a humble man, and on the day of his last rites, the following account was published: "Traffic came to a standstill as a procession of 300,000 mourners followed the coffin to the cemetery. For whom were they weeping? He was not a wealthy man; he had lived most of his life in a small room measuring 3 x 2.4 square meters and had never owned a bank account… He was a Bible teacher, known to thousands only as 'brother'" (Hawksley 2009). Bakht was raised in a traditional Indian family, devoted from birth to the guru, the founder of Sikhism. He despised Christianity, but while studying in Canada, he experienced a profound sense of God's presence at a Christian gathering he happened to attend. He soon began reading the Bible and was converted. After this experience, he decided to

Fig. 9: *Bakht Singh with Gabriel Jonke, October 1965.*

dedicate himself completely to God and serve him. Returning to India, he began to pray, fast, and preach. Disowned by his family for converting to Christianity, he slept with the homeless and preached to the poor. Soon, word spread about him, and churches began inviting him to preach.

In the summer of 1937, he traveled to a place called Martinpur. At that time, this place, part of what was then India and now part of Pakistan, was known for its immorality and alcoholism. There, he prayed and preached until one evening, when everyone got up to pray, fell to their knees, and cried all night long, confessing their sins to God. A revival occurred. From there, he chose seventy people with whom he walked to the next destination, where the same thing happened again, and the revival began to spread to other places. Bakht was an excellent Bible scholar and encouraged everyone to buy a Bible and learn it by heart. He always prayed on his knees and encouraged others to do the same. Bakht Singh also used to pray for the sick during his sermons. Often, those present could witness miraculous healings, but because he did not want to attract people to Christ for the wrong reasons, he even prayed that God would stop healing through him.

Through his evangelistic campaigns, Bakht planted 350 churches, while several thousand church communities considered him their spiritual father. Every year, he would hold a conference where all the communities associated with him would gather. The conference lasted approximately nineteen days, and participants would be housed in tents and attend so-called "love feasts," where they would gather and eat together. Everyone would be fed, and no voluntary contribution was ever asked for, nor were there any charges for these conferences. There was often prayer throughout the night, and the speaker was never announced in advance. Bakht would pray with his associates just before the meeting and ask if anyone had received a message from the Lord. He never wanted to agree in advance who would preach because he believed that this hindered the work of the Spirit. The expository style of preaching was practiced, and everyone was expected to carry their Bibles and follow in them what was being preached. These gatherings often looked like this: rising early in the morning, after sunrise, followed by baptisms (of which there were many) and the laying on of hands on the baptized, then worship, a sermon and finally the "breaking of bread," followed by a "love feast" (lunch) and an evangelistic meeting in the evening. Bakht held fast to his principles, never reading newspapers or watching television, and encouraged others to do the same. He spent many hours in prayer and studying the Scriptures. After 1946, he began traveling regularly outside India to various countries, where he was invited to speak. That is how he came to Zagreb (Hawksley 2009).

3.2. Publishing and Branko Đaković

In Croatia, specifically in the former Yugoslavia, during the period when the community was most active (1950–1975), public preaching was not possible, and publishing and distributing Christian literature were the main methods of evangelization, i.e., sharing the word of God and the Good News of salvation. Therefore, the CCB worked diligently on producing printed materials, ranging from various tracts and brochures that were always carried with them to booklets, books, and magazines. The regime at the time prohibited the public holding of any religious gatherings, except in premises permitted by the authorities. Even gatherings in a family home were limited to family members only, as such gatherings could also be reported to the authorities (Zorislav Đaković 2018). Even during a certain period, theological literature could not be printed in traditional printing houses. Therefore, the church used its resources and premises to print Christian literature and evangelistic materials (Zorislav Đaković 2018). The church owned the so-called mimeograph, a device for manually reproducing up to a hundred copies, on which the original was transferred to prepared paper with special ink. Such a device was located in the church premises, at Gajeva 9a, and church members helped in the production process. Most of the published literature was printed on this machine until it became impossible to print freely, and when the main collaboration began with a printing house called "Grafička galanterija Časni" in Severin na Kupi. Branko Đaković (Fig. 10), one of the community's elders, was most dedicated to translating Christian literature. He translated a large number of titles, mainly from English, German, French, and Italian. His most significant work is the translation of the entire Bible and the *Bible Dictionary*. He was also the editor-in-chief of *Bratski vjesnik*, a magazine with Christian themes published by the CCB in Zagreb. Branko Đaković collected materials for the magazine, and Marija Berković coordinated everything, from retyping texts on a typewriter to composing and printing on a mimeograph. Although she is listed as an editor in some editions, she never translated or wrote texts, but Branko Đaković would consult with her about the selection of texts. He wrote, translated, and selected texts, and Marija prepared everything necessary for production and printing. In a modern

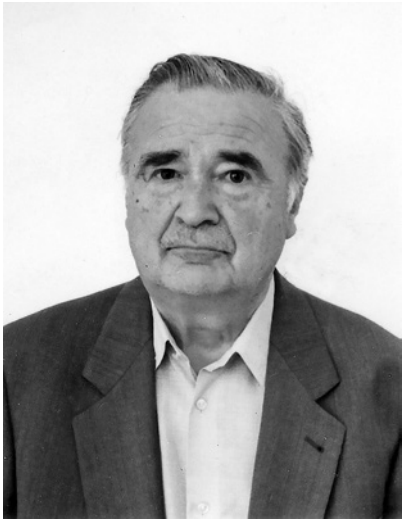


Fig. 10: *Branko Đaković, 2000*

context, she would likely be referred to as an executive editor, while Branko would be the editor-in-chief.[20] Dragica Božičković also helped with the production and preparation of printed materials, as did some other church members. Branko's son Zorislav Đaković (2018) recalls:

> He always had a great desire to publish something, some written material, and that's when it started with Marija Berković and Dragica Božičković. He would translate or write certain texts, and they would write them on matrices. Then they would jointly print them on a gesthertner (an old printing technique), and make copies. That was the only reproduction technique at that time. That was done in Gajeva, there in the lobby, there was that gesthertner, those colors, and that was cut. Since my father was employed at the Institute, in one part of the Faculty of Agriculture, as a research associate and advisor. At work, they knew that he was a believer, and they called him "pop." That was his nickname. At that time, it was not allowed to publish or write anything special, so Marija Berković was the one who took it upon herself, to put her name on those materials and to be the editor-in-chief… my dad edited it, she actually wrote it with him, she just wrote down what he edited and did… but they also consulted together, they were friends and Dragica Božić participated in it, graphically. We translated many booklets, such as *Knjiga o džungli* (*The Jungle Book*), and he even let me draw an illustration once, like in *Put u sunčanu zemlju* (*The Journey to the Sunny Land*), by Kristina Roy, and various other booklets. At that time, small brochures were produced in large quantities as materials for missionary work and evangelization in the area where we lived.

The printed materials produced by the church were modestly designed, especially those produced on a mimeograph. They were mostly in black and white, stapled in the middle, with soft covers, and occasionally other colors were used. Of course, later, when cooperation with printing houses began, plasticized covers in color were produced. First, cooperation was established with local printing houses, such as Časni printing house. Later, cooperation was also established with a printing house in France. In later years, cooperation increased with the publishing house in Germany, Dillenburg: Gute Botschaft Verlag (GBV), which prints the New Testament, the Bible, and some other publications. They were one of the first publishers to print daily readings and calendars with a biblical message. Even today, GBV publications can be purchased through the Christian Association in Rijeka, led by Danijel Lukić. The GBV publishing house, whose name translates to "Publishers of the Good News," was founded by several brothers in the 1960s. While distributing tracts in their language to migrants, they recognized the need for Christian literature for missionary purposes. This need has increased with the growing number of missionaries going abroad, and these publishers can now

20 Also, due to the regime at the time, Branko Đaković, since he was employed by a state-owned company, could not be listed as the editor of the magazine at the same time, so in some issues Marija Berković is listed as the editor.

boast of offering Christian literature in more than ninety languages, which they send to over one hundred countries worldwide every year. All the literature published by GBV stems from the desire to spread the gospel throughout the world, and all these publishing activities are not for profit, but are financed by a foundation that translates as "Friends of Christian Mission and Charity" (Gute Botschaft Verlag s.a.).

3.2.1. Branko Đaković – Biography

Branko Đaković (Novska, 27 February 1921 – Zagreb, 9 September 2009) was born in Novska, and at the age of eight, he came to Zagreb with his parents. At the age of sixteen, his father Milan died, and he remained to live with his mother Ema at Vlaška 125/I. He graduated from the First Boys' Gymnasium on Roosevelt Square in 1940 and later graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry in Zagreb. He received his doctorate from the Faculty of Agronomy in Novi Sad[21] and specialized in soil physics at institutions in Versailles and Bremen.[22] He worked at the Soil Science Institute of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry in Zagreb, and later at the Institute for Agricultural Research in Sarajevo. Until his retirement in 1985, he served as a scientific advisor at the Institute of Agroecology of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in Zagreb. He often traveled on official business to foreign countries with developed water regulation systems, such as France, and was most impressed by how Israel created fertile soil from the desert using an irrigation system, which he wrote about in his scientific papers (Zorislav Đaković 2018). He wrote more than a hundred scientific and professional papers. At the age of twenty-eight, he married Brunhilda Punk (known as Hilda), with whom he had three children: Zorislav (1950), Ivana (1953), and Elizabeta (1955–2022).

During his student days in Zagreb, during the time of the Independent State of Croatia, due to political turmoil and great insecurity, his mother, Ema, sent her son, Branko, temporarily to Slavonia, where she had grown up, to live with her relatives. Ema had already converted by then and tried to connect him with some local believers. There he met a believer, Maženka Kovaž, a Czech woman who had probably heard the gospel from a Baptist. She testified to him about her faith in God, and Branko accepted it. And then she told him:

> "I know a good preacher, an evangelical, who is a converted man, has experienced conversion and salvation. He accepts you into his family while you are here, and you can live with him." Branko was deeply affected by what he saw in the life of that family. Everything was so beautiful, quiet, yet determined and dedicated. He was one dedicated man who had undergone conversion, and his wife and family lived accordingly (Zorislav Đaković 2018).

