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THE "CRITICAL" LANGUAGE: ADDRESSING TENDER SPOTS IN CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM SHIFTS

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A HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL CASE FOR MODULAR AND TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION: THE BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL IN SERBIA

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ABSTRACT. Modular and transnational educational delivery are two types of structures for theological schools that often are found together, especially outside of the west. Both positive and negative aspects of each structure have been presented in literature and research. Some examples come from the experience of educators at non-western schools, while others have approached the subject from a contextual and theoretical basis. This article seeks to show the need and usefulness of modular transnational education by analyzing a theological school's history and context. To this end, the Baptist Theological School in Serbia will be considered. As the first Evangelical educational work established in the country, the institution has, since its inception until today, a recognizable modular and transnational expression running through the vision of the various leadership generations of the school. Two elements contributing to this theme include the school's long-standing tradition of educating laity and its overt multicultural engagement. These match the prevailing demographic of Serbian Christian workers. Supporting evidence from literature will also be offered as reinforcement for this type of education. The goal is to evidence that a modular system which seeks to meet the needs of common lay leaders, as well as a transnational system which utilizes international teachers, matches the ethos of the progressive architects of theological education at this school and in this region. Examining the history of theological education within a given region with attention to predominant local communities can be a useful tool to determine and evaluate the use of modular transnational education.

KEY WORDS: Baptist Theological School, Serbia, modular, transnational, Oncken

Introduction

In 1834, Johann Oncken was baptized into the Baptist faith at midnight on an island in the Elbe River near Hamburg (Saxon 2015: 7). He would go on to become one of European Protestantism's most fruitful reformers, sending missionaries and establishing churches throughout Eastern Europe. This was not with-

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out hardship and persecution, even from his own country. Hamburg, as most of Germany, was under the dominance of the Lutheran Church, the established church at that time (Saxon 2015: 9). Therefore, Baptists did not find ready acceptance. Illustrations of the zeitgeist of the area are anecdotal stories, passed down into near legend. It is said that Oncken was arrested multiple times in Hamburg for evangelism, with the Burgermeister warning him, "As long as I can lift my little finger, I will put you down from preaching this gospel." Oncken replied, "As long as I can see God's mighty hand above your little finger, I will preach this gospel" (Wood 1970: 273). It is opined that the local chief of police had determined to extinguish the Baptists, "root and branch" (Rushbrooke 1915: 9). Stories in the history of the church are many, but persecutions and imprisonments throughout Oncken's life and ministry were a reality, in spite of the fact that the persecutors theoretically held to the same gospel message as Oncken. Yet Oncken's motivation in persevering lies in his oft-recited belief that every Baptist is a missionary (Todorović 2011: 267). He became known as the father of European Baptists because of his commitment to plant churches across Europe. His efforts spread much farther though, impacting church planting in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland, Turkey, Austria, Australia, W. Africa, France, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Baltic States, China, and Serbia (Rushbrooke 1915: 2, and Effa 2007: 5). While his passion was missions, it was expressed in various ways. The first hint of the need for modular education in Serbia was seen in Oncken's drive to increase theological education by means of Sunday Schools and the establishment of a theological college in Hamburg. If every Baptist is a missionary, and therefore a theologian, then the testimonies of Baptists would necessarily have to be supplemented by trained service (Rushbrooke 1915: 28). Oncken had personal reasons to want Christian workers trained. Hamburg was a very religious city, but foundational Christian doctrines had been abandoned including belief in the deity of Christ (Saxon 2015: 4). What began as a simple six-month theological instruction to small groups of men continued for years until a permanent four-year college was established on October 1, 1881 (Rushbrooke 1915:30). (This college was simply called the Hamburg Baptist Seminary and would eventually close the location in Hamburg. Today, Elstal Theological Seminary claims to be the continuation of this school, located on Johann-Gerhard-Oncken Str. in Wustermark, Germany, see https://www.th-elstal.de/.) Yet his theological ethos was predicated on the need to train lay workers from different cultures with a model consistent with their abilities.

In November of 1875, Heinrich Meyer, one of Oncken's appointed missionaries and colporteurs, was sent by him to Novi Sad, Serbia to a group of ex-Nazarenes who were holding regular meetings (Donat 1958: 435). At this meeting, several people were baptized as adult believers, thereby marking the beginning of the Baptists in Serbia. The theological school in Hamburg served as a source of constant supply for ministry and education for Eastern Europe, and specifically for Serbia (Armitage 1887: 829-830). In 1892, the Novi Sad group became an independent congregation. They invited Julius Peter, a Prussian native, to be their pastor. Peter had himself finished the Hamburg school which Oncken started and brought his educational perspective to influence the Baptists of Serbia (Wardin 1995: 267). Like his mentor, he immediately started mission work in Serbia in the villages of Šajkaš, Beej, Feketi, Crvenka, Torža, Seki, Belo Blat, and Gregurevci, putting Hamburg's theological education to practical application for the kingdom of Christ, focusing on regular lay ministers (Bjelajac 2010: 95). The Novi Sad church became the center of missional and educational work for the province of Vojvodina in Serbia and beyond (Hopper 1977: 30). Lay workers would continue to be the backbone of the Christian endeavor along with the need for practical, accessible theological education.

This story is interesting for those who desire to understand Baptist history in Serbia. However, its importance lies in the fact that it sets the stage for the future of theological education, springing from Oncken's Hamburg school and influencing not only the initial work, but subsequent pastors and mission work. The Lord would build an organized educational movement in Serbia on the foundation Oncken and his men laid down. Not long before Pastor Julius Peter's death, the Baptist World Alliance met in 1920 in London and determined to offer missionary support to the Baptist movements in Yugoslavia and other newly established works with the partnership of the Southern Baptists in America (Bjelajac 2022: 188-189). In the same decade, American Everett Gill was sent by the Alliance to Romania, and two American based Europeans to Yugoslavia, Czech Vinko Vacek and Serbian Nikola Duli (Bjelajac 2022: 188-189). While Vacek would help organize the Baptists of Serbia into a formal union, it was Duli who would be instrumental as the successor to Peter to carry on the work of theological education in Serbia.

When Duli came to Yugoslavia in 1923, he organized a two-week course for Sunday School teachers, much like Johann Oncken did in Hamburg (Bjelajac 2022: 189). This two-week course soon became four-week courses with both men and women as well as different nationalities present. One attendee of the lectures expressed the attitude of every participant there,

> "Brothers", he said, "let us conclude today so that we do not deny it tomorrow. Let there be no Serbs, no Croats, no Germans, no Hungarians among us from now on. Neither male nor female. Let's be Christ's!" (Bjelajac 2003: 164)

These seminars would spread out over the next few years to villages in Serbia like Baki Petrovac, Crvenka, Belgrade, Severin, and Makovac (Lehotski 2010: 264). This was a continuation of the vision of Oncken that education is necessary and should be designed with lay workers in mind. Additionally, theological education taught by and delivered to mixed ethnic groups would be a common theme running through the future of theological education in Serbia. The combined need to teach lay Christian workers of various nationalities would prove to be the logical rationale for modular transnational education.

The Baptist Theological School

In keeping with the cross-cultural aspect that theological education had in Yugoslavia from the start, American missionary John Allen Moore was appointed in 1938 as a representative to Yugoslavia by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (Wardin 1995: 268). At that time, there were few trained Baptist preachers in Serbia for several reasons. Reading of books besides the Bible was considered by some to be sinful, especially by those from a Nazarene background. Additionally, a trained preacher was considered unspiritual and worldly and thus disqualified for ministry (Klem 1952: 88-89). Despite the previous declarations coming out of Duli's courses, unity in mission work and the provision of theological education was still difficult to organize in areas where the work was young and different nationalities, languages, and convictions co-existed (Klem 1952: 88-89). Vinko Vacek had managed to unite five language groups into a formal denominational alliance in the early 1920's, establishing the contextual model for a cross-cultural partnership among Baptists in Serbia (Lehotski 2004: 17). While Vacek furthered the cause of unifying nationalities under one Baptist umbrella, it was Moore who led the establishment of a theological institution. He founded the Baptist Theological School (BTS) in Belgrade and gave birth to the current school existing in Novi Sad now. Moore formalized and organized the work that Vacek and Dulić had pioneered in the previous decade. A seminary, however, was considered at the time a revolutionary work, and as such, one that was attended with some trepidation and persecution just as the original Baptist work had been (Moore 1941: 176). The world and political scene was chaotic with the onset of World War II, and some feared that an educated populace would cause trouble with government officials (Torbet 1963: 189). Regardless, Moore's vision was shared by all the leaders at the seminary and stated most vocally by him in a letter published at the opening of the school (Bjelajac 2010: 266). Reflection on it illustrates the faithfulness of men and women who, faced with the most dangerous of situations, still press on because they believe in the work God has called them to. Moore stated,

> We must not postpone action indefinitely just because the entire road has not been inspected. We do not know what awaits us in the future. It is quite possible that within a few weeks or months, we will be scattered on several fronts. We do not know the future. We only know that we are bound by the duty and love to the Lord to be faithful in the present and to work while the day lasts, as the night will come. We hope to have one long day of doing the works of Him who sent us, but whatever day or night, nothing is required of a servant but to be found faithful. (Bjelajac 2010: 265)

In this original Baptist school, subjects were designed to address both the theological and practical and demonstrated a contextual desire on the part of the school to meet the realistic needs of the men and women who attended. Eleven subjects were offered including New Testament, Church Organization, Bible Geography, Missions, and Evangelism which were taught alongside Business, History, and Hygiene. (This beginning information about the school was taken from an unpublished personal letter written from J.A. Moore to Ruth Lehotski, which this author possesses.) The teachers were transnational even at this time, coming from American, German, Serbian, Czech and Slovak backgrounds, male and female (Moore 1940: 317). Students were aged between 19 and 60 years old. Seven nationalities were represented among students: Serbian, Croatian, Czech, Slovak, German, Slovenian, and Russian. They were not ordained ministers but were lay preachers who were in fact mostly farmers. (Information also gathered from Pauline Moore's unpublished personal letter to her aunt, written from Beograd on February 19, 1940, which this author possesses.) There could not have been a more cross-cultural, colloquial educational program. The second world war would see the closing of the school only six months after it started, along with the shattering of the Baptist Union in Yugoslavia. Both would eventually be reestablished in due time. However, it is important to emphasize that not only was a theological school started, but that it was marked by two foci, that is, working with a variety of nationalities and reaching lay leaders. These two factors would continue to mark the nature of BTS and would determine the modular transnational direction of the school.

The goal of reopening the seminary to help the average Christian laborer was realized on March 1, 1954, when BTS reopened in Zagreb, Croatia with its president Franjo Klem. Klem was a key figure in the renewal of theological education work among the Baptists in Yugoslavia, of which Croatia was a part at that time (Lehotski 2010: 267). He, along with others, had a desire that the school provide more education to people than just the basic courses that had been the norm up until then. Klem carried on the vision of the founders of BTS and revealed in his inauguration that there is a great need for the theological preparation of workers, basing this on the fact that only three men in positions of leadership among the Baptists had any theological education (Lehotski 2010: 268). Indeed, Klem's contribution was transnational, that is, the continuance of permanent theological education that served the ethnically diverse Balkan population. After Klem, Josip Horak, a lawyer and economist, brought a more administrative direction to the vision of the school. He was experienced and competent, and in his directorship of BTS which lasted until 1957 he was instrumental in keeping theological education organized in post-war Yugoslavia (Lehotski 2010: 269). This concentration will continue progressively in the direction of meeting the educational needs and life situations of lay workers, up to the present situation of being a modular school.

Unfortunately, the desire for a permanent solution to the lack of theological education and a direction toward more serious study was not attended with the financial means to accomplish it. It was still a post war time, and Yugoslavia could not rely on financial help from other parts of the Baptist world. This would lead the school to relocate briefly to Daruvar, Croatia, and soon thereafter to Novi Sad, Serbia, returning to the founding place of the first Baptists in Serbia. The first building was on Miurinova Ulica 1, and then would move into a new building on Koruška 24. That street is now Kolo srpskih sestara (Lehotski 2010: 268). In moving to Novi Sad, the school would embrace once again its roots, physically, spiritually, and philosophically.

A young scholar named Adolf Lehotski, who attended a course for preachers in 1923 at the same school started by Johann Oncken in Hamburg, followed his predecessors in seeking to improve biblical preaching among lay pastors in Northern Serbia (Lehotski 2010: 272-273). Lehotski believed that these lay preachers could not take time to attend school in Hamburg, or anywhere else, if it required full-time dedication. Therefore, BTS was designed to have courses short in duration. Lehotski would lead BTS in this manner for 14 years until he was replaced by Stjepan Ori, a graduate of the school itself. Ori's vision would maintain the view that theological education be brought within reach of ordinary Christians unable to accommodate the commitments required by most residential schools. Ori declared,

> The idea of the new school is to be much closer to the people. We abandon the concept of a school for preachers, and we accept the idea of becoming a school for biblical and theological training. A school should be closer to the real needs of churches and community. (Lehotski 2010: 273)

This sustained the idea that theology was for everyone, and that if the kingdom of Christ in Serbia was staffed by lay leaders, they too needed to be thoroughly equipped in teaching the word of God [2 Timothy 3:16-17]. The passion for accommodating theological education for the common person with jobs, families, and responsibilities continued to hold the focus of BTS' line of leaders. Johann Oncken had this in mind when he stressed the value and importance of Sunday Schools for all ages in the churches he planted. Ori shared his understanding that everyone needs theological education and that there must be educated teachers to accommodate the demand. This was a continued emphasis on a trained laity, but now more intentional and developed.

BTS was directed by additional men who sought a connection with the community of Christians. James Williams was the first missionary to get permission from authorities for a permanent VISA to live in Yugoslavia (Bjelajac 2010: 274). He creatively revised regular curriculum by creating the Extensive Theological Organization (ETO), which had the mission of providing theological education to pastors and Christian workers who did not have the ability to attend a residential school (Lehotski 2010: 274). In his efforts, a formal work was established dedicated to the laity. In 1987, a professor at the school named Želimir Srnec became director. He renamed the school "Logos" and divided the program of the school into two parts. The first part would be a one-year program designed as a preparatory school for lay workers, which could be followed by an additional three years of pastoral studies. In this way, the basic needs of lay workers were addressed, in addition to the more advanced needs desired by full-time pastors (Lehotski 2010: 275). Srnec' vision for theological education echoed Franjo Klem from earlier years of the school and sought to "do everything to continue the vision of the founders of theological education, as there was an extraordinarily great need for educated Christian workers." At the same time, Srnec' desire was to train "well-educated successors for the future" (Lehotski 2010: 275). The first titular dean of BTS was Dimitrije Popadi, elected in 1999. Popadi established a charter for the school to be a Faculty of Theology and designed a program consisting of six degrees that could be attained (Lehotski 2010: 275). He sought to meet the needs of a wide group of students with varying backgrounds and ability for study. His vision for BTS was for it to be a "faculty of theology for the academic, spiritual and practical" (Lehotski 2010: 275). Popadi continued directing BTS, at that time under the name Protestant Theological Faculty, until 2007.