21 The topic of the doctoral thesis was: "Contribution to the Knowledge of Hydromorphic Soils of the Lower Course of the Krapina River and their Amelioration."

22 For more on his scientific work, see: Juras 1993.

This preacher was of Czech origin. Branko stayed with him for a short time, but he had already accepted the gospel there. When the danger was no longer there, this preacher instructed him to contact Gabrijel Jonke upon his return to Zagreb. This preacher knew the Jonke family (Gabrijel and his mother Jelena) and directed Branko to them so that they could better introduce him to the truths of the gospel. The Jonke family at that time attended the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street, but they also had their home group. In 1946, Branko was baptized in Mačkovac in the Baptist Church. In that group of baptized people, there were four other converts: Franjo Bulek, Danijel Grujić, Hilda Punk (later Branko's wife), and Adam.[23] Branko and Hilda were married in 1949 in Zagreb.

Branko Đaković, although an agronomist by profession and a doctor of agronomy who left behind numerous scientific papers and other publications in his field, spent his free time translating and writing Christian literature. He was the editor *of Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*) and led Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb. From his conversion until his old age, he tirelessly wrote and worked to ensure that the word of God touched as many human hearts as possible. Branko was a polyglot, fluent in six foreign languages (French, English, German, Italian, Czech, and Russian), and had a good command of Latin and Greek. He used English, French, and German the most, and he loved French the most. He owned a sizable home library of mostly foreign Christian literature, but also lexicons, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. The most significant theological works he left behind are the translation of the New Testament and the entire Bible (Zagreb, 2000), as well as the *Bible Dictionary* (Zagreb, 1973), the first of this kind in Yugoslav Protestantism (Knežević 2019, 138).

He met his wife, Hilda (1930), at Christian meetings in Zagreb. It is interesting to note that Branko's wife, Hilda, was also introduced to the faith by her grandmother, Theresia Magerle (1873–1962), née Konrad,[24] who in her youth, around the turn of the century during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, experienced conversion in Sarajevo, probably through Baptists who came from Germany (Hilda Đaković 2018). Hilda Punk was born in Sarajevo, completed her religious education, and was baptized in the Catholic Church by her Catholic father. However, since her aunt married an evangelical, Hussite, she, her mother, and grandmother also joined the Evangelical Church at the same time. Her grandmother, Theresia, also read to her selected texts from the Scriptures and Spurgeon's daily devotions in German every day (Hilda Đaković 2018). Hilda states that her grandmother was one of the first converts in Sarajevo. At that time, there was no community in Sarajevo to which they could go, so they had a home group that met regularly

23 Adam – last name unknown.

24 Otherwise of Hungarian origin, she married a Silesian German (Joseph Magrle) at the age of fifteen, and in addition to Hungarian, Czech and German were spoken at home, while she spoke mostly German with her granddaughter Hilda.

in her home, and which was also visited by some missionaries.[25] Hilda remembers that when she was still little, they would regularly meet on Sundays at her grandmother's house and pray, sing, and play the harmonium, and her two uncles, Miroslav (Fritz) Magerle and Alojz (Lojzi) Magerle,[26] and Aunt Viki on the violin would join in. Baptists from Germany were visiting Sarajevo at that time, with whom Theresija was in contact, and she was also connected to Baptists in Zagreb through Danijela Vacek (known as Danko), who occasionally visited them. He began coming after the war to visit relatives, but also to spread the gospel.[27] At the age of sixteen, Hilda came to visit her aunt Meri Magerle (née Vacek) in Zagreb in the summer of 1946,[28] and in conversation and prayer with Danijel Vacek, she experienced true conversion, although she had already heard the word of salvation from her grandmother (Hilda Đaković 2018).

3.2.2. Publications

As already mentioned, publishing within the played a crucial role in the evangelism and discipleship of believers. For the needs of evangelism, tracts and some small pocket-sized booklets were most often used. In 1971, *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*) published an offer of their literature by categories of applicability: 1. Reflection on the Word of God; 2. Books for Instruction and Edification; 3. Reflection on the Word of God for Every Day; 4. Stories; 5. Evangelistic Brochures.

Some of the evangelistic materials were: *Zašto to Bog dopušta?* (*Why Does God Allow It?*) by A. E. Wilder Smith, *Sin čovječji* (*Son of Man*) by R. Wolf, and the titles: *Pavle Smoljoni* (*Paul Smoljoni*) and *Život za život* (*Life for Life*). There was also *the Expanded New Testament* (from Romans to Revelation). Of other literature for the instruction and edification of believers and the study of the Word, William MacDonald (1917–2007), Charles Henry Macintosh (1820–1896), and Watchman Nee (1903–1972) were the most widely represented. From MacDonald, titles such as: *Što uči Biblija* (*What the Bible Teaches*), *Pouke za kršćanski život* (*Lessons for Christian Living*), *Postoji povratak Bogu* (*There's a Way Back to God*), *Božja milost* (*Grace of God*), etc., were published, and from W. Nee, a Chinese missionary, titles such as: *Pravi kršćanski život* (*The Normal Christian Life*), *Kršćanska služba* (*What Shall This Man Do?), Promijenjeni u Njegov lik* (*Changed into His Likeness*), and literature for daily devotion: *Stol u pustinji* (*A Table in the Wilder-*

25 She was probably converted through Baptists from Germany, left the Catholic Church, and was baptized.

26 Miroslav and Alojz Magerle later, when they moved to Zagreb, became elders in the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street.

27 Danijel Vacek was related to them by family, as Theresa's son Lojzi, Hilda's uncle, married Danijel's sister, Meri Vacek.

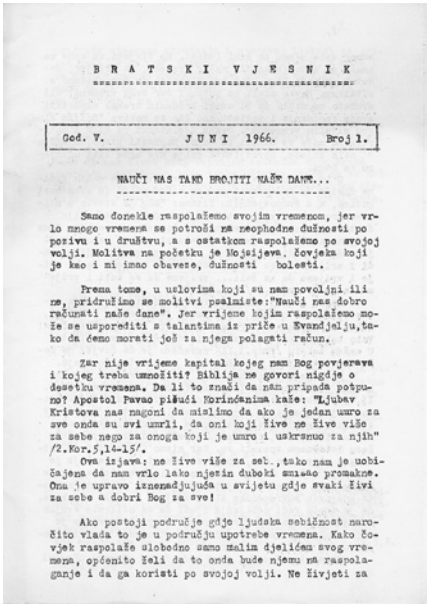
28 Hilda and her grandmother Theresia sometimes came to Zagreb in the summer to visit Meri and Alojz Magerla, at Medveščak No. 14.

ness). Also in great demand were C. H. Macintosh's books, *Razmatranja o pet knjiga Mojsijevih* (*Notes on the Pentateuch*), which have been reprinted several times. Furthermore, at that time, stories with a Christian message by the Slovak writer Kristina Roy, such as *Put u sunčanu zemlju* (*Sunshine Country*), *Sluga* (*The Servant*), *Sretni ljudi* (*The Happy People*), etc., were in great demand.

The editions were published by the publishing house *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*). The same name was used for a magazine, i.e., a church bulletin, which was published several times a year. In later years, the GBV increasingly took over the publishing. Almost all editions were edited and translated by Branko Đaković, who did not sign his name on many editions. Even the translation of the entire Bible does not mention his name as the translator, but only signs it at the end of the introduction, which aligns with the characteristics of the Brethren movement: simplicity and modesty. Branko Đaković did not want to impose himself; instead, he did his translation work out of love for God, his Word, and a desire for as many people as possible to experience salvation through the written word.

3.2.2.1. The Brethren Herald

Branko Đaković was the editor-in-chief of *Bratski vjesnik*, a magazine that he edited for some time together with Marija Berković. The oldest issue found is from 1966 (Fig. 11), and J. Majerski is listed as the editor-in-chief (as well as at the beginning of 1967). Between 1967 and 1975, Marija Berković served as editor-in-chief, and from 1975 to 1993, Dr. B. Đaković. From 1966 to 1991, the publisher is listed as "Kristova Crkva Braće u SFRJ," and from 1992, it is listed only as "*Bratski vjesnik*, Zagreb, HR." The year of publication in the 1966 issue is V, and in the 1967 issue it is VI, which suggests that *Bratski vjesnik* began publishing in 1962. The 1993 issue is the last copy found, so it can be assumed that *Bratski vjesnik was* published in 1962–1993 (copies from 1966–1993 are currently in the Library of the Biblical Institute, Amruševa 11, Zagreb).



B R A T S K I V J E S N I K

God. V. J U N I 1966. Broj 1.

NAUČI NAS TAKO BROJITI NAŠE DANE...

Samo donekle raspolažemo svojim vremenom, jer vrlo mnoge vremena se potroši na neophodne dužnosti po posivu i u društvu, a s ostatkom raspolažemo po svojoj volji. Molitva na početku je Mojsijeva. Čovjek koji je kao i mi imao obaveze, dužnosti bolesti.

Prema tome, u uslovima koji su nam povoljni ili ne, pridružimo se molitvi psalmiste:"Nauči nas dobro računati naše dane". Jer vrijeme kojim raspolažemo može se usporediti s talentima iz priče u Evandjelju,tako da ćemo morati još za njega polagati račun.

Zar nije vrijeme kapital kojeg nam Bog povjerava i kojeg treba umnožiti? Biblija ne govori nigdje o desetku vremena. Da li to znači da nam pripada potpuno? Apostol Pavao piše Korinćanima kaže: "Ljubav Kristova nas nagoni da mislimo da ako je jedan umro za sve onda su svi umrli, da oni koji žive ne žive više za sebe nego za onoga koji je umro i uskrsnuo za njih" /2.Kor.5,14-15/.

Ova izjava: ne živi više za sebe, tako nam je uobičajena da nam vrlo lako njezin duboki smisao promakne. Ona je upravo iznenadjujuća u svijetu gdje svaki živi za sebe a dobri Bog za sve!

Ako postoji područje gdje ljudska sebičnost naročito vlada to je u području upotrebe vremena. Kako čovjek raspolaže ulobodno samo malim djelićem svog vremena, općenito želi da to onda bude njemu na raspolaganje i da ga koristi po svojoj volji. Ne živjeti za

Fig. 11: *The Brethren Herald, 1966*

Bratski vjesnik newsletter was of simple production because it was entirely produced and reproduced in the church premises. It was produced in a folded A4 or A5 format (15 x 21 cm) and stapled in the middle. It had a simple design, typed on a machine, printed in black and

white, with only text and monotone colors used, for example, on the cover in 1969 and on several occasions in later years. It mostly contained about twenty to thirty pages, and some later issues had about sixty pages. The texts addressed biblical themes, with the purpose of edifying believers. It was published bimonthly and quarterly.[29]

Alongside *Bratski vjesnik,* there were also supplements and publications with specific topics (in the same format and design as *Bratski vjesnik*), such as *Stol u pustiji* and *Dnevno svjetlo* by Watchman Nee, which were later published as separate editions. Some of the libraries that own *Bratski vjesnik* are: Research Library of Zadar, which owns issues from 1966 and 1967, and University Library Split, which owns issues from 1966–1968, and NSK, 1966–1968.

3.2.2.2. Bible Dictionary

The *Bible Dictionary* was created out of a desire to approach and deepen the understanding of the biblical text. It is significant to note that it is "the first work of this kind in the Yugoslav Protestantism of that time" (Knežević 2019, 139), given that there were no similar works. The dictionary is large in format, simple in design, without an introduction or imprint (except for the title, author's name, and year of publication), and contains an explanation of certain biblical terms in alphabetical order (from A to Z) on 514 pages. *The Brethren Herald* from 1973 promoted its

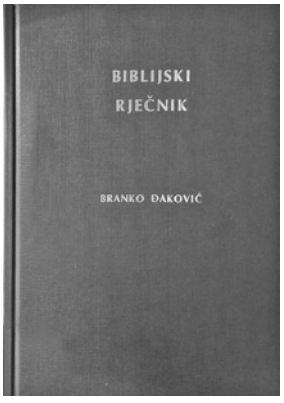


Fig. 12: *Bible Dictionary, cover*

Hardcover, large format: 30.2 x 21.2 cm (3 cm spine). Book block: 29.7 x 20 cm. Year of publication: 1973. Number of pages: 514. Self-published. Publisher: Bratski vjesnik Kristove Crkve Braće, Zagreb, Gajeva 9a. Editor-in-chief: Dr. Branko Đaković, Zagreb, Nodilova 2, Duplicated: Zagreb, Gajeva 9a

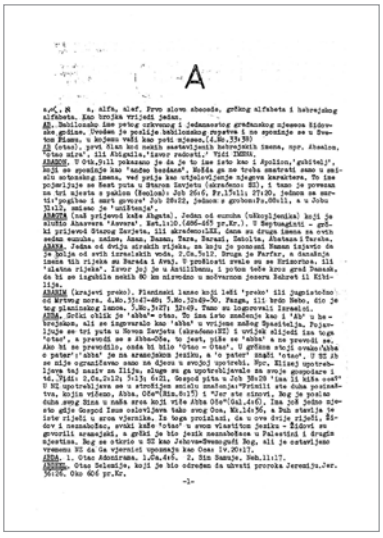

A

Fig. 13: *Bible Dictionary, first page*

29 For example, on the 1987 copy, issue 3, it says: "A magazine for the edification of Christians, published quarterly."

sale, stating that it contained 514 pages and 400,000 words (Fig. 12 and 13). The exact circulation is unknown, but it can be assumed that it was not large, because there are not many copies today. For example, the library of the Biblical Institute has one copy, and the library of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek has two. According to Danijel Lukić, the current head of the Brethren community in Rijeka, who worked closely with Branko Đaković on publishing, a second edition of the dictionary was subsequently printed by the French publishing house Bibles et Publications Chrétiennes from Valence. There were probably not many copies of that edition, because neither he nor anyone from the Đaković family owns that copy, nor has any been found so far. Danijel Lukić believes that the dictionary was modeled after the *Concise Bible Dictionary* (1993). This dictionary, used for comparison and owned by Branko Đaković, is a 1993 reprint, has a hardcover, and contains 877 pages. The author and editor are not listed. Danijel Lukić probably owns an older copy of the same dictionary, which does not state the year, but does list the author H. L. Heijkoop (Blijhamsterstraat 58, Winschoten, Netherlands, published by Bible Truth Publishers, Illinois, previously printed by George Morrish of London). Hendrik L. Heijkoop (1906–1995) (Cross s.a.) is the author of the booklet *Pisma za mlade ljude* (*Beginning with Christ: A Series of Letters to Young Christians*), also published by GBV, Dillenburg, with a translation by Branko Đaković, as well as some other editions.

3.2.2.3. Bible Translations

The Bible translations of Branko Đaković were written about by Knežević in his 2019 book, which dedicates an entire chapter to his translations. In the introduction, Knežević writes: "Although Branko Đaković's translations originated within the theology and biblical studies of *Christ's Church of Brethren*, they eventually became known among other domestic churches that followed the Reformation. After Šulek's translation of the New Testament and Psalms, these were the first domestic standard translations of Protestant provenance" (Knežević 2019, 137).

Of Branko Đaković's Bible translations, the first to be published was *the Expanded New Testament* (1969) (Fig. 14), followed by the *Gospel of John* (1989 and 1993) (Fig. 15), and then the *New Testament* (1989) (Fig. 16) and the *New Testament and Psalms* (1993 and 1994) (Fig. 17).[30] Finally, the entire Bible was published: *The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (2000, 2006, and 2008) (Fig. 18). In none of these editions, although he translated them all, is B. Đaković listed as the translator (except for *The Expanded New Testament*), but rather as the editor-in-chief.

In 1969, the *Amplified New Testament was published,* from the Epistle to the Romans to the Revelation. These copies are almost non-existent today; there are

30 *The New Testament and Psalms* are listed as second (1993) and third editions (1994).

two copies in the library of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, and there is a record of it in the National University Library (NSK: II-50.173) and the Cambridge University Library (BSS.252.1.F69.2).[31] The English so-called expanded New Testament is listed as the original: "The Amplified New Testament." Branko Djaković is listed as the translator of the Croatian edition.[32] He is also listed as the publisher (Dr Branko Djaković, Zagreb, Nodilova 2), and it is

Fig. 14:
The Expanded New Testament, 1969

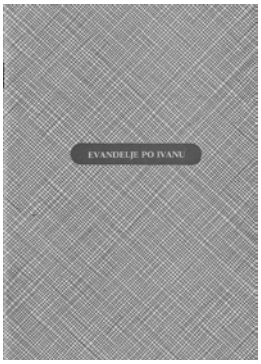


Fig. 15:
The Gospel of John, 1989

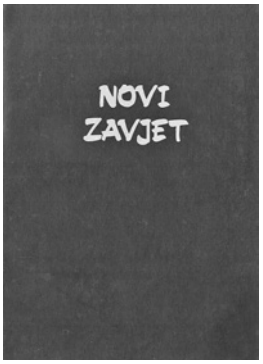


Fig. 16:
New Testament, 1989

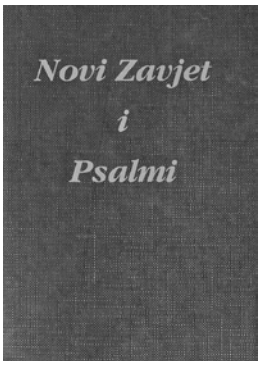


Fig. 17:
New Testament and Psalms, 1993

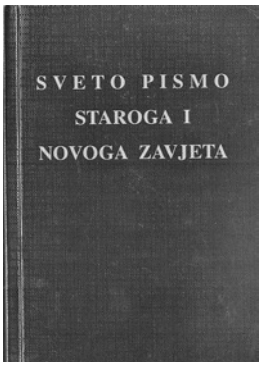


Fig. 18:
Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, 2000

31 Although the introduction to the *Expanded New Testament* states that it is a translation into Croatian, the Cambridge catalog lists it under Serbian, probably because at that time Serbian was considered an official language alongside Croatian (Knežević 2019, 141).

32 Given that at that time everything was written on a typewriter on which there was no printed letter "Đ," it was common to use "Dj" instead of "Đ." For this reason, Brano Đaković sometimes signed with Djaković.

stated that the edition was reproduced in the premises of the Brethren Church in Zagreb, Gajeva 9a.

The Gospel of John was published as a supplement to the *Bratski vjesnik*, and Branko Djaković is listed as the editor-in-chief. The publisher (Christ's Church of Brethren, "Bratski vjesnik," Gajeva 9a) and the printing house (Grafička galanterija Časni, Severin na Kupi) are the same for both the *Gospel of John* and the *New Testament* (Zagreb edition), which were printed in the same year, 1989. For the editions of the *New Testament with Psalms* (1993 and 1994), the publisher is listed as the Udruženje za širenje vjerske literature (Association for the Spread of Religious Literature) (Žrtava fašizma 2)[33] and Dillenburg, GBV.[34] The same publisher is also used for all subsequent editions of the entire Holy Scripture.

The first edition of the *Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* from 2000 was printed in 5,000 copies, and according to Danijela Lukić (GBV representative in Croatia), this edition was quickly distributed. Most of this edition, approximately 3,000 copies, was distributed in Croatia, with the remainder in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (Vojvodina), and a portion in Germany and other European countries. The second edition from 2006 (in a larger format) was also distributed. The exact circulation is not known, but it is known that GBV prints a minimum of 3,000 copies. The third edition, printed in 2008, was exclusive to the needs of Germany and other Western European countries, and "only about two hundred copies of that reached Croatia." [35] Today, GBV offers only Vrtarić's translation of the Croatian translation, while Đaković's is no longer in print. Draško Đenović, head of the Church of Christ in Belgrade and president of the Ikonos association,[36] a partner organization of TWR (Trans World Radio, formerly Radio Monte Carlo), known in evangelical circles as a religious analyst, comments on the applicability of Branko Đaković's Bible translation in Serbia and Bosnia:

> With the New Testament translated by Dr. Branko Đaković, I met for the first time in 1994... It was a time of deep national divisions... I am free to say that his misfortune was an unfavorable political and historical moment when he appeared, so he was not Serbian enough for the Serbs, and often not Croatian enough for the Croats... It should not be forgotten that the GBV that prints this translation does not have a permanent representative in Serbia, and therefore, the distribution of their publications is very limited.