Finally, in 2010, the school was given to the directorship of Ondrej Franka, also acting President of the Union. (The information from this point onward regarding BTS is from the direct knowledge of the author, who worked as an associate with Ondrej Franka at the Baptist Theological School from 2013 to present.) Having been educated in the west, Franka believed in the need not just for theological education for everyone, but that which is as thorough and comprehensive as possible. He desired that the teaching at BTS be respected and recognized on an international level, as the people of Serbia deserved the best education, yet that it also be available to the general populace. As the school had been paused for several years, Franka determined to hold monthly courses for laypeople in order to accomplish two goals, that is, to keep momentum of the school going and to train pastors, preachers, and Christian workers without removing them from their ministries or jobs. In this way, he continued the tradition which came before him. BTS would operate this way until 2015.

The purpose of presenting the history of the leaders of BTS is to demonstrate that the missional vision in Serbia, since the founding of Baptist churches there as well as the inception of the school, was theological education made accessible to all nationalities as well as to those who could not attend residential school. This capitalizes on the benefits of the community of Christians in the interchange of theological instruction from mixed cultural backgrounds (Wall 1982: 39-52). BTS has always been a multicultural school for the general population of Christians in Serbia and the Balkans. This is a remarkable character trait for a school to carry for 80 years. In Eastern Europe in general, lay people are not historically involved in church affairs or ministry, and do not hold office, due to the background of the highly hierarchical Orthodox Church (Ilić and Ilić 2008: 468). This often leads to a distancing effect people feel with regard to church. BTS has strived to break this paradigm by educating as many people as possible who desire to know God more. To have the ability to serve in the church as laity also brings the laborer a felt need to be educated. It is not an easy task as the majority religion is Serbian Orthodoxy which has different doctrines and theology than Evangelicals (Volf 1996: 26-31).

The multicultural nature that BTS has always held to is reflective of the land. Situated between the countries of Romania, Hungary, and Croatia, it hosts many groups of ethnicities. Having transnational teachers makes sense in this context. It is also reflective of Evangelicalism itself. Evangelicals are (or should be) against any nationalism in Christianity because they consider all genuine Christians to be their spiritual brothers and sisters and hold to the idea of a new nation of people, a heavenly and holy one as addressed in 1 Peter 2:9 (Milovanović 2016: 10). To this end, Ondrej Franka recruited an American, Dwayne Baldwin, to come to Serbia and help to renew the ministry of theological education with the contextual principles that marked BTS from its genesis. In applying new pedagogy to its historical impetus, the school was formally designed and structured as a transnational, modular bachelor's program in September 2015.

Modular Education as a Contextual Structure

BTS has long been under the governance of the Union of Baptist Churches in Serbia. In considering how the structure of the redesigned school would best suit the needs of the average Christian, many forms were considered. Originally, the Union had the desire for the school to be a full-time, residential school in order to match a common model seen globally. This would necessitate the use of multiple resources such as accommodations, school/ kitchen/ housekeeping staff, and resident faculty, none of which BTS had or could financially develop. Residential theological schools in the Balkans have found it difficult to recruit students who were willing and able to attend school full-time, requiring them to be dependent on parents or family for support, with the prospect of no financial compensation in Christian ministry once they graduated. Even in an existing modular setting the financial aspect is difficult, as employment remains one of the most frequent reasons for student drop out at BTS. (Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Marshal Josip Tito, operated with a unique communist government. Churches, and hence theological schools, were allowed to operate if they kept a very low profile and conducted themselves quietly within the walls of the organization. While not repressed per se, BTS was not a government-recognized facility and has only recently been able to be registered in Serbia. Given this history and the cultural stigma associated with Evangelical groups, it is exceedingly difficult for students and graduates of BTS to maintain a decent standard of living based solely on ministry.)

It was determined that the needs of the community were best served by the school being structured in a modular format. Modular courses typically cover either single subjects or a group of content which comprise a coordinating unit (Sadiq and Zamir 2014: 105). To match the needs for contact hours with the limitations of potential students, the format was to be one-week modules, four times a year, with two courses per module. Teachers would be brought in who fulfilled the qualifications needed to maintain integrity of the school. Staff would be self-supported, which would initially lessen the need for so many resources from BTS. This format has remained the structure of the school since that time. The overall program is four years in duration for the earning of a bachelor's degree. The initial cohort in 2015 started with 20 students, and new enrollment averages about 10 students per year. Many similar schools in Eastern Europe have fewer, sometimes not surpassing ten students in the entirety of the school.

To date, BTS has graduated 27 students with the Bachelor of Arts degree, and hosted students from Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, the United States, Indonesia, and Canada. The school desires to represent even more countries as it grows. There are certainly challenges that exist within a modular structure of education. A decrease in student focus and a tendency to be highly task-oriented have been observed when physical interaction with teachers is lessened. Further, less interaction time with other students can lessen the learning experience as well (Agarin 2021: 326-327).

However, the modular structure has served BTS well and is now recognized by the staff of the school as the best form of theological education possible for the Evangelical needs in Serbia. This is reflective of many parts of Europe where non-residential schools that operate in either a modular or online format are gaining in popularity due to the need for students to have employment and ministry outside of school (Werner 2010: 541). As the body of Christ is served in community, removing men and women for several years to study in the "rarefied air" of a theological residential school is isolating and builds walls between the educational institute and the church (Claydon 2005: 11). In modular schools, students must work hard to balance school, life, and ministry, which in itself helps develop and strengthen biblical character attributes. In short, education in modules allows students to continue their ministry and not move physically into the ofttimes expensive environment of a residential school. They also can immediately apply what they have learned to their contexts between modules, and bring timely questions raised in their contexts back to the school setting. Another advantage to modular theological education is a financial one. Monetary capital for hiring staff is almost nonexistent in Serbia as in other Eastern European countries. Modules enable the theological school to recruit transnational teachers who are able to come in for a short-term module to teach, most times on raised support or personal financing. Most of these teachers are from the west. This practice has become very common in Eastern Europe and is one of the most utilized forms of theological education outside the west (Sadiq and Zamir 2014: 105).

Practically speaking, BTS has six criteria for an instructor to be considered as a professor. They must be:

1. Academically qualified (minimum of a Masters' level degree);
2. Capable to teach theology (pastor, or prior teaching experience);
3. Willing and able to teach (time, energy and willingness to prepare notebooks and syllabi);
4. Doctrinally sound (general agreement with BTS Statement of Faith);

5. Morally sound in life and ministry;
6. Financially independent (requiring little to no honoraria and willing to fund themselves in travel and accommodations)

These qualifiers can be quite limiting and difficult to find in totality in the local setting, especially where past opportunities for theological education have not contributed to credentials or experience, and where teachers need or even demand payment. Additionally, some aspects of this list such as qualified teachers are likely more available for general or secular education in Serbia, but not in theological education. The issues of cost, credentials, and ability remain a prohibitive factor in the goal of many purely national teaching facilities. This does not mean it is nonexistent, but that the pool of candidates must naturally be expanded to include foreign educators.

Modular Education and Character

Research has borne out what BTS has seen experientially. Not only in Europe but also globally there is a growing prevalence of modular or distance education. Baptist schools alone are estimated to train over 50% of their ministers in non-residential courses (Andronoviene et al. 2010: 691). In addition to biblical and theological knowledge, there is the subject of character education, long thought to be limited to schools in which student/teacher interaction is prolonged. In literature highlighting the issue of virtue education in theological schools, the question is asked about whether short term programs can truly impact a student's character. Answers to the positive are becoming increasingly more common (Cook 2009: 31). For the purposes of character education, there are benefits of modularly structured schools that can actually encourage virtue building. Even pastors in Eastern Europe have expressed the opinion that part-time theological education, such as is found in modular education, provide the most optimal conditions for character as they maintain students' relationships with the local churches (Dyatlik 2009: 104). In this way, the local worshipping community engages with the student, helping shape character by providing a laboratory in which to test what is being learned in school (Andronoviene et al. 2010: 691). This approach has been determined to be significant in the formation of character as it ensures that character is being developed in a way that actually serves the community, and not simply as an abstract subject (Andronoviene et al. 2010: 691).

Modular types of programs often serve to advance 2 Peter virtues such as brotherly kindness and love by fostering relationships between local churches and seminaries (Dyatlik 2009: 99). Character education is a driving force at BTS.

Part of the actions necessary to achieve character development is being active in the garishness of "real" life and ministry, and to implement knowledge and skill in actual life's circumstances. Modular courses, therefore, help BTS to achieve its goal in developing virtue in students. Most students also work or take care of families. This necessity is not likely to change, as ministry roles in Serbia and the Balkans usually do not provide the income needed for proper family sustenance. This may be what distinguishes BTS as a school that encourages the development of men and women with godly character as opposed to the production of men and women who merely have much knowledge (Kelsey 1992: 92). Studies have shown that students in modular programs actually experience better overall formational development than those in residential settings (Nichols 2015: 121). Likely causes for this are the fact that modular students are more mature and have jobs and families with the responsibilities that attend those duties. At the very least, modular and distance students are certainly not disadvantaged with regard to spiritual formation compared to residential students (Nichols 2015: 132). Students who are residential for four years may miss out on opportunities for virtue that only happen in the challenges of local life, and hence they not only suffer in cultivating character, but also can become a stranger in their own communities.

Throughout the history of BTS, all of the school's leaders contributed with their own vision for the school. In God's sovereignty, these visions were not independent but part of a golden thread throughout the years, tied one to another in a common goal. The desire at its core was to always have an institution that would be designed to train everyday people who would impact everyday people. A theologically elite class of people has always been anathema to the intention of BTS, yet the necessity for thoroughly equipped Christian workers has remained the motivating purpose behind the school. This has contributed to the role of modular education.

Transnational Ethos as an Operating Principle

In addition to a focus toward lay Christian workers, the history of the Evangelical work in Serbia from the beginning has been the idea of the global community of faith working together. Heard in the cross-cultural voice of the quote at the beginning of this article, "Let's be Christ's!", there has always been an effort to join forces with other races and nations for the cause of Christ in Serbia. BTS was started, and continues, as a result of Serbians, Slovaks, Czechs, Germans, Americans, and others. Transnational education in Serbia has always worked best because global members of Christ's body, though diverse in theological background, can work in a co-belligerent manner against ignorance of God's word.

Technically, transnational or cross-cultural theological education can be seen as a practice in which learning in the host culture is conducted by teachers from a different culture and institute (Council of Europe 2001: 2). However, the word is used by BTS to refer to its practice of intentionally using foreign educators to supplement national teachers. This form of education has gained popularity in recent years, especially in schools located in non-western contexts, as it enables educators to teach at multitudes of locations where resources may be scarce. It allows the educator to utilize his skills, and gives the host schools a wealth of potential adjunct professors, increasing the overall quality and breadth of education at the school. The practice has also been considered very helpful by those receiving it because it is a biblical demonstration of the community of faith participating in the edification of other believers. In this way, it can be considered a benevolent act of sharing amongst global believers.

In Eastern Europe, transnational schools exist partly due to nationalist religions, primarily Orthodoxy. Evangelical schools such as BTS offer something to the student of theology that national religions often fail to offer, that is, a theological perspective outside of the national religion. For the Evangelical, it is a hope of salvation in Christ's work alone and a life lived in surrender to His word alone. Unfortunately, for Evangelical schools the majority of credentialed Evangelical instructors and resources are still located in the west. The problem of lack of resources, teachers and faculty, literature, and funding are all limitations that are difficult to alter, making reliance on transnational teachers increasingly frequent.

Aside from the dependence on cross-cultural teachers and resources, research has borne out that mixing cultures when it comes to education is actually beneficial for the student for a more ecumenical reason. The student sees theology from more than their own context and enables them to see themselves not only as a native in their country, but a Christian pilgrim whose spiritual nationality transcends borders (McGill 2014: 227). When John Allen Moore came with the FMB to open a Bible school in Belgrade in 1939, he did not know the culture or the history of Serbia (Lehotski 2010: 264). Yet, his initiative did not produce a failed work, or an aberrant western Christianity in the Balkans. It instead started a work that was continued by many nationals after him. Investigation has shown that transnational interaction contributes critically to a student's education (Astin et al. 2011: 145). It could be that transnational schools in the final analysis are also structurally better than national schools in the area of critical character development. Biblical character results from knowing oneself before God, and this involves self-assessment as well as community assessment. Therefore, having a blend of a western teacher's individualism with Serbian collectivism can be synergistic.

Reflection for Other Theological Schools

The approach to education outlined in this case study can be used with some benefit in other theological schools. A reflection on a school's cultural and historical tradition may yield critical pathways for the future of the institute that are possibly unconsidered. The vision and purpose of the school must be examined to determine what benefit is available from a case study such as this. The purpose of this case study is not necessary to advocate for change in schools, whether they are modular, transnational, or neither. However, evaluating how a school can improve to better match the dynamics of the students as well as the context is always a best practice. Recommendations for consideration are largely dependent on the status of the school, that is, whether it is a newly structuring school, an existing modular institute, or a residential program.

For some global schools seeking to design a structure, a modular format may be a best solution. Additionally, there are many ways for a school to function modularly. Modular education can operate in unit fashion, focusing on a single course of a short period of time, often two the three weeks. Other modules can be done in repeating bursts of short duration, such as only on weekends for a month. BTS has a separate program that is held on only one Saturday a month on a particular topic. Students who cannot attend the more demanding program at BTS find this useful for theological education, though there is no degree offered for it. In fact, if a degree is not part of the consideration, modular programs can be tailored to fit almost any situation. An existing residential program can benefit in similar way by adding a modular component to its educational offering, specifically for those students who cannot participate in a full-time program. Institutions already functioning in a modular fashion can expand their modular approach, not only for unreached student demographics but also in order to focus on specific educational goals such as a program for counseling or worship arts. All modular schools can be encouraged to reconsider how character development can take an elevated place in the function and ethos of the school. Contrary to a mentality that character instruction is only possible in residential schools, students may benefit from virtue education in modular courses in ways that surpass that of other structures.

The other aspect of BTS, that of being transnational, is more typically found in schools existing in non-western contexts. For these schools, the relationship between teacher and student is a primary concern for contextualization and character instruction. Faculty can be encouraged to do simple things that contribute to contextualization, even in brief time frames, such as asking students how a presented lecture can be applied in the local contexts and allowing for discussion. Seeking ways to foster relationships is important, such as intentional lunches or dinners with teachers in student's homes. Some global schools seek to become fully national as an ideal goal, with no influence or teaching from the west. This may be necessary due to westernism being a barrier to students' education. However, a fully national school may not be the consummate endpoint for all schools. Transnational schools are often attractive to the local population as they can be seen as a more international education. In fact, schools that are taught in English, with or without translation, can be a draw to surrounding countries. From a biblical perspective, theological education is a community activity. If one community has an abundance of resources, it can legitimately be seen as a Christian duty to share those resources with other needy communities, in this case, transnational schools. (The Scriptures detail the practice and responsibility of one church giving for the financial support of other churches, see 2 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8. While this is an ecclesial reference, it can be argued that the principle of the Christian community sharing resources with each other should be an intentional focus of Christian ministries as well, including theological education.) There is, of course, the danger of becoming overly dependent on sending countries. This threat should be a consistent source of conversation and reflection. However, the benefit of transnational schools is not entirely on the side of the receiving school. Incoming teachers can profit spiritually from interacting with other communities of Christians.

Above all, the school is the expert and knows best how the history and context needs to be met in the geography in which it operates. It is difficult for a transnational school to maintain autonomy when so many resources are required from the west, but this must be a priority. The school must be uncompromising in its vision, policies, and functions, with the resolution that it will do so even at the risk of the school closing if necessary. If this risk is acceptable, it frees the school to operate as independently as possible.

Conclusions

Theological education in Serbia since its beginning has had characteristics with proclivities to modular and transnational education. These have been manifested in two ways, a desire to reach the laity and the need to work along multicultural lines present in Serbia. The Holy Spirit has galvanized a vision for these goals in the people He placed in theological education in Serbia throughout the last 100 years, supplying what was needed for the Serbian context. For Serbia, continuing in the path acknowledged first by Oncken as well as each subsequent leader of BTS has necessitated modular, transnational education. More than that, having the most natural and fitting impact on the community for the gospel demands modular, transnational education. It has been demonstrated in reviewing the history and context of BTS that it would actually be contextually wrong for the school to be structured in any other way. This case study can serve as illustration for all theological schools considering how to best match the needs of its students.

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IMAGINI ALE ÎNVIERII ÎN CONCEPȚIE PAULINĂ

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ABSTRACT. The resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The entire Christian edifice represented and erected by the Church rests on the resurrection, while the church head is the resurrected Jesus Christ. This detail makes all the difference between Christianity and the other world religions. Jesus' resurrection is presented throughout the New Testament, however in this paper we propose a particular look upon it, namely through the images used by the apostle Paul to describe the resurrection of Jesus Christ that changed his life. The apostle's way of thinking is clearly influenced by his encounter with the resurrected and glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus. For Paul, the resurrection is a transformation, a form of integrity that leads to the immortality of the redeemed and their glorification.

KEY WORDS: resurrection, transformation, integrity, immortality, redemption, glorification

Introducere

Învierea este piatra de temelie a credinţei creştine. Pe ea se sprijină întregul edificiu creștin reprezentat de Biserică, al cărui cap este Isus Cristos cel înviat. Învierea lui Cristos este și cea care face diferența dintre creștinism și celelalte religii ale lumii. Învierea lui Isus este prezentată în întreg Noul Testament, dar în lucrarea de față ne-am propus să investigăm imaginile folosite de apostolul Pavel pentru a descriere învierea lui Cristos care i-a schimbat viața. Gândirea apostolului este clar influențată de întâlnirea sa cu Isus cel înviat și glorificat, pe drumul spre Damasc. Pentru Pavel, învierea este o transformare, o formă de integritate care duce la nemurirea celui răscumpărat, în vederea glorificării. Referiri la înviere se fac explicit în șaptesprezece cărţi ale Noului Testament și implicit în majoritatea celorlalte zece, astfel că aproape toate epistolele pauline au astfel de referiri, cu excepţia cărților 2 Tesaloniceni, Tit şi Filimon.

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Este important de observat că expresia "înviere din morți" evocă un tablou mental diferit de cel produs în limba greacă prin *anastaseos nekron* (vezi Romani 1:4). În limba română se pierde întrucâtva dinamismul expresiei, din pricina faptului că moartea apare ca stare de a fi sau ca locuință a celor plecați de pe pământ, funcționând într-un fel ca substantiv abstract, la singular. În limba greacă, însă, substantivul de după *nekron* este la plural, ceea ce înseamnă că expresia *anastasis nekron* poate fi tradusă literal "învierea afară dintre cei morți" (Filipeni 3:11). Expresia grecească conţine o imagine mult mai dinamică, de genul "ridicându-se din mijlocul unor trupuri" şi luând natura somatică a trupului învierii. Însă este esenţial să observăm că Pavel nu proclamă o "înviere a cărnii", cum aveau să o numească unii dintre autorii creștini de după el, inclusiv Iustin Martirul și autorul cărţii 2 Clement. Apostolul Pavel face distincţie între *sarx* (carne) şi *soma* (trup) când se referă la învăţătura despre înviere (Richardson 1961:134).

Este important de arătat că Pavel scoate la suprafaţă câteva idei diferite prin efortul său de a comunica înţelesul învierii, pe care o descrie ca mister (*musth,rion*, vezi Richardson 1951:135) în 1 Corinteni 15:51. Varietatea largă de imagini angajate se revelează în dreptul său, demonstrând limitele limbajului de atunci când trebuia să descrie ceva de nedescris. Descrierea pe care o face apostolul Pavel învierii denotă un efort, o flexibilitate a expresiei care în același timp îi fascinează și îi frustrează pe traducători și comentatori deopotrivă. Imaginile rezultate pot fi discutate sub mai multe sintagme, dar în demersul de față vom aborda cinci dintre ele.

Învierea şi Transformarea

În câteva locuri, apostolul Pavel foloseşte limbajul transformării pentru a descrie învierea aşteptată de creştini. În Filipeni 3:10, folosirea participiului verbului *symmorphizo* ("a îmbrăca aceeași formă") apare exact în acest context: "şi să-L cunosc pe El şi puterea Învierii Lui, şi să pot purta suferinţele Lui, devenind mai mult ca El (*symmorphizomenos*) în moartea Lui." În concluzia aceluiași capitol, imaginea este lărgită şi legată direct de revelaţia lui Isus Cristos ca Mântuitor din cer (vezi Filipeni 3:20). În Filipeni 3:21, limbajul transformării apare de două ori: "(Isus Cristos) va schimba (*metaschematisei*) trupurile noastre de carne, să fie ca (*symmorphon*) trupul Lui de slavă." Una dintre cele mai clare expresii ale învierii ca transformare o întâlnim în 1 Corinteni 15:51-52, unde apostolul foloseşte de două ori verbul *allagesometha* (vom fi schimbaţi) pentru a descrie comunitatea de credincioși și ce o așteaptă la *parousia* lui Isus Cristos. Transformarea viitoare este descrisă în versetul 52 ca fiind instantanee (*en atomo, en rhipe ophtalmou*): "într-o clipă, într-o clipire de ochi". Acest limbaj transformator este mărturisit puţin diferit faţă de ceea ce transmit texte din epistole mai timpurii, precum 1

Tesaloniceni 4:13-18, unde metafora spaţială "prinşi împreună" domină întreaga acţiune, alături de *parousia*. Gillman descrie schimbarea ca reprezentare diferită, ca mişcare de la implicit la explicit, care sugerează "răpirea" din 1 Tesaloniceni 4, o imagine compatibilă pe deplin cu motivul transformării din 1 Corinteni 15 (vezi Ladd 1996: 302).

Învierea ca Integritate

În centrul extinsei sale dezbateri pe acest subiect din 1 Corinteni 15, apostolul Pavel folosește un număr de termeni contrastanţi şi imagini antitetice pentru a descrie în ce fel va diferi viaţa de după înviere de forma ei actuală. Sunt incluse aici și câteva perechi de termeni contrastanţi, anume: trecător și netrecător (1 Corinteni 15:42), dezonoare și glorie (1 Corinteni 15:43), slăbiciune și putere (1 Corinteni 15:43), trup de carne și trup spiritual (1 Corinteni 15:44), omul ţărânei și omul cerului (1 Corinteni 15:47-49). În 1 Corinteni 15:50, apostolul Pavel așază din nou prima pereche de antonime, trecător şi netrecător, când afirmă că "sângele şi carnea nu vor moşteni împărăţia lui Dumnezeu, nici ce este trecător ceea ce este netrecător." Termenii relevanţi în limba greacă (*aphtora* şi *aphtarsia*) produc o imagine puternică şi sunt mai nimerit traduși prin coruptibilitate, respectiv integritate. Termenul *aphtarsia* se găsește de şapte ori în Noul Testament, și mereu în scrierile pauline (vezi Romani 2:7; 1 Corinteni 15: 42, 50, 53, 54; Efeseni 6:24 și 1 Timotei 1:10), iar patru dintre cele şapte apariții din Noul Testament ale termenului înrudit, *aphthartos* (neperisabil), se găsesc tot în scrisorile lui Pavel (Romani 1:23; 1 Corinteni 9:25; 15:52 și 1 Timotei 1:17). De-a lungul unei vivide demonstraţii a importanţei escatologice a termenului, se arată aici și legătura strânsă dintre *aphtarsia, aphthartos* şi învierea lui Isus Cristos (vezi Henry 1996:123).

În plus faţă de cazurile din discuţia amplă despre înviere din 1 Corinteni 15, *aphtarsia* este în centrul atenției în contextul discuției despre învingerea morţii odată cu învierea lui Isus în 2 Timotei 1:10; *aphtarsia* mai este asociată cu viaţa veșnică în Romani 2:7, iar *aphtartos* este folosit cu sens figurat pentru învierea trupului, limitându-se la o imagine atletică în 1 Corinteni 9:25. Printre excepţii se numără Efeseni 6:24, unde termenul *aphtarsia* este folost pentru a descrie dragostea necondiționată a creştinului pentru Cristos, şi Romani 1:23 şi Timotei 1:17, unde *aphthartos* este folosit ca atribut al lui Dumnezeu.

Învierea ca Nemurire

Apostolul Pavel folosește un alt termen interesant pentru a descrie învierea în 1 Corinteni 15:53b-54, spunând că natura muritoare (*to thneton*) trece în nemurire (*athanasia*). Învierea este modalitatea prin care creştinii dobândesc nemurirea, iar moartea este, în imaginea poetică din Isaia 25:8, "înăbuşită de biruinţă". Distincţia dintre *athanasia* şi *aphtharsia* nu este întodeauna uşor de făcut, dar asocierea celor două cu imaginea învierii trupului este sigură. Henry (1996: 125) argumentează persuasiv că, în timp ce nemurirea (fie *athanasia*, fie *aphtharsia*) şi învierea sunt strâns legate, prima este consistent prezentă ca posesie viitoare dată la *parousia* lui Isus celor care I-au aparţinut. În orice caz, nemurirea şi învierea sunt prezente în gândirea lui Pavel, care le vede ca idei înrudite, dar distincte. Amândouă sunt fundamentate în crezul lui Pavel ca speranţă escatologică a credinciosului.

Învierea şi Glorificarea

Arătarea finală a slavei lui Dumnezeu este o piesă bine stabilită în escatologia iudaică. Totodată, apostolul Pavel foloseşte ideea de glorificare în anumite texte pentru a descrie implicaţiile învierii pentru credinciosul creştin. 1 Tesaloniceni 2:12 asociază împărăţia lui Dumnezeu cu slava, în timp ce 2 Tesaloniceni 2:14 uneşte chemarea creştină cu viitoarea intrare în slava lui Cristos. În Romani 5:2, speranţa de a lua parte la slava viitoare a lui Dumnezeu este un motiv de bucurie pentru Pavel, care în 2 Corinteni 4:17 foloseşte expresia poetică "greutate veşnică de slavă" (*aionion baron doxes*) pentru a descrie ce-i este pregătit credinciosului. În Romani 8:11-17 şi în 2 Corinteni 4:10-18 ni se spune că atât "trupurile muritoare" (*ta thneta tasomata*), cât şi "carnea muritoare" (*thnete sarx*) vor fi glorificate ca rezultat al unirii dintre Cristos şi Biserica Lui (Schreiner 2020:113). În Romani 8:30, apostolul Pavel foloseşte câteva verbe la timpul aorist, inclusiv verbul *edoxasen* (a glorificat), pentru a proclama siguranţa mântuirii pe baza unirii dintre Cristos şi credincioşi. Această descriere a glorificării, asociată cu învierea ca fiind în trecut, anticipează limbajul scrisorilor de mai târziu ale apostolului (Coloseni 1:27; 3:1, 4), după cum arată şi Tenney (1963:103).

Învierea și Răscumpărarea Trupului

Învăţătura lui Pavel despre învierea trupului provine din antropologia iudaică, în care "sufletul" (în lb. ebraică *nefeş*, în lb. greacă *psyche*) este principiul animator al vieţii umane. În principal, iudeii credeau că fiinţele umane nu au suflete, ci *sunt suflete* (*Dicționar Enciclopedic de Iudaism* 2000: 751). Această temelie antropologică are implicaţii majore asupra doctrinei învierii, pentru că refuză să predea componenta somatică a fiinţei umane. Învierea implică răscumpărarea trupului fizic, deşi natura somatică a existenţei învierii dă orizont câtorva dintre cele mai creative expresii folosite de apostol în 1 Corinteni 15:35-49 (vezi Tenney 1963: 105). Având în vedere acest context, este perfect de înţeles de ce în Romani 8:23 sunt descrise efectele învierii ca răscumpărare finală a trupurilor noastre (*ten apolytrosin tou somtos hemon*). O idee similară este formulată în Filipeni 3:20-21, de această dată trupul învierii (al comunităţii credincioşilor) fiind strâns legat de al Domnului Isus cel înviat. Alte ocazii în care este formulată ideea de răscumpărare (*apolytrosis*) în scrierile pauline, precum Romani 3:24; 1 Corinteni 1:30; Efeseni 1:7, 14; 4:30; Coloseni 1:14, trebuie privite în contextul învierii şi al implicaţiilor ei atât pentru omenire, cât şi pentru cosmos.