33 The association is located in Rijeka (Danijel Lukić), and the name was later changed to the Association for the Promotion of Spiritual Culture and then to Živa riječ, Krasica.

34 The publisher is GBV, and the Association for the Promotion of Spiritual Culture is the distributor for the Croatian territory.

35 Danijel Lukić, via email to the author, November 20, 2023.

36 Ikonos was initially TWR's partner for Serbia, and then for the entire former Yugoslavia, except for Slovenia, after "Val evanđelja" was shut down.

Đaković's translation found its place in Serbia in mixed environments and churches that were composed of believers who belonged to national minorities living in Vojvodina. In a way, it was ideal for believers who linguistically gravitated towards Croatian or Croatian-Serbian, particularly those living in Serbian environments. It was especially widespread in the Brethren churches, which were almost exclusively Slovak. According to individuals, Đaković's translation was also popular in certain Baptist communities in Vojvodina, which should not be surprising if we know that in the 1990s the largest number of believers were of Croatian, Bunjevac, and Slovak ethnicity. He was also a favorite among the local Methodists, whose nineteen churches, at least two-thirds, were communities where preaching was done in the Slovak language... The then Methodist preacher in Šid (who has not been there for a long time), Darko Vika, even considered the idea that, following Ruben Knežević's revision of the *New Testament* in the Bosnian language, a Serbian revision of Đaković's translation of the complete Holy Scripture should be undertaken. At that time, there was only Daničić's translation of the Old Testament and a revision of Bakotić's translation...

Somewhere around 2004, Ikonos, which had previously been TWR's partner for Serbia, took over and began broadcasting programs in the Bosnian language. When the question arose as to which translation to offer to the radio listeners of the Bosnian program, the logical choice fell precisely on Đaković's translation because it was somehow acceptable to all parties in ethnically mixed Bosnia. For that occasion, for the needs of Ikonos, GBV printed a new edition with wider margins (the previous edition was trimmed to some 5 mm of text), and Ikonos bought and distributed in Bosnia, if I remember correctly, some 500 copies. When, in the early 2020s, Ikonos sought to utilize Đaković's translation of the Holy Scriptures for a Bosnian program application to meet TWR's needs, it was discovered that, according to Danijel Lukić, GBV also lacked a digital file. This was one of the reasons why TWR abandoned the idea of using this translation for the series of radio programs *Kroz Sveto pismo* (a systematic study of the Holy Scriptures) in Bosnian.

As for the spread of Đaković's translation, it has fallen into oblivion over time in Serbia today. The reason for this is primarily the appearance of new translations of the complete Holy Scriptures in the Serbian language (Modern Serbian translation in Cyrillic, New Serbian translation in Cyrillic, Latin and Cyrillic capitals, and the Milin-Čarnić translation in both scripts)... Another problem that caused some believers to give up on Đaković's translation is the fact that it is printed in relatively small letters in a situation where the "market" is mostly of older age and therefore of weaker eyesight, as well as procurement, bearing in mind that the only source was practically GBV, whose service is not so developed in Serbia. What you should know, however, is the fact that there is not a single book fair in Belgrade or Novi Sad where at least someone does not ask where and how to get Đaković's translation of the Holy Scriptures.[37]

37 Draško Đenović, by e-mail to the author, November 18, 2023.

Conclusion

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb was founded by a few religious enthusiasts who sought greater fellowship and a deeper abiding in God's word and prayer. It was a community where weekly meetings were not missed, evangelism was attended on weekends, and prayer was prayed regularly and persistently, often on one's knees. The Bible was thoroughly studied and memorized, and the so-called biblical "priesthood of all believers" was practically implemented among the brethren, allowing everyone to preach. They came to meetings ready to be prompted by the Holy Spirit to share something from the Word for that day. The restrictions and constant checks by the then-Yugoslav regime, as well as the impossibility of public preaching or using public printing presses, did not prevent believers from finding a way to share the gospel in their midst. Selected Christian literature was tirelessly translated to bring the gospel message closer to the common people through the written word, and also to build up the body of Christ in discipleship. The entire publishing process was carried out manually, from typing to copying, through the hard work of believers within the church itself. It seems incredible how the church at that time managed to secure a space from the city, located in the very center of the city, but this was preceded by a demonstration of respect for the authorities through the fulfillment of certain conditions and transparency in its activities. Modesty, simplicity, separation from the world, and growth in piety were the characteristics of this group of believers, always ready for evangelization, with at least a tract in their pocket, if not a more concrete book. Many devoted believers and a wealth of literature emerged from this community, which shaped and strengthened the Croatian people's faith and touched their hearts. The extent of its real influence is difficult to fully comprehend. Unfortunately, after the period of culmination, the church began to decline in numbers, primarily among the young population, largely due to its rigid principles. Some events are difficult to understand today, and some should simply be left in the past, because those were different times, and every generation has some new challenges. Therefore, we should learn from history that in other situations we can act more correctly and wisely, all in the light of God's word. The community has provided many people with a solid biblical foundation, leaving behind fond memories of fellowship and spiritual experiences from summer camps in Lokve, as well as some incredible conferences and trips to foreign countries, and transformative experiences in contact with the transcendent. The church has provided a solid foundation for believers who have grown up within its fold and have continued to establish other communities and serve the body of Christ. The same church space is still used for biblical research, the preservation of the past, Christian literature, and the formation of disciples of Christ. People pass away, communities are formed and transformed, but the sown word of God always remains and continues to live.

In the process of writing, it was sometimes difficult to reconstruct historical events through conversations with living witnesses; however, it was also a great privilege to delve into ancient memories with them and peer into the past together. It was also a pleasure to collect some valuable, old, and almost forgotten editions, pulling them out of boxes and old cupboards. Sometimes, it was a real challenge to arrange them in chronological order and connect the pieces. Only one part of the history and church legacy is presented here. It seems to me that this is just the beginning in preserving this part of the past, and I hope that this article opens the door to some new research and insights.

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Iva Đaković

Razvoj i djelovanje Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu

Sažetak

Kristova crkva braće u Zagrebu od svog osnutka 1946. godine pa do početka sedamdesetih bila je jedna od najvećih i najaktivnijih zajednica na području Hrvatske. Smještena u samom centru u blizini glavnog zagrebačkog trga u Gajevoj 9a, brojila je oko stotinjak članova. Članovi crkve bili su aktivni u evangelizaciji, najviše putem dijeljenja traktata, osobnim svjedočenjem i obilaženjem okolnih mjesta, unatoč ograničenjima ondašnjeg režima. Dva puta godišnje održavale su se konferencije na kojima su se okupljale sve bratske zajednice iz bivše Jugoslavije. Crkvu su posjećivali poznati inozemni propovjednici poput Bakhta Singa i Rogera T. Fostera. Posjete raznih inozemnih misionara, posebice iz Švicarske i Engleske, kasnije i Njemačke, otvorilo je već tijekom šezdesetih godina nove mogućnosti, posebice mladima, za sudjelovanjem u kršćanskim događanjima i izvan zemlje. Uz putovanja i konferencije redovito su se organizirali izleti za mlade te kampovi u Gorskom kotaru, blizu Lokvarskog jezera, ali i odlasci u Englesku, što je sve ostavilo veliki pečat na životima mladih. Izdavaštvo je zauzimalo bitno mjesto u evangelizaciji te ohrabrivanju, učeništvu i podizanju vjernika. Dr. Branko Đaković, jedan od starješina Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu, iza sebe je ostavio značajan broj prijevoda kršćanske literature, a njegovo najveće prevoditeljsko djelo predstavlja prijevod cjelokupnog Svetog pisma. Također, njegov Biblijski rječnik prvi je biblijski protestantski rječnik na području tadašnje Jugoslavije, a njegovi su biblijski prijevodi prvi standardni protestantski prijevodi na području Hrvatske. U prvom djelu donosi se pregled nastanka bratskih crkava u Europi, kako se taj pokret proširio na područje bivše Jugoslavije te nastanak i razvoj Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu. Drugi dio govori o organizacijskoj strukturi Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu, a u trećem dijelu razmatra se njezin rad, djelovanje i izdavaštvo. Od izdavaštva, malo pobliže se govori o *Bratskom vjesniku*, biblijskim prijevodima te nastanku *Biblijskog rječnika*. Također se donosi životopis starješine Branka Đakovića i još nekih važnih osoba za život zajednice.

Five Practical Applications of Honesty with God in the Christian Life

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Abstract

Admittedly, the commonest instinct of human beings after the Fall is to run from the Creator and wear masks while hiding behind all kinds of appearances (like false religion, "good" deeds, and/or good intentions). Despite this (or perhaps for this reason precisely), God, in his all-knowing wisdom, has ordained honesty and the idea of living in transparency (by the Light of his Word) to heal and repair the broken relationship with him. This means that we, as humans, must be completely open with Yahweh first and foremost, but also with ourselves, admitting our faults to ourselves rather than ignoring them. Honesty with God, in other words, means renouncing all attempts to justify, minimize, or even deny the grievousness of our sin (otherwise said, renouncing all masks and the appearance of human "goodness") so that we might be not just forgiven, but also cleansed, healed and restored (at least partially, until the "completeness" comes). Thus, based on the biblical premise that transparency is the best shield against deceit and self-deceit, this article discusses five practical applications that the habit of being completely transparent with ourselves – but, most importantly, with God – develops in our Christian walk of faith.

Keywords: *sincerity, transparency, confessing, forgiveness, inner healing, purity of motives*

Introduction

According to Genesis, also called "The Book of the Beginnings," one of the first consequences of the Fall was the ontological, deep-embedded shame, translated into a feeling of pain, the intuition of something profoundly wrong, which motivated the fear of Adam and Eve, by birthing a pit between them (us) and the Creator:

> And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (Gen 3:7-10).[1]

The very first reaction of our ancestors after they tasted the forbidden fruit was to stay away, hide, and cover themselves with fig leaves. Symbols of the unbiblical attempts to redeem the lost glory and reestablish relationship with God – but, of course, in *human* terms – the torn relationship with God, the fig leaves could be associated in the present time with our overarching tendency to dissimulate, wear masks, or perpetuate false beliefs about ourselves, to hide our true identity and run from him (just like Adam and Eve). Walls that obstruct our spiritual sight, these "strongholds," as Paul calls them in 2 Corinthians 10:4, have to do with our defense mechanisms, with those "schemes" that we mentally conceive (oftentimes unknowingly), trying to deal with our ancestral shame, inherited from our fathers in the Garden of Eden.

The good news is that, even before the Fall of man, God already had the solution prepared. Millennia later, after careful preparation, the Lord of Grace came down from Heaven and offered himself as a Lamb of sacrifice so that, by his innocent blood, we may again have access to the Father. Thus, in the darkest hour of history, when Jesus Christ, the Savior, was hanging on a tree like an ordinary sinner (the key word here being "like," not that he indeed was one; see Isa 53:4-5, 9 and Gal 3:13) the earth shook from the ground and the veil that was separating us from God was torn in two (see Matt 27:51), thereby reopening our path towards him (see Heb 10:19-20).

Besides the priceless gift of being able to have access to him again, our Lord Jesus offered us, through the sacrifice on the cross, a way to redeem our spirit, soul, and, subsequently, our body by healing us from sin and, to a certain extent, from its devastating consequences. Yet, forgiveness and restoration require from

1 All Scripture quotations in this book are taken from the King James Version Bible, unless otherwise stated.

us a specific *price*: a willingness to see and admit our state, and, having this revelation, to run to God with it to be set free. Biblically speaking, we cannot be saved until we see our sinful condition, nor healed until we are conscious and humble enough to ask for his help! This implies that we are ready to accept the truth about ourselves and become vulnerable before him, so Jehovah-Rapha may do his work in us. But even though, as followers of Christ, we should be quite aware of this unique and priceless opportunity to be intimate with him, how many times do we choose instead to build up walls and barricades or run in the opposite direction by hiding the truth about ourselves in the attempt to appear better, more spiritual, or more powerful than we are?

1. Honesty with God – a Biblical Shield Against Deceit and Self-Deceit

To counter this human tendency of hiding behind all kinds of appearances, God ordered the idea of *transparency* (in other words, living "in the light," see Jn 3:19-21) as a biblical solution, understood as complete honesty with him, which is expressed in the confession of our sin, deeply aware of *who* God is and *how* we are.

Transparency, which the German theologian Albert Schweitzer (2014, 230) describes as being "the very foundation of spiritual life" constitutes that fundamental relational attribute that determines the measure of trust between two people while, at the same time, being a *sine qua non* attribute of self-awareness, that allows us to understand our weak/strong points better, thus making us able to discern the seasons that we move through in our short walk on this earth. Yet, when we apply it to our relationship with the Lord, this virtue of voluntary transparency acquires a sacred, transcendental dimension, expressed in the conscious choice to affirmatively (and wholeheartedly) respond to his holy invitation.

This idea of living *in the light* (meaning with complete transparency and integrity) with ourselves, and, most importantly, with God, by practicing our daily spiritual cleanse (both in the Word and our conversations with the Father) is expressed by a few particular terms.

The first (which is found in the Old Testament) is the Hebrew adjective *bar* (Heb. בַּר, derived from the Hebrew verb *bārar*), meaning "pure," "clean," or even "empty, emptied" (but with the same meaning of "cleanliness"—see Job 11:4; Ps 19:8; 24:4; 73:1; Prov 14:4; Song 6:10) (Swanson 1997, 1338 II. בַּר (*bǎr*)).

The New Testament correspondent is the word *katharos* (gr. καθαρός), an adjective used 27 times in the Bible, with the sense of "clean," "pure" (without any admixture), "sincere," "innocent," "authentic" or physically "without blemish" (Matt 23:26; 27:59; Heb 10:22 (23); Rev 15:6; 19:8, 14); "honest," cleaned of every mixture of genuine with false (1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22 and 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3); "true," "genuine" (Jas 1:27); "innocent," "blameless" (Acts 18:6; 20:26);

"ethical" – free of sin, fault or unclean desires (Tit 1:15; Jn 13:10-11); "suitable for serving" (Matt 5:8; Rom 14:20; Tit 1:15).

The third word used is the adjective *eilikrinēs* (gr. εἰλικρινής), synonym with *katharos*, which only appears twice in the New Testament, in Philippians 1:10 and 2 Peter 3:1, meaning "pure," "sincere," "transparent," whose root means "to be found pure (or clean) when unfolded and examined in the sunlight" (BDAG 2001, 250). Related to it is the noun eilikrineia (gr. εἰλικρίνεια), which appears three times in The New Testament (in 1 Cor 1:12, 5:7-8 and 2 Cor 2:17), being defined by Theophylact of Orchid (ca. 1050/60-1108) as "purity of thought that has nothing to hide and nothing to stay hidden in the shadow, waiting." According to William Barclay (1992, 157):

> The discussed term (*eilikrineia*) can be derived from a combination of two Greek words: *heile*, meaning "sunlight," and *krinein*, meaning "to judge." In this case, they could describe something that stands the evaluation made in the sunlight, something that, even though it is held up high in the bright sunlight, uncovers no defect or crack. In this case, we have a very telling picture. In the eastern bazaars, the shops were small, dark, and shadowy. An article, say a piece of pottery, or a piece of glass, or a piece of fabric, might look perfect in the dark closet of the shopkeeper's shop, but the wiser buyer would take it out into the street, subject it to the judgment of sunlight, and often the bright rays of the sun were revealing flaws and cracks that would never have been noticed in the darkness of the shop.

Thus having the meaning of "sincerity," "honesty," "purity of reasons," and/or a "clean heart," these notions describe the positive moral quality of having pure motives by combining, in an unitary understanding, the candor and innocence of children (see Matt 18:3-5) with the ability to see things in a clear and nuanced way, sincere and capable of introspection (or self-examination) based upon the Word (specific, of course, to mature people).

First Application: Honest Repentance and Confession of our Sins

As previously shown, sincerity means seeing ourselves the way we are (as shown in the Word of God); it means being completely aware of our faults and weaknesses, and particularly our need for Jesus; it also means being capable of self-examination in the light of the "sun" (or, better said, "the Son"), allowing us to see even the most minor imperfections that used to pass unnoticed before that. More than any other domain of Christian life, the idea of honesty with God and with ourselves is reflected in the simple yet necessary act of repentance from our sinful ways. This act (along with faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior) constitutes one of the two main pillars of salvation: initiating a relationship with the Father and continuing our daily walk with him.

Without genuine repentance, we cannot experience the new birth (see Jn 3:3-7) nor advance in the process of sanctification and spiritual maturity, which unfolds throughout our lifespan. Derived from the Greek word *metanoia* (which means "changing your mind, changing your line of thought"), this inner dynamic begins with that profound awareness regarding our sinful nature – brought by the Holy Spirit in the life of a (potential) believer (see 1 Jn 1:8-9), accompanied by sincere regret, and reparatory actions motivated by our strong desire (decision, inner commitment) to change ourselves, by correcting our behavior.

Of course, sincere repentance must be reflected in confessing our sins – understood as an honest declaration made before God and/or a trusted person – in which we openly admit our sin without justifying it, looking for excuses, or casting the blame on someone/something other than ourselves (with the mention that, in the absence of a genuine change of heart, mere confession is yet another one of the numerous expressions of religious hypocrisy, focused on exterior forms, but without inner transformation). According to Scripture, the Lord is compassionate and gracious, "slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (see Ex 34:6). In other words, he is always ready to forgive those who erred, provided that they "own" their transgression and genuinely want to change. Paradoxical, although it should be a real encouragement for Christians, this mercy and graciousness that characterizes the Creator can be a real challenge for believers who, instead of running to him the second they realize they have mistaken, they do everything they can to "fix" the problem of sin by themselves, by trying to cover up, hide, forget or dissociate from all that is bad in their life (as if this would somehow solve the real issue, which is the condition of their heart):

> Christians face a problem. We, as disciples of Jesus, are meant to reflect his character. Jesus was and is perfect, and we wish to show more of his goodness and less of our old sinfulness. There are two methods by which we seek to achieve this, yet only one of those is correct. God's method is to allow the Holy Spirit to take over and he will convict us of the sin in our lives. As a result, we confess our sin, repent, and let him bring about the change of heart. The other method is to take control and do everything we can to hide as best we can those areas that we consider weak, damaged, or inappropriate. It is the method that will never produce the desired results, because we are doing nothing else but placing a certain area of our life in a dark corner, under the authority of the evil one. As much as we would like it to be effective, dissociation from our sinful nature does not lead to holiness. We must recognize and confess our sinful human nature and then let it die by walking in daily submission to the Spirit of God (Cross 2016, 80).

Apart from the priceless gift of salvation and reconciliation with God, another vital purpose of repentance is to transform our inner man, thus becoming able to fulfill his purposes *in* and *through* us. Yet, just like the aforementioned Christian

author explained in his book, this transformation, characterized by holiness and spiritual maturity, is not attainable by hiding the sin under a mat and pretending that it does not exist, nor when we attempt to redefine it, by diminishing its seriousness and covering it with so-called "good" deeds (on the contrary, such attitudes block the Holy Spirit manifesting in our lives and the freedom that he brings, creating, in change, a fertile ground for legalism – in all its ugly manifestations). The only truly biblical and legitimate way to address the problem of sin in a believer's heart and life is to expose it to the light by being completely *honest* and *transparent* with God.