Concluzii

Învierea lui Isus Cristos este motivul principal în escatologia lui Pavel, pentru că inaugurează era ce urmează să vină şi reprezintă fundamentul nădejdii noastre în viitor. Viața, lucrarea și învierea lui Cristos constituie punctul care a îndreptat lumea religiosă iudaică spre o nouă ordine, cunoscută azi drept creștinismul. Învierea lui Cristos şi a credinciosului în ziua de pe urmă sunt descrise de afirmația că *speranța celui din urmă se bazează pe siguranța Celui dintâi.* Este clar, așadar, că experiența apostolului Pavel de pe drumul spre Damasc l-a influențat în mod absolut, el ajungând nu doar să creadă în Cristosul înviat, ci și să-L proclame până la sfârșitul vieții. Învierea, indiferent de imaginea ei, reprezintă un eveniment unic în istoria umanității, este realizată de Cristos și așteptată escatologic de toți cei credincioși.

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USING TRANSGENDER LOGIC – A CALL TO RESPECT GOD'S IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT. How does one describe the identity of Judeo-Christian God? Theological responses usually begin by stating God's essence (spirit, being, deity), describing God's attributes (eternal, goodness, truth) or explaining God's roles (creator, ruler, sustainer). Nevertheless, when Moses asked God, "Who are you?" God answered with a name, an individual term which revealed more than the actions or descriptions of an impersonal power, but one of a personal being named YHWH. The name of God opened the opportunity for humans to have a relationship with Deity. They had a way to address God and enter into dialogue. Yet, the question being raised today is how does that dialogue exist? Which pronouns should be used in conversation with the Divine? Should God be referred to as He, She, or They, or does it really matter? Transgender dogma has informed and insisted that society use the pronouns which match an individual's proclaimed identity. Pronoun identification to the transgender community is of upmost importance. Recent literature emphasizes gender affirmation as a level of respect, acceptance of the individual, and critical to the healthy maintenance of a relationship. Transgender logic is grounded in the requirement that individuals determine personal pronouns for themselves. According to their basis of their logic, is God to be viewed as one gender, two genders, no gender, or all genders? This article will explore four different views and conclude with God's opinion of chosen pronouns.

KEY WORDS: logic, gender, transgender, pronouns, God

Introduction

The transgender movement has brought to light a part of language most people take for granted – pronouns, those words to describe people when not using their name. Traditionally, pronouns referred to the biological birth gender of a person. Modern culture supports a new form of logic purported by the transgender community. This logical premise proposes that a pronoun should be a personalized title determined by the owner, rather than an assumption made by

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others. The inference suggests that pronouns are no longer to be associated with generalized grouping (such as male/female), but unique statements of each human being. The conclusion results in society being admonished not to presume knowledge based on gender expression (relating to how one looks or acts) but should always inquire after one's gender identity in order to correctly address them. The practical implications ensue a preferred way of human interaction. Proper introductions are made by asking a new acquaintance to state their name followed by their correct pronouns, such as she/he/they/ze.

This logic explains how correct gender affirmation promotes the well-being of the individual (Glynn 2016: 336-344). A level of respect for personhood is defined by such addresses, as Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network teaches, "Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting people's gender identity, working against cisnormativity, and creating a more welcoming space for people of all genders (GLSEN)." A glance at various gender-educating websites describes proper pronoun usage as validating and inclusive. Affirming a person's identity is essential as it begins with recognition and acceptance of the individual, continues by reinforcement of a fixed identity (both to the person being addressed and to the one addressing), and concludes in displayed respect (McGlashan and Fitzpatrick 2018: 246, 250). The individual feels cared for and seen; thus, using correct pronouns is simply a basic courtesy. Psychologists assert this practice as "critical to the well-being of transgender populations" (Glynn 2016: 342).

While using correct pronouns provides "feeling validated in their gender expression, feeling supported, and subsequently, feeling less emotionally stressed," conversely, "failing to appropriately use pronouns may damage…relationships" (Brown et al. 2020: 74, 80). Misgendering means labeling another person by a gender or pronoun in a manner they do not identify. Even using the term "preferred pronouns" minimizes the importance and reality of "chosen" pronouns (Hillard 2019: 561). "Gender isn't a preference," according to Reimagine Gender, "it's just who we are!" (Reimagine Gender, n.d.). Better Up, a coaching and care company which assists organizations to develop inclusive workspaces, teaches, "When someone identifies themselves to you, you refer to them in that way as a sign of respect and acknowledgment. To do anything else is a not-so-subtle rejection of their identity. It communicates to these people that they aren't welcome or accepted" (Cooks-Campbell, 2022). Those who have been misgendered describe their emotional response as dismissed, alienated, and humiliated. It is demoralizing to be purposefully labeled differently over and over. Present day studies are exploring the connection between invalidation and emotional dysregulation (Martell and Williams 2022: 200-202). Erin Clawson, attorney and advocate for transgender rights, contends, "Continuous and intentional misgendering, or being referred to by the incorrect pronouns, can be mentally damaging to a transgender person" (Clawson 2019: 249).

It is highly offensive to misgender another person with purposeful intent or to continue to use the wrong pronoun with no effort to change. In some cases, intentionally misgendering another is considered part of a hate crime (Crown 2021). This is an international issue of importance. The Equal Representation group in Scotland insists that one always apologize for using a wrong gender pronoun. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission of Australia lists "refusing to call someone by their preferred name or use their preferred pronouns" as the first example of gender identity discrimination. Egale, the Canada Human Rights Trust, cites purposefully not using the requested gender pronoun as transphobia and cisnormative bullying and harassment. The American Civil Liberties Union in Tennessee, USA describes trans children face:

> extreme cases of harassment and danger. In fact, 76 percent of them already aren't allowed to use their correct pronoun in the classroom, and 78 percent heard negative remarks about trans people in school. This number is severe, to the degree that it could even be deadly. Around 40 percent of trans people report a suicide attempt in their lifetime, with 92 percent of these attempts being made by young people under the age of 25. (ACLU 2022)

Incorrect identifying pronouns causes great distress and is increasingly being called an "act of violence." Therefore, according to the trans logic, respecting a person's personally chosen identity is the ethical thing to do.

How does this relate to God? If pronouns are important, then how does one address the Divine? "I am God, and there is none like me," God says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts that your thoughts" (Isaiah 46:9; 55:9). Biblical writers describe God as unique (Exodus 9:14; Jeremiah 10:6; 1 Samuel 2:2; 1 Kings 8:23) The Divine Being is not human or human-like. There is no physical body or equality of logic, so how can humans enter into a relationship with a God they cannot understand? How can they communicate and with which pronoun should they correctly address God? This article will review four views: one gender, two genders, no gender, all genders, and close each section with their statement of how to view and portray God ("thus, God should be referred to as"). The article will conclude with listening to God's personal pronoun choice.

God Is One Gender

The names for God – *Yahweh, Elohim, Shaddai, Sebbaoth, Adonai, Kurios*, and *Theos* – are all in masculine gender (Singleton 1978). Scriptures overwhelmingly use nouns that represent a masculine identity, including *father*, "Jesus said… 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20.17); *husband*, "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD OF HOSTS IS HIS NAME" (Isaiah 54.5); *king*, "For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD OF HOSTS" (Isaiah 6.5); and *master*, "Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; FOR I AM YOUR MASTER" (Jeremiah 3.14). While God's attributes have been described at times in feminine metaphors and similes, there is a difference between attributes and identity. There is no biblical title ascribed to God as mother, wife, queen, or mistress. God's personhood has never given a feminine name or referred to with feminine pronouns such as "she", "her", and "hers".

Additionally, biblical writers refer to God's pronouns as He/Him. The psalmist proclaims, "Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100.3). Joseph declared, "God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." (Genesis 50.24). Prophets testify, "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3.7). Apostles teach, "is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?" (Romans 3.29). Revelation exclaims, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 21.3).

Some theologians explain the necessity for a masculine God to attest to His dominance and authority. Feminine imagery, traditionally given the role of submission and subordination, contradicts God's character. Diodore of Tarsus taught "it is clear that [women who cover their heads] is not an image of God, although she shares in the same soul" (Parmentier 2002: 561). Gerald Bray summarizes this view, "The Bible says that men and women are both created in the image and likeness of God, but the New Testament makes it clear how this is to be understood. The male is created in God's image directly, whereas the female is created in the image of the male, and hence of God-but indirectly" (Bray 2003: 270). Thus, masculine, not feminine, representations are worthy of God.

The greatest proof of the masculinity of God occurred in the incarnation. Jesus Christ, in the appearance of a man, represented the "visible fullness of the Godhead" (Colossians 2.9). Not only was he born a male, but it was also predetermined and prophesied that he would be a man. His being a male is an historically proven fact, not something ascribed by male chauvinists or patriarchal leaders. Nowhere in Scripture or history was Jesus Christ said to have been a woman. His names, *Iēsous* and *Christos*, definitively describe the Son of God in masculine terms. Jesus also instructed His disciples in whose masculine name to baptize and to pray (Matthew 6.9, 28:19).

Thus, God should be referred to as one gender – masculine. God is not to be compared to the pagan deities of the surrounding times and cultures, which represented themselves in dual genders of gods and goddesses. It is the sole use of male terminology which proves Him as unique. Kreeft and Tacelli observe, "The Jewish revelation was distinctive in its exclusively masculine pronoun because it was distinctive in its theology of the divine transcendence. That seems to be the main point of the masculine imagery" (Kreeft and Tacelli 1994: 98). The applications of this belief provide a foundation for God's hierarchy and authority over mankind. Thomas Rees explains, "The first effect of distinguishing too sharply between God and all created being was to set Him above and apart from all the world" (Rees 1956: 1259). Yet, Rees continues, God reveals Himself preeminently as a Father,

> It is his customary term for the Supreme Being, and it is noteworthy that Jesus' usage has never been quite naturalized. We still say "God" where Jesus would have said "the Father." He meant that the essential nature of God, and His relation to men, is best expressed by the attitude and relation of a father to his children; but God is Father in an infinitely higher and more perfect degree than any man. (Rees 1956: 1261)

God is always depicted as masculine, and Jesus always referred to Him in masculine terms. This is what makes Christianity different. To portray God as **He/Him**, separates the sacred from the secular.

God Is Two Genders

The traditional church asserts the canon of Scripture was written in the male language as God intended and translated correctly in a clearly understood masculine manner, but Reta Halteman Finger, one of the founders of the Christian feminist movement, disagrees with those who think the Bible must portray God as only male:

> I cannot affirm this statement—that everything in the original documents of what became our Bible was exactly what God wanted to say. This omits the human aspect of the texts and the cultural limitations of the writers. It [claim that the Bible translation] must include the "masculinity of God's words," which I see as a reflection of patriarchal cultures that the gospel of Jesus came to challenge. (Finger 2018)

Christopher Seitz agrees that language is culturally bound and imperfectly reflects reality, and biblical language is "open to revision by subsequent cultures" (Seitz 2001: 24). Current theological culture has revised the views of the past. Modern biblical translations, broadened international philosophies, and examinations of patriarchal hierarchies, provide the motivation for believers to question ecclesiastical traditions. Is God truly male? If the answer is affirmative, feminist leader Mary Daly uncovers the eventual sinful temptation, "Since God is male, the male is God" (Achtemeier 2006: 1 citing Daly 1975: 21). Too much emphasis has been attributed to the God-male, male-God connection. Seitz observes that "God has a 'name' that refers directly to divinity, but 'Father, Son, Holy Spirit' is not it" (Seitz 2001: 24).

God chose to use many feminine terms and metaphors to self-represent in Scripture. In the Old Testament *Elohim* is the Creator. Joan Schaupp explains, "For women, the significance is that the *ruach Elohim* of Genesis 1.2 is a feminine noun accompanied with a feminine-ending verb form, *m'rechephet*. Thus, the 'spirit of God hovering' is a metaphorical allusion to the feminine in God" (Schaupp 2000: 18-19). This is the same verb phrase used in Deuteronomy 31.11 describing God as a mother eagle. A bear with her cubs and a hen with her chicks present other metaphors (Hosea 13.8; Matthew 23.37; Luke 13.34). Isaiah 46.3-4 also depicts God in maternal language with a womb and as one who carries and bears Israel. Isaiah also describes God as a woman in labor and a comforting mother (Isaiah 42.14; 66.13). In the New Testament, "Jesus-Sophia" utilizes feminine examples to teach about God's kingdom (Johnson 2010: 57).

Contrary to traditional thought, feminine titles and descriptions were used in church history. Syriac theology portrayed the Holy Spirit as mother (Parmentier 2002: 580). Clement of Alexandria, Chrysostom, and Julian of Norwich were some who addressed God as both Father and Mother (Haddad 2004: 3-5). The Greek church fathers did "not feel constrained to use exclusively male images when they speak of Christ. Indeed, the fathers often do not hesitate, when they speak of Christ, to use female imagery" (Parmentier 2002: 572). While there are other recorded examples of those who acknowledged God's maternal or feminine descriptions, feminists maintain that these images have been historically overlooked or downplayed to uphold the masculine-only preference.

Christian feminists believe that male-only terms condense the infinite Spirit to a one-sided character, restraining the worship of the vastness of God. Thompsett suggested broadening terminology to include "other images of God – drawn from the whole range of experience, social classes and cultures – are called for, lest we make our images of God too small" (Thompsett 1986:43). In order to balance alleged patriarchal and misogynic religious views, Christian feminists placed an emphasis on celebrating a non-masculine form of God. God is no longer just the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but also the God of Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel. In the early 1980s, the Inclusive Language Lectionary produced by the U.S. Council of Churches redefining terms like "Abba" from "Father" to "Father and Mother," and changing Jesus' relationship with God from "son" to "child" (Sharrock 2012: 91). The Methodist Church in Great Britain followed suit almost ten years later by deciding "the use of female imagery is compatible with faithfulness to Scripture--indeed Scripture itself points in this direction and also gives us examples of that imagery" (Sharrock 2012: 91).

The greatest proof of the masculinity and femininity of God occurred in the creation. The *imago Dei* refers to both genders. God says in Genesis1:26, "Let us make *adam* in our image, after our likeness. And let *them* have dominion..." (emphasis added). It is clear that God is speaking of the plural mankind form, not of a single created male, and verse 27 further clarifies it is both sexes, male and female. Trible emphasizes, "Clearly, 'male and female' correspond structurally to the image of God" (Trible 1973: 17). On this *imago Dei* point, even conservative Christian groups like Focus on the Family agree, "according to the language of Scripture, it takes *both* man *and* woman – or, to put it another way, *mankind as a whole* – to reflect God's image in a complete way" (FOTF 2017).

Feminist theology, like that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, proposes that if masculine and feminine elements were created to equally represent God, then describing God in three masculine personages (Father, Son, and "male-like" Spirit) is unbalanced. "A Heavenly Father, Mother, and Son would seem more rational" (Stanton 1993: 14). Thus, Mary Daly's quote inspired a redefinition of the description of God and a reversal of terminology. Instead of God's persona promoting masculinity, feminist theology turned the focus to one of neutrality at least, as portrayed by Harriet Sherwood statement, "If I am made in the image of God, then God is not to be seen as male. God is God" (Sherwood 2015).

Thus, God should be referred to as two genders – masculine and feminine. The application of a two-gender view exposes a one-sided masculine or "Father-God" imagery which leads to a form of idolatry (Thompsett 1986: 43). Describing God as male is, in their view, too close to a manufactured likeness. Reuther insists:

> We have to acknowledge the principle that the male has no special priority in imaging God... to take one image drawn from one gender and in one sociological context (that of the ruling class) as normative for God is to legitimate this gender and social group as the normative possessors of the image of God and representatives of God on earth. This is idolatry. (Ruether 1984: 16)

Feminists argue that even though mainstream Christianity teaches that both men and women are made in the image of God, in practicality it is the male image of God that is promoted and worshipped by the church (Johnson 2010: 42). The revealed Word demands that God is not to be pictured or worshiped as a male figure, or as the commandments teach, making an image of God in the likeness of a man (Exodus 20.4). To portray God as **He/Her** is properly directed veneration.

God Is No Gender

Tension exists in the feminist view, a struggle between choosing to prefer the masculine or feminine form of God. Phyllis Trible, described as an "esteemed pioneer in the text-based exploration of women and gender in Scripture," expressed her own initial struggle:

> I face a terrible dilemma: Choose ye this day whom you will serve: the God of the fathers or the God of sisterhood. If the God of the fathers, then the Bible supplies models for your slavery. If the God of sisterhood, then you must reject patriarchal religion and go forth without models to claim your freedom. (Trible 1973: 31)

If a one-sided gender view leads to an idolatrous idea of God, would comparing God to two-genders solve the problem or would it compound the problem making God an idol in the form of both women and men? Other Christian feminists recognize the danger of identifying God in either direction and prefer neutrality above feminizing God. Rachel Treweek, female Anglican bishop of Gloucester, questioned the exclusivity of calling God mother. "There's something about the whole connotation of 'mother' that has a sense of dependency for me. It's not how I want to be looked at. I see myself as a leader, as leading from among people" (Sherwood 2015). Trible came to an important realization that her problem need not be an either/or decision but found a third way to "reread (not rewrite) the Bible without the blinders of [patriarchy]… to translate biblical faith without sexism" (Trible 1973: 31). The important point these Christian feminists realize is "not that God must now be called feminine and not masculine, but that God must not be understood as exclusively either masculine or feminine" (Thompsett 1986: 43).

However, gender-neutral pronouns such as "It/They" do not fit a personal God. Gail Ramshaw, in her work "De Divinis Nominibus: The Gender of God," presents a solution of using God/Godself/Divine as the best terms for deity (Ramshaw 1988: 202). Madeleine L'Engle uses a creative expression of El/Elself, based on the Hebrew name for God (L'Engle 2017: 13). Treweek keeps it simple;

not desirous to offend, she simply uses the term "God" rather than using any pronouns such as He or She (Sherwood 2015).

The realization that God is neither feminine nor masculine is not a new concept. Historically, the Judeo-Christian teachings refer to God as having no sex/gender. Moses warned the Israelites, "Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of *male or female*" (Deuteronomy 4.15-16, emphasis added). Instead of a form, God interacted with people in the forms of fire, clouds, and wind. The Psalmist asks in Psalm 139.7, "Where can I go from your Spirit?" The New Testament also expresses that God is spirit (John 4.24; 2 Corinthians 3.17). God does not have a material body, and therefore, is neither male nor female.

Different Christian branches agree that God is non-gendered. The Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry teaches, "God does not have a gender. He is neither male nor female. Gender is a biological characteristic, and God is not a biological being" (Slick 2014). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: He is God" (Part One, Section Two, Chapter One, Article I, Paragraph 2, Subpoint II). Nicolae Moșoiu admits the traditional Orthodox view is "consistent with the scriptural testimony which did not assign gender to the divine being" (Mosoiu 2016: 59). Anglican bishop, Hugh Montefiore passionately expresses,

> Does this mean that God is male? The very question verges on the absurd... God exists eternally, and in the eternal sphere there is no sexual differentiation. *God has no gender.* He is neither male nor female... The fact that we use the masculine pronoun in referring to him points to the inadequacy of our language, not to the maleness of God. (Montefiore 1994: 130-131, emphasis in original)

Thus, God should be referred to as no gender – neither masculine nor feminine. However, this is a difficult practice to uphold as pronoun habits are difficult to break and the desire is strong to relate to God on personal terms. Analogous language in provided for mankind's benefit in revelation, yet it must always be remembered that God transcends a human description and comprehension. Isaiah 55:8-9 reiterates, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" The application of this view reminds humans that God is greater than all creation, as Elihu admits, "Behold, God is great, and we know him not" (Job 36.26). Humans are honored to represent a reflection of the Divine. While both sexes must be embraced for humanity to correctly understand the image of the Godhead, they offer a limited image-bearing because God is neither male nor female. To portray God as **YHWH/God** (no gender) shows a proper humility for who God is.

God Is All Genders

God does not have a biological sex, but does that mean that God is genderless, or can humans choose to call God whatever they favor because God is sexless? Trible taught that God is a God of the masculine and of the feminine. She explained that the genders are not at war with each other, but complementary to each other. Likewise, while God is worshiped as a judge and king, there is an equal balance of God as servant, helper, nurturer, and liberator. "We need to see the dynamic relationship between God as the source of our being and God as the empowerer of our aspiration and growth toward new being, toward redeemed and fulfilled humanity" (Ruether 1984: 17). The idea that God is not "either/or" plants seeds for a broader view of God to grow.

In recent years, the movement of inclusion has been made not to proclaim that God is neither male nor female, but that God *is both* masculine and feminine *and* everything in between. Kate Bornstein, author of *My New Gender Workbook*, teaches that "No gender is a space containing all genders – those that exist, and those as yet unimagined" (Bornstein 2013: 28). To celebrate the International Transgender Day of Visibility, Anna Sheetz from the First Presbyterian Church of Iowa City prays,

> Oh, God of pronouns, we give praise to the great one, the one who was identifiable as God. "I am what I am," you say. The great "they", the incarnate he and she, the God of trans-being. Impregnating Mary, fathering God. Breastfeeding God of many breasts, you... shatter all stereotypes, making every single person male and female. Male and female, intersex, non-binary in your image. Exactly in your image. (Sheetz 2022: 38, 39)

As described in the prayer, the modern view of God's image has transformed to an all-inclusive entity from which modern-day humans have evolved. God's changed image developed along two distinct trajectories.

First is the concept that God originally created one human as a mix of male and female, not as two distinct beings. This theory finds support in the Jewish Talmud. The Hebrew term *adam* is a generic term for mankind. It comes from a word-play for "taken from the earth" (*ha-'adamah*) and could be translated as "earth creature" (*ha-'adam*). Patriarchal tradition is accused to have taken this universal *adam* and merged it with Adam, the name given to the first man, as the same entity, to state their case that God created a male being first. However, it is argued, the creation account in Genesis teaches that God created *adam* ("generic mankind") first, and that this human was a creature bisexually formed (they/them) (Horowitz 1979: 184-185). Kiser suggested genderless phraseology to reflect this such as, "Generic Human Creature from the Dust which was then later separated (Genesis 2.21-23) into male and female" (Kiser 2013). The genders became differentiated in Genesis 2 when woman was created out of man, and Milne reinforces that even after physical/biological separation, there seemed to be a singularity or equality in name; it was only after the fall, Milne states, that the feminine form was named "Eve" (Milne 1989). The importance of declaring *adam* as a hermaphrodite, a human containing both the essence of male and female while not being distinctly male or female, would clearly demonstrate that mankind was created as the similar image of a gender-inclusive God. Elijah Marcelle-Ezekiel Westerfield describes the results of surveyed transgender participants who "felt a connection with a higher power and specifically viewed themselves as made as transgender by God" (Westerfield 2012: iii). The practical outcome of such a view can imply that mankind is not only able to call God whatever they like, but more importantly, that humans should seek to be fluid in gender in order to image God more correctly.

A second foundational support describes the godhead as a complete fulfillment of a spectrum. Traditional Christianity defines creation in binary extremes: darkness/light, land/water, birds/fish, men/women. Trans Christians argue that creation is not clearly defined separations but a spectrum of options within categories. For example, God separated the land from the water, yet nature still includes rivers that run through the land and contains mud where land and water are mixed together. Darkness and light include times of dusk and dawn. Flying fish and flightless birds display such a spectrum. Austen Hartke uses Revelation 1.8 as God's self-description. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord." Hartke points out that God is not just the extremes at either end but instead uses that terminology to explain that the Divinity encompasses all things, from one extreme to the other and everything in between (Hartke 2017: 12:50). Likewise, when Genesis reveals that both male and female are made in the image of God, that does not mean that God is two separate things (male and female), but the spectrum of everything between those two endpoints. God is all-inclusive of every gender state and, because of the infinite nature of the deity, even more diversified than humans can imagine. To limit God to the revealed "male and female" binary is to restrict God's boundless being. Transgender believers feel pity for those who cannot understand, "Unfortunately, many people are stuck with that view of scripture. And it's sad because it limits them. It limits their view of the world. It limits their view of God. The box they keep their God in is too small" (Westerfield 2012: 38). When God creates men and women in Genesis 1, it occurs after creating opposites in every other corner of creation. Humans, then, are also created in an opposite pair – male and female. However, a literal reading of the binary restrictions in Genesis 1 constrains the creative work of God. The totality of Scripture shows that God's creation exists in spectrums.

Thus, God should be referred to as all gender – all masculine, feminine, and the entire spectrum of possibilities. The application of diverging from a God who is stuck in a particular category (male, binary, or non-gendered) to a God who is fluid demonstrates itself practically in the worship of such a God. This is a not a God that transcends creation, but a God who is encompasses all variants of creation. Because He/She/They identifies with us, then we can identify with Him/Her/Them. Sheetz closes the prayer by stating,

> God of pronouns who said, "You can call me he or she or they, whatever makes you feel closest to me." Invisible and visible god, on this day where visibility and celebration, belatedness, affirmation, and acceptance is the bare minimum, remind us that you are the god of pronouns, so you affirm and you celebrate them. (Sheetz 2001: 49:35)

The attractiveness of this view lies in the key applications to God's trans-nature and God's accessibility, acceptance, and affirmation. God can be viewed in whatever way a believer chooses, in the way that makes God "feel closest" to them. Acceptance is always available because there is nothing on the spectrum that God is not, so there is no fear of being shunned or being called different. God provides only affirmation and celebration because humans represent the encapsulation of all aspects of the divinity without distinctions. To portray God as **They/Them** honors a limitless God (Sprecht 2022).

Misgendering God – A Call for Consistent Logic

As explained in the introduction, the trans movement uses their form of logic to urge society to become all inclusive, representative, and welcoming, which begins with the adherence to personally defined labels and pronouns. Respect, they claim, is of utmost importance. The logic of the trans community states that people are to defer their usage of pronouns and gender identity according to the desires of the individual. The introduction of this article summarized how the correct use of pronouns makes people feel: validated, recognized, accepted, reinforced (applicable to both parties), cared for, seen, and above all respected. If the image-bearers respond in this way, how much more would God demand such treatment?

However, in the arguments for God's gender identity or neutrality, the logical deference is not afforded to God with the same passion. Indeed, the very actions that outrage the advocates of gender inclusivity are the same actions they commit toward God. The trans Christian community prefers to relate to God in a manner that makes them feel most comfortable and accepted, not based on God's personal revelation. To intentionally call God a different gender is damaging to the relationship, a "not-so-subtle" rejection of God's identity, a communication that God is not welcome or accepted. It is an act of dismissal, alienation, and humiliation. Using the trans logic and terminology, to ascribe to an infinite God *any* other label than God's revealed choice is the worst act of violence, an eternal, immoral hate crime.

God's opinion is not sought out, but rather the relationship's terminology is determined by the human's desire to connect. Being human has limitations on choices and freedoms, which is why humans in life and literature aspire to have all the attributes of God. However, as image bearers of the divine, humans represent God but are not exact copies of God in every way. Humanness is bound to the sexual construct of gender, and the autonomous choices and freedoms mankind thinks it deserves contradicts the existing implanted divine image in being both male and female. This limitation results in deep frustration, driving their personal words, thoughts and experiences to interpret God and the Bible, instead of allowing God and the Word to interpret their lives.

Human views are constantly changing. The image of God has transformed from being "neither male nor female" to being "all male, female, intersex, and non-binary." *This is an inversion of the historical view of the Divine.* Generations constantly vary their ideals of what image-bearing looks like between overtly masculine and feminine characteristics or non-sexual and fluid essences. Thus, they are making God in their image. Singleton implores these generations, "We should not try to make God in our image, whether male or female. We should not give Him a gender any more than we should try to give His skin a particular color, or select His clothes from those worn by a particular class, or make His eyes slanted or unslanted" (Singleton 1978). Christianity is not a religion based on myths and oral traditions passed down and developed over time. Christianity is based on revelation – God revealing the Divine to mankind through the unchanging, inerrant Word. Kreeft and Tacelli challenge, "One issue is whether we have the authority to change the names of God used by Christ, the Bible and the church. The traditional defense of masculine imagery for God rests on the premise that the Bible is divine revelation, not culturally relative, negotiable and changeable" (Kreeft and Tacelli 1994: 98). That Word is truth, as it has been revealed by a holy God who cannot lie and does not change. What is known about God is only what God has chosen to reveal.