Second Application: True Faith/Trust in Jesus Christ

To "entrust" yourself to Another for your delivery is barely acceptable for a man. Even when we, as Christians, know from the Bible and personal experience that the Lord is a God of agape love and his mercies never come to an end (see Lam 3:22-23), and even though it only takes one good look at the cross to understand how precious we are in his eyes, oftentimes we find it much more difficult (at least in the beginning!) to "abandon" ourselves to his will (admittedly, quite unpredictable at times…) than to put our trust in other things which only offer us a mere *appearance* of safety (like, for instance, our relationships, possessions, or what we can do in our strength).

One of the classic exercises that future actors must do at the faculty of theater is to form unconditional "trust falls," where they allow themselves to fall on their backs, trusting that their colleagues will catch them and will not let them hit the ground. Practically speaking, God requires of us the same thing: to allow ourselves to trust in his character, in what he declared about himself, thus putting down the reins and abandoning us fully into the "hands" of the One who is not only willing but also perfectly capable of fulfilling everything that he said in his Word: "God can be trusted and he will never prove unfaithful to those who put their trust in what he said. The essence of true faith is taking God at his word and trusting him to do what he has promised" (Grudem 2004, 211).

Transparency with God, which can be seen as an act of profound humility, is an expression of true belief *in him* (as opposed to ourselves), a dive into the unknown, being exclusively guided by the voice of the One who called us to follow him. However, this "leap" of faith involves an apparent risk. For it seems risky to open ourselves up by confessing all sinful thoughts and desires that we cannot even admit to ourselves while, at the same time, completely and wholeheartedly believing that he is good enough to forgive us, that he wasn't "joking" when he invited us to cast all our cares unto him; that he isn't surprised, nor afraid of all the bitterness, pain, and selfishness in us; that he will not reject us if when we come before him *just as we are*, and, finally, that he will not throw back at us a well-

deserved "I told you so…" like our parents did when we were children (in fact, the parable of the prodigal son proves just the opposite).

This unspoken fear that our God will cease loving us if he saw our true colors (as if he wouldn't already know beforehand!) might be precisely why oftentimes we hesitate to get fully close to him; the fear that, if we are not like the other "perfect" Christians (as other people in the church seem to be), we will end up being somehow second rank in his eyes. Consequently, we take the "easy way" by hiding from ourselves and from him. Alternatively, even if we admit our sin, we might try to minimize it, searching for ways to punish ourselves, to atone for our guilt. In reality, none of the approaches mentioned above is biblical or effective, as they fail to address the real problem within us (which is a sin of the heart just as much as behavioral sin is) or to help us get closer to God (see Heb 11:6).

Third Application: Forgiving Others Who Have Wronged Us

Sincerity in admitting the truth in all its ways, shapes, and forms has practical applications (and implications) not just regarding *our* sin and the willingness to confess it but also in regards to the ability to recognize an evil that was done *to us*, admitting that we have indeed been offended, and thus opening the way unto forgiveness (and, implicitly, towards inner healing and the restoration of our soul, without necessarily involving reconciliation, especially if we do not see any sign of repentance from the part of the person that has wronged us).

Using his testimony, Christian author John Bevere, in his well-known book *The Bait of Satan*, explains the traps that this way of thinking (denying the seriousness of someone else's offense) exposes us to, and what is the result of our attempt to avoid dealing with sin (this time, the sin of others):

> One way the enemy keeps a person in an offended state is to keep the offense hidden, cloaked with pride. Pride will keep you from admitting your true condition. Once, I was severely hurt by a couple of ministers. People would say, I can't believe they did this to you. Aren't you hurt? I would quickly respond, No, I am fine. I'm not hurt." I knew it was wrong to be offended, so I denied and repressed it. I convinced myself I was not, but in reality, I was. Pride masked the true condition of my heart. (…) Pride keeps you from dealing with the truth. It distorts your vision. You never change when you think everything is fine. Pride causes you to view yourself as a victim. Your attitude becomes, "I was mistreated and misjudged; therefore, I am justified in my behavior." Because you believe you are innocent and falsely accused, you hold back forgiveness. Though your true heart condition is hidden from you, it is not hidden from God (Bevere 2011, 20-21).

Essentially, when discussing sin, the Bible condemns any conscious or unconscious attempt to redefine it or portray it in a "positive" light (Isa 5:20). However,

in God's economy, denying or ignoring it also doesn't constitute an acceptable solution.

According to our Lord's words in Matthew 6 (vv. 12, 14, and 15), forgiveness is not optional – if we want to be forgiven by our Heavenly Father. Yet how can we forgive something we aren't even willing to admit? In his book *Forgive: Why Should I and Can I?*, Tim Keller (2022, 9) defines the idea of forgiving as "first to name the trespass truthfully as wrong and punishable, rather than merely excusing it." The entire process of forgiveness and healing from the trauma that we experienced always begins with recognizing our pain and understanding what happened. In this sense, sin must be dealt with (processed internally), and the person who sinned is forgiven, fulfilling thus the command of Jesus Christ. Instead of healing, any effort to deny, diminish, or cover up a real evil that has happened to us only deepens our wound by keeping us prisoners of a victim mentality or in a state of self-righteousness that prohibits us from offering the needed clemency to be healed.

Fourth Application: Recognizing and Venting our Emotions in a Godly Way

Daniel Goleman (2008, 73) asserts that our "incapacity to take notice of our true emotions leaves us prey to them." In other words, without a minimal understanding of what we feel and the cause thereof, it is almost impossible not to give in to these destructive emotions. In this sense, honesty towards God (and, of course, towards self) appears as being a first necessary step (although not sufficient!) to make light in our own sin-darkened heart so that, by identifying with precision the emotional root that triggers us on a subconscious level (check out the list in Mk 7:21-23), we will be able to make an informed decision to not give in to our emotions or act based (solely) on them, but, in change, obey God's commandments and show forth the fruits of the Spirit (see Gal 5:22-23), *regardless of how and what we feel*.

If the absence of self-control can have disastrous relational and spiritual consequences, hiding, denying, or completely ignoring our true feelings will, in time, leave us with profound wounds in our souls by creating confusion, bitterness, a hardened heart, inability to express ourselves or communicate our affections, or even (in extreme cases) physical incapacities. In fact, according to the Bible and medical science, there is a direct causal correlation between our emotional and spiritual state and the health of our bodies (e.g. Prov 17:22). Besides recognizing how we feel, Scripture also speaks of a second essential step in the process of emotional healing: expressing our feelings in such a way that we don't cause harm to the others around us (Eph 4:26, "In your anger, do not sin") – to be freed from those feelings that "bubble up" inside us, causing disturbance and a plethora of other issues: "When we were little, many of us were urged by our parents to be

good children, without learning how to do it in a spiritual way. The only possible option seemed to be hiding the bad boy or girl, and probably our unconscious plan to be more like Jesus is the same" (Cross 2016, 80).

Whether we're talking about worry, anxiety, anger, hate, fear, or any other feeling, momentary state, or buried emotion that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to light, our response should reflect total transparency in our relationship with the Lord, the only One who can truly heal our soul when—by renouncing all formalism and religious prejudice—we dare to make ourselves vulnerable and pour out our hearts in an act of radical honesty. This is what we biblically call *pouring out our hearts* before Jesus who, in Matthew 11:28-29, calls us to lay our burden on him, in complete and unconcealed trust directed towards the One who not only bore those pains on the cross, but who is also able to give us his rest – understood as a state of mental balance and emotional stability that stems from the healing of our souls, by the work of God's divine grace.

Having the connotation of abundance, this concept of pouring out our hearts before God is typologically associated with the shedding of blood or water within the context of ritual sacrifices that took place in the Tabernacle of Moses (see Lev 4:7, 18, 25), also referring to the desperate prayer of the person who, having reached the "end of his/her rope" and in a state of profound desperation, pours out his/her heart before the Lord without constraints, like an overflowing river (see Lam 2:19), trusting fully in the ability of God to understand our pain (that he experienced on the cross), cleanse our emotions and replacing all our "venom" with his peace.

The Bible contains several accounts about people of faith who, confronted with the hardest of trials and sufferings that seemed never to end, chose to share their pain with the Lord. A prime example of this is Hannah, the faithful mother of the prophet Samuel, who trusted so much in the character of God that she was able to overlook the accusatory remark of the High Priest by admitting that she was "a woman of a sorrowful spirit," who out of "the abundance of her complaint and grief" had come to the Temple to "pour out her soul before the Lord" (see 1 Sam 1:15-16).

Using a similar language, King David described in Psalm 142 how he "poured out his complaint before the Lord and he showed before him all his trouble," for when "his spirit was overwhelmed within him, then God knew his path" (see Ps 142:2-3). Last but not least, Jeremiah, also known as the "weeping prophet," paints in his writings a very graphic image of the feelings that brought him to the edge of despair, feelings that he communicated directly to the Lord through expressions like: "I weep, and my eyes overflow with tears. See, Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, my eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground" (see Lam 1:16, 20; 2:11).

Fifth Application: Transparency with our True Thoughts and Intentions

As the apostle Paul points out in his epistle to the Romans, the *renewing of our minds* is closely linked to our spiritual awareness, expressed by the ability to identify and, subsequently, fulfill God's perfect will (see Rom 12:2). This "renewal" (or recalibration) of the mind through the daily immersion in the Word is more than an intellectual absorption of the precepts of the Bible. It aims to bring clarity and peace by gradually replacing the false and unbiblical beliefs that we oftentimes hold with the eternal, immutable, and life-giving Truth that was embodied in the person of Jesus (see Jn 1:14; 14:6).

In regard to our thoughts (the way we perceive reality and understand life at a cognitive level), a true "renewal" can only take place on the grounds of genuine humility, manifested in the courage to admit our need for God, starting from where we are, to get where he wants us to be. Real transformation (which stems from the inside, yet overflows in the exterior) cannot bypass this important step of transparency, of allowing us to become vulnerable before our Creator, who invites us to voice not just what we *feel* but also what we *think*; in essence, to express all those thoughts that consume us, by submitting them before Christ: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have the divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:3-5).