Today, many followers of God do not find it important to discover what has been revealed. The National Center for Transgender Equality reported that 66% of American transgender people were part of a religious community during a point in their lives (Anderson and McGuire 2021: 390). Sadly, there is not a majority of transpeople who are willing to defend God's position. Out of all the differing views of God's gender, believers in the trans community should use their own logic and shout the loudest to respect the gender pronouns God has chosen. As stated at the beginning, their premise proposed that pronouns are personalized titles determined by the owners, rather than an assumption made by others. If one is to remain true to transgender logic, then they must answer the question, how is a person on the outside able determine another's personal identity? The logical answer states that it starts by asking what the chosen pronoun is and how an individual would like to be addressed and identified.

Conclusions. Respecting the Pronouns God Uses for Himself

What pronouns has God chosen to represent the Divine identity? He has made it clearly known what His chosen pronouns are because God is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). God may be a spirit, and He may be sexless, but God does have a gender – and He has identified Himself as He/Him. Isaiah 43:10-13, 25 states (emphasis added),

> "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "AND MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN, THAT YOU MAY KNOW AND BELIEVE ME AND UNDERSTAND THAT **I am he**. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, AND BESIDES ME THERE IS NO SAVIOR. I DECLARED AND SAVED AND PROCLAIMED, WHEN THERE WAS NO STRANGE GOD AMONG YOU; AND YOU ARE MY WITNESSES," DECLARES THE LORD, "AND I AM GOD. ALSO HENCEFORTH **I am he**; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work... I, **I am he** who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

Despite claims that patriarchal religion has leaned toward a masculine partiality or omitted texts that confirmed feminine descriptions, Scripture overwhelmingly points to a He/Him preference. Consider a few additional passages where God's own voice describes His essence as He (emphasis added).

7. Deuteronomy 32.39a – "See now that **I, even I, am he**, and there is no god beside me;"8. Isaiah 48.12 – "Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! **I am he**; I am the first, and I am the last.
9. Isaiah 41.4 – I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; **I am he.**
10. Isaiah 51.12 – "I, **I am he** who comforts you,"
11. Revelation 2.23 – And all the churches will know that **I am he** who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

Even in Isaiah 46.3-4, the passage provided as proof of God's femininity, God says "Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age **I am he**."

God has chosen His gender and has identified His identity through His revelation. Therefore, all mankind should respect that He has a right to be known and called by that gender. C.S. Lewis sums up the argument perfectly,

> Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable; or, if tolerable, it is an argument... against Christianity. (Lewis 1970: 237)

Transgender logic should agree, misgendering the Divine must be surely intolerable. God unambiguously affirms, "I am God, and my chosen pronouns are He/Him." Anything less than accepting and embracing the preferred masculine pronouns of God is therefore an everlatsting act of violence towards **He/Him**.

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SUPERIORITATEA LUI CRISTOS FAȚĂ DE ÎNGERI. CRISTOS NU DOAR UN MESAGER, CI MESAGERUL (EVREI 1:1-14)

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ABSTRACT. The notion of revelation, the idea that God reveals essential aspects of God's being, will and work to human beings, has a fundamental significance in monotheistic religions, for which the dimension of worship is central. The idea of revelation is shared in both Christianity and islam, each with its own perspective on the concept. From a Christian perspective, it is based on the understanding of a personal God. What humans can know about God is not simply the result of human reason trying to understand the divine, but it also involves God's actions in revealing himself. It is only through revelation that man can have a self-knowledge of God, where he actively makes himself known, being both the subject of this knowledge and its object. On the other hand, in islam God is considered a solitary monad who remains a mystery, and the Muslim believer knows only his name and attributes described in the Qur'an. This paper aims to provide an exegetical analysis of Hebrews 1:1-14 from the perspective of its dogmatic content. Our goal is to present the islamic perspective on angels as the main messengers in the context of revelation, and in so doing to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over the angels in position (given his superior name and absolute worship) and in nature (given his superior nature as the Son, his superior existence as Creator, and his superior dignity as eternal Lord).

KEY WORDS: Christ, the Son; Lord creator; angels, revelation, Qur'an

Introducere

Revelaţia divină stă la baza întregii epistemologii umane și este edificiul adevărului. Dumnezeu există, este creatorul omului şi al universului şi dorește să Se descopere omului. Prin creație, omul a devenit imaginea lui Dumnezeu, fiind creat ca recipient al revelației, ceea ce înseamnă că în esență este făcut pentru a-L cunoaște și a-I răspunde lui Dumnezeu.

Termenul "revelaţie" provine din verbul latinesc *reveleo, revelare*, care înseamnă *a descoperi*, *descoperire*. Actul revelației este desemnat în Noul Testament prin folosirea a doi termeni, anume: *phanerosis* (apariţie, revelaţie, vezi Kittel 1993: 6) şi *apokalipsis* (a descoperi, a dezvălui, a apărea; vezi Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie 1992:

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51). Prin urmare, indiferent de termenul utilizat pentru revelaţia supranaturală, ea rămâne o acţiune a lui Dumnezeu prin intermediul căreia Se descoperă, Se revelează. Revelaţia are rol esenţial atât raportat la religie, cât şi la teologie. Raportul dintre cele două este indisolubil, iar ordinea priorității este clar stabilită. Întotdeauna revelaţia cere răspunsul religiei, iar religia este irealizabilă în absenţa revelației. Revelaţia cere un răspuns, și anume religia. Așadar, revelaţia divină este punctul de referinţă prin care poate fi verificată validitatea oricărei teologii şi religii. Revelația divină este actul liber, supranatural, prin care Dumnezeu, din proprie inițiativă și putere, Se descoperă, adică Se face cunoscut oamenilor: revelația este înțelegerea cognitivă a comunicării de Sine a lui Dumnezeu accesată prin credință, prin har. Cristos reprezintă culmea revelaţiei supranaturale şi deplina confirmare, deplina clarificare a sensului ei.

În religia islamică, revelația divină joacă un rol foarte important. În limba arabă, conceptul de *revelație* este considerat ca având corespondenți cuvinte formate pe baza a două rădăcini diferite: *wahy* și *nzl*. În traducerile Coranului în limba engleză, *wahy* este înțeles în mod obișnuit ca "revelație", iar *awhā* ca "a dezvălui", uneori "a inspira" sau "a incita". Cuvintele derivate din a doua rădăcină, cum ar fi *nazala*, *nuzūl*, *nazzala* și *anzala*, transmit ideea de "coborâre", "descindere" sau "trimitere jos", având o puternică conotație legată de locul fizic (Yahya 2008: 180-196). Astfel, islamul diferențiază "inspirația" (*wahy)* de "revelație" (rădăcina *nzl)*, care corespunde descendenței dintr-o carte. Cuvântul arab pentru fenomenul revelației este *waḥy* și, strict vorbind, se aplică numai Coranului. *Waḥy*, în sens mai larg, înseamnă a trimite un mesaj, adesea în secret, prin intermediul unui gest, prin transmitere scrisă sau prin inspirație. Pe scurt, *waḥy* poate fi înțeles ca fenomen propiu-zis al comunicării divine, iar *tanzīl* este conținutul acelei comunicări, dezvăluit într-o perioadă de timp (Afsaruddin 2020: 143-146).

Pe lângă revelația progresivă, Coranul este adesea asociat cu ideea de "descendență". Musulmanii cred că, prin intermediul îngerului Jibreel (Gavril), Dumnezeu a dezvăluit ultimul mesaj adresat omenirii profetului Mahomed. Din perspectivă islamică, Coranul a fost a revelat cuvânt cu cuvânt și literă cu literă de însuși Dumnezeu, iar pentru musulmani Coranul nu este doar cartea sacră emisă direct de divinitate, ci însuși Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu.

Atât creștinismul, cât și islamul sunt religii monoteiste în care conceptul de revelație divină deține un rol fundamental; totuși, modalitatea revelației și caracterul ei sunt percepute diferit în cele două. Astfel, există o revelație divină personală în istorie, în persoana Fiului lui Dumnezeu, Isus Cristos, versus o religie în care Dumnezeu vorbește prin intermediul profeților, iar mesajul său este transmis printr-un instrument într-un anumit spațiu și timp.

În acest context, articolul de față este o încercare de a argumenta superioritatea persoanei lui Isus Cristos față de îngeri în istoria revelației divine, o revelație personală, finală și desăvârșită, vis-à-vis de perspectiva islamică asupra îngerilor și a rolului acestora în transmiterea mesajului divin. Demersul nostru are la bază textul din Evrei 1:1-14, prin prisma conținutului său dogmatic.

Perspectiva Islamică asupra Îngerilor

Fundamentul islamului este credința sau *Imaan* (Hadi 2008: 6). Imaan, în teologia islamică, presupune credința omului în aspectele metafizice ale islamului. Definiția sa cea mai simplă este credința în cele șase articole de credință, cunoscute sub numele de *arkān al-īmān*. Credința sau Iman în limba arabă înseamnă a afirma ceva și a respecta afirmația făcută. Imaan înseamnă acceptarea tuturor articolelor de la baza credinței islamice. Actele de natură interioară pe care musulmanii le fac poartă numele de stâlpi ai credinţei/ Imaan (Al-Sheha 2022: 17).

În religia islamică nu există un crez oficial, dar pentru musulmanii sunniți există șase învățături centrale sau articole de credință, care determină înțelegerea lor despre Dumnezeu (Sarwar 2021: 241). Această învățătură, cei şase stâlpi de bază ai credinţei, poate fi găsită într-una dintre tradițiile (Ahadith) lui Mahomad, profetul islamului, după cum urmează: 1. Credinţa în Allah Preaînaltul 2. Credinţa în Îngerii lui Allah 3. Credinţa în Cărţile lui Allah 4. Credinţa în Mesagerii lui Allah 5. Credinţa în Ziua Judecăţii 6. Credinţa în Al- Qadaa (Predestinare) şi Al-Qadar (Destin) (vezi Al-Sheha 2022: 17).

Credința în îngeri este unul dintre principiile de bază ale crezului, numit *aqeedah* (Ashqar 2002: 13), este fundamentul religiei, fără de care credința ar fi incompletă. Cuvântul *malaka* (înger) derivă din rădăcina *alaka, ma'lakah* și *ma'lak*, și înseamnă mesaj. Din această rădăcină derivă cuvântul *malaa'ik*, care înseamnă îngeri, pentru că ei sunt mesagerii lui Allah (Ashqar 2002: 14). Fiecare musulman are obligația de a crede în toţi îngerii lui Allah, care fac parte din creația lui Allah, pe care i-a creat pentru a-l adora şi pe care el însuşi îi numește în Coran preacinstiți robi (vezi Bin Baz 2015: 24): „Ei zic: Cel Milostiv și-a luat un fiu! Mărire Lui! Însă ei nu sunt decât niște robi ținuți în cinste. Ei nu i-o iau înainte cu vorba și purced numai după porunca lui" (Coran 21: 26-27).

După cum arată Coranul în următoarele versete, credința în îngeri este un principiu de bază al credinței și se află la chiar rădăcina revelației lui Allah şi a mesagerilor săi, pentru că revelația lui Allah a fost mediată de îngeri, iar mandatarul revelației este îngerul Jibreel (Kishk 1996: 3):

> Cuvioșia nu stă în a vă întoarce fețele spre Răsărit sau spre Apus, ci înseamnă a crede în Allah și în Ziua de Apoi, în îngeri, în Carte și în profeți... (Coran 2: 177).
> Fiecare [dintre ei] a crezut în Allah, în îngerii lui, în scripturile lui și în trimișii lui [și ei zic]: Noi nu facem nici o deosebire între vreunul dintre trimișii săi. (Coran 2:285)

> Cel care nu crede în Allah, în îngerii Săi, în Cărțile Sale, în trimișii Săi și în Ziua de Apoi, acela pribegește în cea mai îndepărtată rătăcire. (Coran 4:136)

Crezul în îngeri este unul dintre principiile credinței și precede credința în Cărțile lui Allah și ale mesagerilor săi, deoarece Allah a dezvăluit Cărțile mesagerilor săi prin intermediul îngerilor. Negarea existenței îngerilor înseamnă negarea existenței lui Allah, cel ce emite revelația; negarea duce la respingerea revelării Cărților divine și, în consecință, a mesajului mesagerilor (Aziz 2011: 5).

Din perspectiva islamului, credința nu este corectă fără credința în îngeri. De aceea, Coranul menționează credința în îngeri înaintea credinței în Cărțile divine și în mesageri. Potrivit doctrinei islamice din Coran, oamenii au fost făcuți din lut, iar îngerii au fost creați de Allah din lumina (*Nur*) (vezi Ibrahim 1997: 79). Îngerii sunt ființe spirituale care se supun poruncilor lui Allah; de asemenea, ei sunt trimiși de Allah pentru a-i ajuta pe profeții și urmașii lui. Toți se supun lui Dumnezeu și împlinesc poruncile lui, sunt creați în așa fel încât întotdeauna să se supună și niciodată să nu acționeze împotriva poruncilor divine, să slujească continuu și să nu obosească a-i sluji lui Allah. Îngerii au fost creați să facă ce poruncește Allah: "Se tem de Domnul lor de deasupra lor, şi fac ceea ce li se poruncește" (Coran 16:50); „Oh, voi, cei care credeți! Păziți-vă pe voi înșivă și familiile voastre de un Foc ale cărui vreascuri sunt oamenii și pietrele și peste care sunt îngeri neînduplecați și aspri, care nu se răzvrătesc împotriva lui Allah în ceea ce le poruncește și care fac ce li se poruncește" (Coran 66:6).

Îngerii reprezintă lumea nevăzută și sunt ființe pur spirituale ce-l adoră pe Allah. Ei nu au natură divină, sunt doar slujitorii lui Allah, sunt cu totul şi cu totul supuși lui, făcând întotdeauna exact ce li se poruncește: „Mesia nu se va dezice niciodată de a fi rob lui Allah, și nici îngerii apropiați, iar pe aceia care se dezic de slujirea lui și se arată trufași îi va aduna la el laolaltă" (Coran 4:172). Ca slujitori ai lui Allah, îngerii au misiunea de a prezenta oamenilor voința lui Allah (Seda 2002: 14). Îngerii sunt canalele prin care credincioșii musulmani pot deveni conștienți de legile și scopurile lui în viața lor; ei sunt slujitorii lui Dumnezeu și pot lua multe forme pentru a-i îndeplini poruncile, dar, spre deosebire de oameni, nu au liber arbitru, libertatea de a acționa și a hotărî după propria voință. Îngerii sunt obligați să se supună poruncilor lui Allah, sunt fără păcat și, deci, pot intra în prezența tronului lui Allah, dar pot comunica și cu oamenii (Sarwar 2001: 242).

Îngerii nu se plictisesc și nu obosesc să se închine lui Dumnezeu: „Ai lui sunt cei din ceruri și de pe pământ. Iar aceia care sunt lângă el, nu se socotesc prea mari pentru a-l adora și nici nu ostenesc. Ei îi aduc laudă noaptea și ziua, fără oprire“ (Coran 21:19-20).

Din perspectivă islamică, îngerii sunt ființe spirituale create de Allah pentru a îndeplini diverse sarcini ce le-au fost încredințate. Îngerii nu au corpuri fizice, dar Coranul îi descrie ca având aripi, unii dintre ei au două, alţii trei, iar alţii mai multe: "Mărire lui Allah, Creatorul cerurilor şi al Pământului, cel care a făcut din îngeri trimiși cu câte două aripi şi cu câte trei şi cu câte patru. El adaugă făpturii ceea ce voiește, căci Allah este cu putere peste toate“ (Coran 35:1). Îngerii sunt întotdeauna descriși ca bărbați. Există mai multe tipuri de ființe angelice, care nu pot fi numărate, fiecare îndeplinindu-și funcția sa. Numărul exact al îngerilor și îndatoririle lor sunt știute numai de Allah. „Și nu-i cunoaște pe oștenii Domnului tău decât numai El“ (Coran 74:13). Aceștia formează ierarhii și ordine cosmice variate, în sensul că au dimensiuni, statut și merite diferite. „Și nu este nici unul printre noi care să nu aibă un loc cunoscut! Noi suntem aranjați în rânduri și suntem cei care aducem laudă“ (Coran 37:164-166). Allah le-a atribuit îngerilor funcţii specifice pe care trebuie să le îndeplinească, a informat despre numele şi activităţile câtorva dintre ei, dar despre alţii nu a dat informații. Musulmanul credincios, însă, trebuie să creadă în toți și în faptul că fac parte din creaţia lui Allah.

Îngerii pot lua forme umane în anumite circumstanțe care implică oameni. Musulmanii cred că, deși prin natura lor sunt invizibili, îngerii există în întregul univers. Fiecare musulman are doi îngeri păzitori: „El are îngeri care-l însoțesc unul după altul, înaintea lui și în urma lui, care-l veghează din porunca lui Allah“ (Coran 13:11), îngeri care înregistrează faptele bune și rele ale omului: „Însă peste voi sunt veghetori cinstiți, care scriu. Ei știu ce faceți voi“ (Coran 82:10-12). Îngerii au fost creați pentru a interacționa cu oamenii și a le aduce mesajul divin. Niciodată nu sunt departe, ci mereu în contact cu oamenii, în special când aceștia se roagă sau se gândesc la Dumnezeu (Sarwar 2002: 243). Funcția îngerilor este de a acționa ca emisari și agenți între Allah şi mesagerii săi dintre oameni, pentru a-i duce la îndeplinire voia (Kuehn 2019: 337): "A coborât cu el Duhul cel credincios (îngerul Gavril) peste inima ta, pentru ca tu să fii dintre prevenitori, într-o limbă arabă limpede“ (Coran 26:193-195).

Cel mai mare dintre îngeri este Gabriel. Profetul islamului l-a văzut în forma sa originală. De asemenea, însoțitorii tronului lui Dumnezeu sunt printre cei mai mari îngeri. Ei îi iubesc pe credincioși și-l roagă pe Dumnezeu să le ierte păcatele (Mufti 2006): „El știe ce este înaintea lor și ce este în urma lor. Iar ei nu mijlocesc decât pentru acela de care el este mulțumit, dar ei sunt cu teamă de El“ (Coran 21:28). Sarcina lor principală, din care derivă și numele lor, este de a transmite mesajele lui Allah profeților săi aleși. Această mare onoare este atribuită în principal liderului lor, Gabriel, mesagerul ceresc al lui Dumnezeu pentru omenire. El va transmite revelația de la Allah către mesagerii săi umani. Dumnezeu spune: "Cine este dușman lui Gavriil? El a pogorât [Coranul] în inima ta, cu îngăduința lui Allah, adeverind ceea ce se afla dinaintea lui, ca îndreptare și bunăvestire pentru credincioși. Spuneți: cine este vrăjmaș lui Gabriel, pentru că el aduce (revelația) în inima voastră prin voia lui Dumnezeu...?“ (Coran 2:97)

Arhanghelul Gabriel (Jibra'eel) controlează comunicarea revelației divine către profeți. El a adus revelația coranică profetului Mahomed; îndatoriea lui a fost să transmită relevația lui Allah profeților și mesagerilor (Ibrahim 1997: 78). Îngerul Gabriel a fost intermediarul prin care s-a comunicat revelația sfintei cărți a musulmanilor, Coranul: „(Coranul) este cuvântul unui trimis darnic (arhanghelul Gavriil), înzestrat cu mare putere, cu vază la Stăpânul Tronului“ (Coran 81:19-20). Cât privește aducerea mesajului lui Allah, islamul învață că Allah nu comunică direct cu oamenii, în schimb folosește ființe speciale (oameni și îngeri) pentru a-și transmite mesajul.

Cu privire la îngeri găsim referințe în Coran, în faptele şi cuvintele lui Mahomed. Cei mai importanți îngerii din islam sunt: Gabriel, a cărui responsabilitate era transmiterea revelației către profet; Mihail, înger răspunzător de bunăstare și compasiune; Azrael, îngerul morții; și Israfil sau Seraphiel, cel ce va suna din trâmbiță la judecata de apoi. În concluzie, conform islamului, operarea, întreținerea și controlul întregului univers, inclusiv al lumii noastre, le face Allah prin intermediul îngerilor lui (Hadi 2008: 5, 7). Astfel, „cel ce este dușman al lui Allah, al îngerilor săi și al trimișilor săi, al lui Gavriil și al lui Mihail, [să știe că] Allah este dușmanul necredincioșilor!“ (Coran 2:98) În percepție islamică, mijlocirea este întotdeauna o onoare pe care Allah o acordă mesagerilor și slujitorilor săi evlavioși. Când Allah vrea să ierte păcatele slujitorilor săi, poate face din mijlocirea slujitorilor săi evlavioși un mijloc de a ierta păcătosul și de a-și onora slujitorul evlavios (Aziz 2011: 58).

Textele Coranului și Sunnah menționează caracteristicile unor astfel de oameni privilegiați, pentru care îngerilor li se permite să mijlocească, să caute iertare și să ceară binecuvântarea lui Allah. De asemenea, îi citează pe acei oameni nefericiți împotriva cărora îngerii îl invocă și îi cer lui Allah să aducă distrugerea și eșec.

Allah ne spune că purtătorii Tronului și Îngerii care sunt în preajma Tronului îl slăvesc pe Domnul lor și cred în el, i se supun și cer iertare pentru cei ce cred, se roagă pentru iertarea credincioșilor și în special a celor care se pocăiesc (Aziz

2011: 73): „Doamne! Tu îți întinzi peste toate lucrurile îndurarea și știința Ta. Deci iartă-i pe cei care-ți cer iertare, se căiesc și urmează calea ta, și păzește-i de chinul iadului, Doamne! Și fă-i pe ei să intre în grădinile Edenului, pe care tu le-ai promis, ca și pe cei care au fost evlavioși dintre părinții lor, soțiile lor și urmașii lor, căci Tu ești Cel Puternic [și] Înțelept [Al-'Aziz, Al-Hakim]. Și păzește-i pe ei de cele rele! Iar acela pe care-l păzești de rele, în Ziua Aceea, de acela Te-ai îndurat. Și aceasta este marea izbândă!" (Coran 40:7-9) „Mai că se despică cerurile în înălțimi, când îngerii laudă mărirea Domnului lor și roagă de iertare pentru cei de pe pământ. Allah este iertător și îndurător [Al-Ghafur, Ar-Rahim]" (Coran 42:5).

Superioritatea lui Cristos față de Îngeri

Superioritatea lui Cristos este dovedită nu numai prin relația pe care o are cu Dumnezeirea, ci și prin relația Sa cu îngerii. Când ajungem să discutăm despre îngeri, intrăm în subiectul considerat „cel mai interesant și mai dificil dintre toate" (Barth 1961: 169). În Vechiul Testament, îngerii sunt prezentați ca ființe personale, spirituale, cu statut de mesageri și slujitori ai lui Dumnezeu. Psalmul 148: 2-5 îi prezintă pe îngeri ca fiind produsul creației lui Dumnezeu. Actul creării lor a fost simultan. Îngerii au fost înzestrați cu putere și privilegii (sunt „fiii" lui Dumnezeu prin creație și au plăcerea de a I se închina), dar limitați în spațiu și putere (2 Petru 2: 11), în inteligență (1 Petru 1: 11-12) și în sfințenie (Isaia 14:21). Îngerii sunt responsabili moral înaintea lui Dumnezeu, Creatorul lor. Condiția inițială a existenței lor este sfințenia, iar catalogarea lor ca buni sau răi se face în funcție de cel pe care-l slujesc (Dickson 1975: 25-28).

Fiecare referire la îngeri este în legătură cu un alt subiect. Astfel, îngerii nu pot fi tema unei discuții independente. Îngerii sunt direcționați către Dumnezeu și om, iar în particular către persoana și lucrarea lui Cristos (Matei 4:11, Luca 4:10-11). Menționarea lor se face mereu pentru a da mai multe date cu privire la Dumnezeu, la ceea ce face și la modul în care face El ceva (Barth 1961: 371).

Autorul Epistolei către Evrei vrea să demonstreze că Isus este superior îngerilor. Iudaismul acorda îngerilor un rol foarte important, aspect vizibil în Vechiul Testament. Îngerii erau considerați mediatori ai legii date de Dumnezeu (Galateni 3:19). Având la bază o astfel de mentalitate, probabil că unii dintre cititori aveau tendința de a-i preamări, nejustificat, pe îngeri, acordându-le reverența cuvenită exclusiv lui Dumnezeu. Cristologia deficitară (lucrarea și persoana lui Isus erau privite ca inferioare) de care se presupune ca suferea auditoriul, este, probabil, motivul comparației dintre Cristos și îngeri (Daryl 1990: 171). Cel mai extins pasaj cu privire la îngeri din Epistola către Evrei este 1:5-2: 9, care urmărește să stabilească superioritatea lui Cristos față de îngeri. Cu toate că a fost făcut pentru puțin timp (prin actul întrupării, vezi Filipeni 2: 6-11) mai prejos de îngeri (Evrei 2:9), Cristos le este superior în orice privință.

Care este relația Fiului cu îngerii? În cele ce urmează vom analiza problema superiorității lui Cristos, dovedită prin poziția și esența (natura) Sa.

Superior prin Poziție

Nume Superior (Evrei 1:4)

Subiectul superiorității lui Cristos față de îngeri se naște din afirmația finală din Evrei 1:3, "stă la dreapta Măririi". Aceasta nu înseamnă că Isus este pur și simplu unul dintr-o mulțime de îngeri, ci El este înălțat peste ei. Dacă în Evrei 1:3, superioritatea este sugerată prin poziția de onoare la care a fost înălțat, în 1:4 este indicată prin numele moștenit. Acest verset are două scopuri: concluzionează afirmația introductivă și pregătește scena primei secțiuni.

Autorul afirmă ca Isus a devenit τοσουτω κρειττων față de îngeri. Afirmarea superiorității lui Cristos include un cuvânt caracteristic Epistolei către Evrei: κρειττων. κρειττων este un cuvânt-cheie în epistolă, întâlnit de nu mai puțin 13 ori (Evrei 1:4, 6:9, 7:7, 7:19, 7:22, 8:6 etc.). Cuvântul apare și în LXX (Septuaginta). Ideea este a unei ființe superioare în trăsături, în funcție („mult mai bun, diferit, superior") și arată spre posesia unui statut înalt în comparație cu altcineva („superior față de", vezi Louw și Nida 1989: 623). Ideea sugerată este a superiorității în demnitate, valoare sau avantaje, concepul fundamental fiind cel de putere, și nu de bunătate (Westcott 1977: 17).

Fiul a devenit γενομενος. Rădăcina cuvântului este verbul γινομαι, care are mai multe sensuri: „a forma", „a fi", „a deveni", „a se întâmpla", „a se mișca", „a aparține". Sensul în Evrei 1:4 este de „a fi", adică a poseda caracteristici sigure (Louw și Nida 1989: 158). Fiul este mai bun decât îngerii, pentru că a moștenit κεκληρονομηκεν un nume care atestă prin el însuși supremația. Rădăcina acestui cuvânt este verbul κλερονομεω, care gravitează în jurul ideii de moștenire. El este „Moștenitor", în sensul de moștenitor natural, numit prin hotărâre sau prevedere legală. Ideea este a posesiei de drept. În Evrei 1:4, verbul este la indicativ perfect activ, indicând că numele moștenit de Cristos a fost, este și va fi o posesie permanentă (Kittel 1964/2: 766). Acest ονομα moștenit este nespecificat. În Israel, precum în celelalte popoare, exista conștiența semnificației atașate numelui și puterea care rezidă din el. Numele indică o persoană, stabilește identitatea și este o parte indispensabilă a personalității. Se credea că omul este constituit din trup, suflet și nume. Philo spunea că numele este al doilea lucru atașat esenței fundamentale, la fel cum umbra însoțește trupul (Kittel 1964/5: 254, 261). Numele semnifică, în special în mintea iudeului, caracterul fundamental al cuiva și al lucrării sale. Numele nu este doar o etichetă asociată accidental cu cel care-l poartă, ci este expresia esenței (Hughes EP 1977: 50). Întrucât Isus a fost prezentat ca Fiu, idee ce devine tema următoarelor citate, este clar că numele mult mai bun moștenit de El este cel de Fiu; acesta implică cea mai apropiată și intimă relație (Guthrie 1988: 70). Cristos a moștenit numele de Fiu, așa cum a moștenit toate lucrurile (Evrei 1:2), prin numirea eternă a Tatălui.