In this short passage, we can identify no less than four denotative and connotative terms that describe various processes of mind: *strongholds* (gr. ὀχυρωμάτων, "fortresses" in a figurative sense), *arguments* (gr. λογισμοὺς, meaning "reasoning," "argument" or simply "thought"), *pretensions* (gr. ὕψωμα, meaning "heights," but figuratively alluding to the idea of prideful imaginations) and, of course, thoughts (gr. νόημα, meaning "mind," "intellect," "thought") referring to the conscious or unconscious beliefs/attitudes of mind which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we must learn to "take captive." The question here is: how do we do this? How can we take ownership of our thoughts instead of allowing them to control us? The answer is found in verse 5 of the same passage, where Paul, inspired by the Spirit, speaks of subjecting our thoughts to Christ: in other words, identifying and confessing them to our Savior, who will be neither taken by surprise nor appalled by our selfish intentions and desires, as long as we are willing to be changed and persuaded by his Spirit to let go of our old ways and submit to his will.

Conclusion

Nothing prevents advancement in the Christian life more than the well-meant attempt to deny or dissimulate about who we are or how we feel before the Lord. On the other hand, sincerity with him opens the gate wide for healing, giving us the strength to forgive and process all those feelings and thoughts that have kept us trapped in the prison of our sin-affected mind.

Without replacing true, genuine repentance or the necessity to subject ourselves to God's perfectly good will, transparency with the Creator manifests in the conscious choice talk honestly with him and to pour out our hearts before him, while receiving what the Holy Spirit reveals to us, as we actively oppose the temptation to reject the truth, or water it down or conveniently select only those parts of it that we want to honestly admit.

When we examine our inner motives in the light of Scripture, false humility and pride vanish, leaving us with a correct perception of ourselves (in relation to him). Only when we dare to be completely honest with the One who made us can we become a "vessel unto honor" so that, freed from perfectionism and unfruitful attempts to please him in our strength, we may enter his much-desired rest (see Heb 4:10). From this perspective, we can conclude that it takes an act of genuine, radical faith in Christ to widely open the gates of our soul and throw ourselves to the mercy of the One who not only *agape*-loved us to the Cross (Jn 15:13) but indeed loved us foreknowing who we are (Rom 5:8).

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Delia Doina Mihai

Pet praktičnih primjena iskrenosti s Bogom u kršćanskom životu

Sažetak

Jedna od urođenih težnji ljudskih bića nakon pada u grijeh je želja da bježe od svojeg Stvoritelja i nose maske, krijući se iza raznih vrsta privida (kao što su lažna religija, „dobra" djela i/ili dobre namjere). Unatoč ovomu, ili možda upravo zato, Bog je u svojoj sveznajućoj mudrosti odredio da iskrenost i ideja transparentnog življenja u svjetlu njegove Riječi iscijeli i popravi narušen odnos s njim. Ovo znači da mi, kao ljudska bića, moramo biti potpuno otvoreni u prvom redu s Jahvom, ali i sa sobom, priznajući i ne ignorirajući svoje pogreške. Drugim riječima, iskrenost s Bogom predstavlja odricanje od svih pokušaja da opravdamo, umanjimo ili čak zaniječemo ozbiljnost svojega grijeha (drugačije rečeno, odricanje od svih maski i privida ljudske „dobrote") kako nam ne bi samo bilo oprošteno, nego kako bismo bili očišćeni, iscijeljeni i obnovljeni (barem djelomično, do dana „dovršenosti"). Dakle, na temelju biblijske premise da je transparentnost najbolji štit protiv obmane i samoobmane, u ovom članku razmatramo pet praktičnih primjena koje se navike potpune transparentnosti sa sobom – ali, još važnije, s Bogom – razvijaju u našem kršćanskom hodu vjere.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sarah Nicholl
Integrated Mission: Recovering a Christian Spirituality for Evangelical Integral Transformation
Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2024, pp. 213

Sarah Nicholl's book, *Integrated Mission,* explores a spirituality of mission for evangelicals with the purpose of both pointing out this as a lacuna in the Lausanne Movement's documents and exploring a way forward for Lausanne. In this, she is joining theologians and missiologists seeking to reintegrate theory and praxis; a separation beginning, according to Nicholl, in the 13th century. She locates herself as an evangelical scholar of practical theology, with an interest in Lausanne from the 1980s in the UK, a time when John Stott's influence was prominent. She approaches the study from a multi-disciplinary and ecumenical perspective, including missiology, spirituality, theology, and history.

The first part of the book sets the theoretical and hermeneutical stage for her arguments, and her clear elucidation of both her personal and theoretical positionality lays a robust foundation for her arguments in the rest of the book. Her methodology chapter articulates her understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis, specifically drawing on Don Browning's method in his book, *Fundamental Practical Theology,* which encompasses four theological components: descriptive, historical, systematic, and practical (p. 16), and this structure informs the book. Browning's method is rooted in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics. Gadamer argues that humans engage dialogically with history and tradition to interpret their present. Their "interpretative horizon" then interacts with a text, and this "fusion of horizons" can facilitate new realizations and insights. With this hermeneutical framework, Nicholl outlines her intention to visit Christian history to uncover fresh insights regarding integrative mission. Every person is extensively researched and placed in their cultural and historical context, so that the reader can understand the particular environment from which their theology and missiology emerged.

Nicholl's descriptive theology chapter focuses on the contents of the Lausanne Documents emerging from its Congresses in 1974, 1989, and 2010. Regretfully, the book was published the same year as the most recent Lausanne Congress and so does not include discussion on its document, "The Seoul Statement." Nicholl details the historical context of Lausanne's beginnings and argues that its various documents have a primary focus on evangelization based on Mathew 28, with an emphasis on the Church's service to the world. She critiques Lausanne's prescriptive, dualistic approach to evangelization and highlights their neglect of critical

concepts such as *missio Dei* and other key biblical texts for mission. Although there are no explicit references to a spirituality of mission, Nicholl points to implicit references—such as forming one's life like Jesus, incarnational and kenotic movements, and love— that could help develop a spirituality that both fuels and is shaped by mission.

Nicholl's historical theology chapters focus on John Wesley (Britain) and Ignatius of Loyola (Spain). Both were concerned about many aspects of life, not just conversion. Wesley emphasized that through abiding in Christ and receiving gifts from the Holy Spirit, one lives in relationship with God and other Christians, but also faces outward toward the world. Service to the world is "works of mercy' as a means of grace, which is fueled by one's relationship to God (p. 71). This is the kind of integration Nicholl is foregrounding; the Christian being sanctified as they are doing acts of mercy, not as a result of their good works, but through their life with God that empowers and transforms them as an act of grace.

Ignatius brings an experiential, even mystical element to Nicholl's discussion, but she roots it in his relationship and participation with the Triune God, which is consistent with the patristic understanding of *perichoresis.* Ignatius's life with God and service to the world again emphasizes the non-dualistic approach to life. Specifically, bringing one's missional methods into discernment within one's relationship with the Trinity. It is this intimacy with Christ and accompanying discernment that Nicholl believes offers Lausanne wisdom to form their integrative spirituality.

Nicholl's next two sections highlight contemporary theology, which focuses on Orlando Costas (Puerto Rico) and Segundo Galilea (Chile). Here, she names Costas as a radical evangelical and, although she used the term several times earlier in the text, defines it for the first time. Also known as integral mission, radical evangelicals synthesize evangelism and social action and are concerned with a practical application of the Bible instead of a theoretical one. Latin American theologians and missiologists, even from the 1970s, critiqued Lausanne's tendency to separate these two dimensions of mission, and this remains a tension point even today—some missiologists, for example, take issue that integral mission is listed as an "issue network" instead of being the lens through which Lausanne views mission. Nicholl specifies that Costas' writings do not explicitly deal with spirituality in relation to mission; thus, her analysis of his writings in relation to her theme requires some extrapolation. However, she points to a greater synthesis near the end of his life between experience and service—encountering God while serving the poor and marginalized, and a connection between liturgy and witness.

Her second choice of contemporary theologians is a Latin American Catholic, and his spiritual theology "guides Christians to practice the elements of the Christian faith in ways that both engage their contexts and encounter God" (p. 123). Nicholl describes Galilea's understanding of mission as evangelism, social justice,

and prophetic, before discussing his spirituality. His holistic view of the Christian life centers around following Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit, and then responding to the challenges of individual contexts and histories. In this, he tried "re-situating traditional spiritual practices in a contemporary setting in a manner that created renewal and a relevant spirituality for Latin America" (p. 138). These traditional practices included prayer, reading the Bible, practicing the sacraments, and serving the poor. It was encountering God in these practices, Nicholl asserts, that ensured mission was both contextually driven and spiritually robust—a mission of justice grounded in an authentic relationship with God.

Her final sections on practical theology bring all these voices together in a "round table" forum, comparing and contrasting their views on the relationship between mission and spirituality, and then reflecting on how this synthesis of voices could critique Lausanne's understanding of mission. Some of the questions she addresses seem to anticipate objections or fears from her audience; for example, she explains that her emphasis on the experiential is a needed counterbalance to other ways of knowing that have been prioritized by Lausanne, such as the intellectual and cognitive. She sums up her primary findings from her conversation partners: no distinction between social action and evangelism; a spirituality within mission which transforms both the missioners and their neighbors; this holistic mission is grounded in a spirituality of following Jesus, an intimate relationship that is fostered by spiritual practices; these practices then become interdependent with mission; this is not just individualized but in community; following Jesus means displaying kingdom values, and finally, she draws out the connection between *missio Dei* and *perichoresis*—Christians participating in the Triune God and taking part of God's mission. Her attention to the sacraments as part of an integrated spirituality might cause some evangelicals to be wary, particularly as one of her conversation partners is a Catholic priest. However, her roundtable dialogue with perspectives from evangelicals such as Wesley and Costas regarding the eucharist offers an enriched addition to experiencing God's presence in the Eucharist. Particularly, she draws out the insight of sacramental service, that one experiences God while living with and serving the poor.

Her final chapter converts these primary insights into six concrete proposals for Lausanne to assist the integration between their theology, missiology, and spirituality: expanding their idea of mission, the mutuality of mission, mission emerging from an intimate relationship with God, participating in the life and love of the Trinity, integrating communal spiritual practices, and promoting mission as incarnational.

Nicholl offers a compelling case for both the lacuna within Lausanne and a way forward, drawing from a rich tapestry of historical and contemporary voices reimagined for the present. But perhaps this critique of Lausanne actually reveals the deeper issue—a past overreliance on Western voices, which have tended to

be more dualistic, prescriptive, and pragmatic—to shape the conversation to the neglect of other cultural perspectives that already view the world more holistically. In light of this, it is helpful that she engages with voices from Latin America as well as from another Christian stream. Curiously, however, all her interlocutors are men, and although it is obvious she carefully chose each individual, numerous women could have brought additional nuance and enlarged perspective to the discussion.

Although she hints that Lausanne already seems to be moving towards a more integrative mission, some of the debates and controversies at the 2024 Congress (for example, primacy of evangelism vs. service, or how justice is expressed in mission) and critique of the Seoul Statement (for example, INFEMIT, a network of theological reflection and practice that Nicholl identifies in her book, pointed out a minimizing of integral mission in the Statement) challenge this optimism. If anything, this indicates that there is a need for this book. However, as mentioned earlier, certain streams of evangelicalism may struggle with her engagement with Catholic voices and her openness to reimagine the place of liturgy in relationship to mission. And yet, this is precisely what her methodology addresses early in the book—to recognize one's biases and be open to encounter the "Other"—not to blindly adopt their thinking, but to see beyond one's present interpretative framework. This, it seems, is actually part of an integrated mission—as Christians move into deeper intimacy with the Triune God, God's grace enables them to grow and learn with others and be transformed through their service and witness to the world. Despite the differences in time periods and contexts, as Nicholl astutely points out, each man in the study lived this kind of spirituality. This leads her to conclude that perhaps the conception of *missio Dei* needs to be broadened to be a "place of being, participating (*perichoresis*), and growing in grace with God" (p. 196). This emphasis on *being* in mission is an important corrective to the frantic pace of growth, strategy, and action that still characterizes so much of modern mission. It is in this *being* where not only are we shaped, but we can discern to what and where the Spirit is calling us to participate.

Melody Wachsmuth

Phillip Cary
The Nicene Creed: An Introduction
Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2023, pp. 248, Logos Edition

Since it is the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, I have a delightful duty of preaching on the truths of the Nicene Creed to our local Baptist Church in Zadar. There are numerous ancient and modern authors whose works elucidate the Council and its Creed. In my study, I have drawn upon works by authors such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Philip Schaff, J. N. D. Kelly, and Dr. John Behr, which have proved invaluable in their own ways. Nevertheless, I lacked a volume that would serve as a running commentary, providing a starting point for my inquiry. *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction*, by Dr. Phillip Cary, a Professor of Philosophy at Eastern University in the USA, proved to be exactly the work that I needed. His book has seven chapters; two of them serve to introduce the Creed ("Introduction") and to help readers understand and explain the Trinity ("Epilogue"). Between these two book-end chapters, we find five chapters of an orderly exposition of the Nicene Creed.

"Introduction: The Historical Setting" tells a story of how one of the heads of the ancient Hydra was menacing the Church with its attacks upon the very person of Jesus Christ, her Lord and Savior, in the person of an Alexandrian presbyter called Arius, who said that "there was once when he [the Son] was not" (p. 1). And so, the emperor convened a council in AD 325 in a city of Nicaea, today's İznik in Turkey, to settle this issue and bring peace to the Church and his empire (p. 3). The council, later recognized as the First Ecumenical Council, produced a creed against this heresy, but the author explains that what we call "The Nicene Creed" today is actually an expanded version of this creed of the Council of Nicaea, which was "formulated at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and officially accepted as a statement of the Nicene faith at the Council of Chalcedon in 451" (p. 7). The author translated the Creed from the original Greek text to introduce it to us (p. 10). Since it would be too cumbersome and unnecessary to follow the author's commentary on the Creed in detail, my goal in this review is to revisit some of the more significant passages in the Creed and examine how the author has treated them, to better understand the nature of this volume.

Cary's work is both accessible and comprehensible in the way that it introduces us to the Nicene Creed. The author presents it as seen through the eyes of both ancient and modern interpreters, steering clear of both contemporary attempts to maintain Nicene orthodoxy through explanations that actually deny it and highly philosophical explanations of medieval scholasticism. This approach is consistent throughout all chapters, except in the last part of the chapter on the Holy Spirit, where, although still accessible, the commentary becomes more concise. This will be the only real criticism of this work. Let us therefore review some additional

important portions of Cary's volume to gain a sense of what it has to offer its readers.

In the chapter "Article 1: God the Father," Cary explains the identity of the Church's God and his works, which encompass the totality of both material and spiritual creation. He also points out that God did not create evil, as evil is the corruption of God's good creation. Although he does mention ancient religious and philosophical traditions that were at odds or similar to Christian monotheism, his explanations are simple and also replete with Biblical passages, which were in the back of the minds of the church fathers as they struggled to write a creed that would both defeat heresy and uphold biblical witness. The same is true in the two chapters on the Son of God, which deal with his existence before the incarnation ("Article 2, Part 1: The Eternal Son of God") and his existence as God-Man ("Article 2, Part 2: God Incarnate"). The author explained how "one Lord" pertaining to Christ is parallel to "one God" in the previous article, and that when the Creed calls Christ "Lord," it is "applying to him the sacred Name of the LORD, the God of Israel" (p. 40). He connects scriptural passages that show why this is so. Then commenting on the Son being "begotten of the Father before all ages," Cary points out in plain language both the apophatic nature of this description as well as its foundation in God's incomprehensibility and ineffability (p. 61), which is really necessary if we are to understand the Creed in the way that is congruent with its authors. In the portion of the chapter commenting on the Son as having "the same being [or essence] as the Father," the author's explanation of this phrase is to the point. Cary writes that, "The divine *ousia*, the being or essence of God, belongs equally to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but it originates with the Father, who bestows it entirely on the Son when he gives the Son his very being, and likewise on the Spirit..." (p. 85). Indeed, both Athanasius and Augustine would agree with the way he phrased it to the chagrin of some modern (re)interpreters of the Nicene Creed.

Between these two chapters on the Son of God, there is an "Excursus: The Word and Analogies" that is very helpful, as it warns us that we need to be careful in our illustrations of the Trinity, understanding that any creaturely analogies for God are "limited and imperfect" (p. 97). We can see the devotional aspect of this work when the author explains that the Son has become a human being because "love brought him down" (p. 105). He also accepts the mystery of Incarnation when he notices that God's Son came "in mortal flesh… to a place where he was already" because of his divine omnipresence (p. 108; quoting Augustine). Cary is also able to take into consideration doctrinal nuances, as seen when he explains that the Son, as an unchanging God, did not become human, but rather took up humanity (p. 123).

In the chapter on "Article 3: The Holy Spirit," the author explains that the original Creed of Nicaea concluded with the words "And in the Holy Spirit," indicating

that everything that follows was added by the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381. Cary is again both careful and accessible, as he explains in understandable terms the nuances of different Greek words used in the Creed, as well as the need to take these words carefully and not assign them the full meaning given to them afterwards in differing contexts. For example, we should not understand the word "person" in the sense that there are three "personalities" in God, because this would be tritheism. In other words, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are three Persons in a sense that should always be qualified with the explanation that they are only "one God, having one will and power and activity, as well as one essence" (p. 178). When discussing the Western addition to the Creed – [and from the Son], that is, the *filioque* clause – he is observant to both parties. Indeed, he writes that, together with most Western theologians, he agrees with the statement in its original, Augustine's meaning, where the Spirit proceeds from the Father and (through) the Son; nevertheless, "the Father is the source of all that is divine" (p. 187). On the other hand, he agrees with the Eastern church that this addition should not be in the Creed since no truly Ecumenical council has confirmed it.

In further discussion of the Nicene Creed's statement on the Church, Cary's treatment is shorter, allocating a paragraph or so to each of the statements about the Church, which results in a discussion that lacks the nuance and comprehensiveness of his preceding commentary. For example, according to the author, "catholic" means "universal" and "orthodox," which is the primary patristic understanding, but a footnote on the subsequent development of the term would enrich the work. Similarly, when explaining what it means that the church is apostolic, Cary gives a very one-sided understanding of the term: "Since the apostles' preaching, like the words of the prophets of old, now comes to us in holy Scripture, calling the church 'apostolic' is the Creed's way of saying it is biblical" (p. 197). In other words, even if it is true that most of today's evangelicals understand "apostolic" in this way, each church tradition (Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants) has its own way of understanding it in the context of its ecclesiological and hermeneutical commitments. Similarly, there is a lack of explanation regarding how different traditions understand the concept of "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," an article of faith that is both controversial and rejected by several evangelical traditions. The author's final chapter, "Epilogue: The Trinity in Simple Terms," encourages readers to use Augustine's seven simple statements on the Trinity to answer different questions people might raise on the doctrine, without getting entangled in technicalities and attempting to unravel the mysteries of God's triunity.

Cary's book is not a definitive work on the Nicene Creed for those who want to research its theological and philosophical depths, and even some preachers will want more discussion on its history, protagonists, and meaning. Towards the end, it has shortcomings when discussing the Church and Baptism, possibly because

these truths were not a focus of the Church Fathers at the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). Having said that, I believe that *The Nicene Creed* will serve everyone, from an interested teenager to a college professor, as an excellent resource that will do exactly as its subtitle promises, give *An Introduction* to the Creed. And since it is the 1,700th anniversary of Nicaea, I heartily recommend that all my readers read this insightful book.

Miroslav Balint-Feudvarski

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