Există mai multe teorii cu privire la calitatea de „Fiu" moștenită de Isus. *Prima teorie* este a calității de fiu prin *întrupare*. Cristos a existat din eternitate, dar nu a fost „Fiu" decât de la întrupare. A *doua teorie* este a calității de fiu prin *botez*, și susține că la botez Cristos a fost declarat „Fiul lui Dumnezeu" (Matei 3:17). A *treia teorie* este a calității de fiu prin înviere, și susține că înainte de evenimentul învierii nu se poate afirma că Cristos a fost Fiul lui Dumnezeu. Învierea este dovada clară a dumnezeirii și a calității de Fiu divin. Isus nu a fost făcut „Fiu" prin înviere, ci învierea I-a validat statutul de Fiu. Cea de-a *patra teorie* este a calității de fiu prin *înalțare*. Înălțarea nu L-a făcut „Fiu", ci a declarat calitatea de Fiu divin și victoria Sa asupra păcatului și a morții. Cea de-a *cincea teorie* este a calității de fiu etern, care susține pre-existența ontologică a Fiului (Walvoord 1969: 39, 40).

În Evrei se vorbește despre calitatea de Fiu ca fiind un atribut permanent al lui Cristos, nu un titlu care I-a fost dat sau pe care L-a dobândit la înălțare (Ellingworth 1933: 105). Ideea este întărită prin folosirea în Evrei 1:3 a lui ειμι la timpul prezent, timp care indică permanența.

Inchinare Absolută (Evrei 1:6b)

Dacă prin folosirea lui πρωτοτοκος în Evrei 1:6a, autorul exprimă unicitatea relației de care se bucură Fiul, în Evrei 1:6b continuă să argumenteze supremația axiomatică a Fiului față de îngeri, citând Psalmul 97:7b din LXX. Originea citatului din Evrei 1:6b este considerată de unii ca fiind traducerea grecească (LXX) a cântării lui Moise din Deuteronom 32:43 (vezi Kistemaker 1984: 167).

Textul din Evrei 1:6b, προσκυνησατωσαν αυτω παντες αγγελοι θεος, se găsește numai în LXX. În loc de αγγελοι θεος, unii citesc αγγελοι αυτου sau υιου θεου. Autorul folosește αγγελοι θεου întrucât se potrivește cu scopul argumentului său: superioritatea lui Cristos față de îngeri (Isaac 1992: 167). Acest psalm intră în categoria psalmilor de întronare. Având cadru escatologic, Psalmul 97 îl prezintă pe Dumnezeu ca Domn veșnic peste întreg universul. În contextul original se referă la închinarea sau omagiul adus lui Dumnezeu, dar autorul înțelege textul ca profeție cu privire la înălțarea Fiului (Lane 1991: 28).

Poziția și modul de relaționare a îngerilor față de Fiul sunt exprimate de autor prin folosirea verbului προσκυνω. Verbul προσκυνω mai este folosit în Evrei 11:21 și deseori în LXX. În Noul Testament nu este folosit niciodată în relație cu un obiect, iar închinarea este întotdeauna dată unei ființe care se presupune că este divină. Sensul este de a „adora“, „a se închina“, adică „a te închina cuiva ca act de reverență, teamă sau implorare“; „a exprima închinarea nu numai prin poziția corpului, dar și printr-o atitudine și activitate reverențioasă“ (Louw și Nida 1989: 218, 540). Verbul este la imperativ aorist activ, iar ideea sugerată este a autorității (Cristos este Dumnezeu) și încuviințării (închinarea adusă de ființele angelice dovedește autoritatea Fiului).

Isus este mai mare decât îngerii datorită statutului special conferit de numele moștenit. Acest statut implică ideea autorității, autoritate recunoscută prin închinarea adusă de παντες αγγελοι.

Superior prin Natură

Natură Superioară: Fiu (Evrei 1:7)

Următorul pas în argumentul autorului privind superioritatea lui Cristos este opoziția dintre natura schimbătoare a îngerilor și caracterul etern al Fiului. Contrastul este accentuat prin utilizarea construcției μεν (1:7a)... δε (1:8a).

Citatul folosit pentru susținerea argumentului este versiunea din LXX a Psalmului 104:4. Prepoziția προς din Evrei 1:8 și 1:13 introduce o adresare directă către Fiul, dar în 1:7 nu are aceeași funcție. În multe traduceri ale Psalmului 104:4, cuvântul αγγελος nu apare, dar în LXX apare frecvent (Kistemaker 1984: 41). Una dintre trăsăturile evidente ale Psalmului 104 este combinarea stilului specific imnului cu adresarea directă către Yahweh. Tema celebrată este măreția creației universului, înfăptuit de Dumnezeu, care este prezentat ca singurul Creator puternic (Allen 1983: 28). Înțelesul citatului este ambiguu, iar interpretările pot fi: Dumnezeu face din vânturi îngeri ai Săi sau face îngerii Săi din vânturi. Înțelesul nu este de a arătă semnificația lui πνευματα φλογα. Scopul citatului este să stabilească faptul că îngerii nu sunt mai mult decât λειτουργους lui Dumnezeu, și astfel sunt subordonați Fiului. Cuvântul λειτουργος este foarte rar folosit cu sens sacru. Există cinci referințe în Noul Testament, trei la Pavel, iar două în Evrei (1:7, 8:2). Sensul transmis este de slujitor (Kittel 1964/4: 230). Folosirea lui ποιων marchează un contrast. Statutul de ființă creată și efemeritatea slujirii îngerilor sunt plasate în contrast cu statutul și suveranitatea eternă a Fiului. Prin închinarea adusă, îngerii recunosc că Cristos are natură superioară. Ei sunt slujitori supuși lui Dumnezeu, iar Fiul prin esența Sa este Dumnezeu din eternitate.

Existență Superioară: Creator (Evrei 1:10)
Următoarea piesă în construirea argumentului este furnizată de Psalmul 102: 25, care prezintă demnitatea superioară a Fiului creator în contrast cu ordinea creată. Psalmul 102 îl prezintă pe Dumnezeu ca Împărat: El este întronat pe veci, iar calitatea de împărat a fost manifestată la creație. Înțelegerea cristologică a citatului (Ps. 102:5) este facilitată de LXX, unde Dumnezeu se adresează unuia pe care Dumnezeu îl numește κυριε. Termenul κυριε arată „exersarea personală a puterii peste oameni sau lucruri". Omul poate fi atât subiectul care exercită puterea (domn), cât și obiectul (slujitor). În relație cu Dumnezeu, omul este obiectul. Aplicat la Isus, cuvântul implică putere legală și autoritate deplină, o poziție egală cu Dumnezeu, poziția Domnului înviat (Kittel 1964/2: 1040, 1042). Termenul trimite la conceptul de relație, care implică ideea de dependență.

Expresia κατ αρχας introduce activitatea cosmică de la început a Fiului. Termenul αρχας relaționat la noțiunea de timp are sensul de „început, principiu", iar la cea de rang, sensul de „putere, dominație". În LXX, de obicei αρχας indică începutul temporal. Este folosit frecvent pentru a exprima dominația, puterea, poziția de putere, poziția de conducere și, în final, persoana care exercită influență. În Noul Testement este folosit frecvent cu sensul de „început" (Kittel 1964/1: 479, 481). Fiul există din eternitate, dar existența Lui nu este pasivă, ci activă. El este singurul prin care Dumnezeu εθεμελιωσας a pus fundamentul întregului univers. Verbul θεμελιω apare numai aici, în Evrei, și înseamnă " piatră de la temelie" sau "fundament". În sens literal este folosit cu referire la temelia unei case sau cetăți (Kittel 1964/3: 63). Pavel sumarizează în Coloseni 1:16: „Toate lucrurile au fost făcute prin El și pentru El."

El este Domnul, iar îngerii sunt închinătorii; El este Creatorul, ei sunt creaturile; El este infinit în ființă și în putere, ei sunt finiți și dependenți. Toată creația poartă amprenta timpului, dar "Isus Cristos este același ieri și azi și în veci" (Evrei 13: 8).

Destin Superior: Domn Veșnic (Evrei 1: 13-14)
Argumentul atinge punctul culminant în Evrei 1:13 prin citarea Psalmului 110:1. Folosirea perfectului ειρηκεν sugerează că actul instalării, la care se face referire, a avut loc în trecut, dar are efect continuu. Psalmul 110 este un psalm regal (interpretat de autor ca psalm mesianic) și conține o profeție despre un împărat israelit din perioada pre-exilică, căruia Dumnezeu i-a promis ca răsplată un tron la dreapta Sa. Psalmul 110:1 este unul dintre textele Scripturii iudaice cel mai des citat în Evrei. Este citat sau se fac referiri la el de 33 de ori în Noul Testament, iar în Evrei de 12 ori. Interpreții l-au aplicat mai multor persoane: lui David, Ezechia (vezi în secolul II la Iustin Martirul), iar mai târziu lui Mesia. În toate aceste

interpretări, ideea transmisă este de persoană care se bucură de un favor special din partea lui Dumnezeu. A fost citat de Hippolit pentru a dovedi că Cristos este un monarh ceresc, mai degrabă decât unul pământesc. Alții l-au citat pentru a argumenta natura divină și pentru a afirma gloria lui Cristos (vezi Hay 1973: 25, 28, 33, 48). Temele răspândite în întreaga expunere a autorului sunt cuprinse în acest psalm: filiația, suveranitatea, preoția și întronarea (Isaac 1992: 179). De altfel, Buchanan definește Epistola către Evrei ca "un midrash homiletic bazat pe Psalmul 110" (în Ellingworth 1933: 130).

Psalmul 110:1 se axează pe tema „șederii" și este văzut ca afirmare a statutului lui Cristos cel înălțat. Expresia καθου εκ δεξιων μου nu este doar o descriere simbolică a locului de cinste, ci și a sursei autorității și puterii. Șederea εκ δεξιων μου a fost privită de rabini ca simbol al pasivității. În lumea antică, partea dreaptă era identificată cu măreția, puterea și divinitatea. În iudaism era un simbol asociat cu superioritatea și favoarea. În creștinismul timpuriu, partea dreaptă era înțeleasă ca implicând puterea divină, adesea asociată cu creația și conducerea lumii și aproape întotdeauna cu salvarea (Hay 1993: 53, 56). Totuși, șederea lui Cristos nu implică o stare de pasivitate, întrucât El le pregătește un loc urmașilor Săi, așadar înțelesul este: „unul care are demnitatea regală egală cu Mine (Vincent 2010: 392).

În Evrei 1:3, Isus este prezentat ca stând El însuși la dreapta lui Dumnezeu, iar 1:13 explică faptul că întronarea s-a realizat prin voia și la inițiativa Tatălui. Întrebarea retorică conclusivă din Evrei 1:14 este un comentariu exegetic la Psalmul 104:4 (1: 7). Desemnarea îngerilor λειτουργικα πνεθματα are echivalent în cuvintele λειτουργους și πνευματα din Evrei 1:7. Îngerii au loc clar în oikonomia răscumpărării (ei sunt mediatorii Legii, vezi Galateni 3:19, și slujitorii celor mântuiți, vezi Evrei 1:14), dar nu stau la dreapta lui Dumnezeu (Lane 1991: 31). Cristos are demnitatea, poziția cea mai înaltă. El este co-regent cu Tatăl. În schimb, îngerii αγγελος sunt duhuri slujitoare, trimise de Dumnezeu să slujească celor ce vor moșteni mântuirea. Atât cuvântul ebraic דְאָלְמַ, cât și grecescul αγγελος se trag din rădăcina verbală αποστελλω, care înseamnă „a trimite". Îngerul este trimis să îndeplinească o misiune specială (Hughes EP 1977: 70).

Destinul îngerilor este să slujească, de aceea nici un înger nu a fost invitat să stea la dreapta lui Dumnezeu. Destinul lui Cristos este să domnească (Apocalipsa 19:15-17). Domnia Lui este permanentă, fapt sugerat prin verbul καθου folosit la timpul prezent. Prin înălțarea la loc de cinste, Isus devine Domnul lumii și împărtășește gloria, puterea și dumnezeirea lui Dumnezeu Tatăl.

Concluzii

În tradiția musulmană, credința în îngeri este un principiu fundamental al crezului, temelia revelației lui Allah. Mai mult, ea precede credința în cărțile lui Allah și în mesagerii Lui, credința cuiva fiind considerată incompletă fără ea. Din perspectivă islamică, statutul lui Isus este inferior îngerilor, fiind considerat doar unul dintre profeți, în timp ce îngerii sunt socotiți fără păcat, capabili să intre în prezența tronului lui Allah și să mijlocească pentru iertarea credincioșilor, rolul lor fiind de agenți ai lui Allah ce transmit oamenilor mesajul divin.

Prin contrast cu această perspectivă, Epistola către Evrei face comparații între Vechiul și Noul Legământ pentru a arăta că Isus este superior în orice fel. Poziția de prim rang a lui Cristos cel înviat și înălțat este confirmată și de superioritatea Sa față de ființele angelice. Numele care-L distinge pe Cristos de îngeri și-I dă o poziție superioară este de „Fiu", nume care dovedește onoarea și demnitatea, măreția la care a fost înălțat Cristos. Superioritatea nu este obișnuită, ci este una a puterii, domniei, calității, supremației în rang și demnitate. Primul aspect al superiorității este permanența posesiunii (Tofană 1996: 103). Superioritatea lui Cristos față de îngeri, în calitate de Fiu, este subliniată și prin actul închinării îngerilor (Evrei 1:6). Demnitatea pozițională nu corespunde clasei îngerilor, ci numai unicului Fiu al lui Dumnezeu, destinat să domnească.

Folosirea lui ο ποιων în Evrei 1:7 scoate în evidență superioritatea lui Cristos față de îngeri. Statutul îngerilor este de creaturi, slujitori ai voii Sale. Schimbarea lor accentuează caracterul neschimbat, etern al Fiului, și subliniază inferioritatea îngerilor față de Fiul (MacArthur 1983: 32).

Psalmul 110 joacă un rol important în dovedirea superiorității lui Cristos nu numai ca Fiu și Domn, dar și ca Mare Preot și Răscumpărător. Acțiunea din Evrei 1:13 făcută de Tatăl în favoarea Fiului constituie încoronarea supremației Fiului față de îngeri și de întreaga creație. Nici unui înger nu i s-a permis să stea la dreapta lui Dumnezeu; numai Fiul ocupă acest loc (Filipeni 2:10). El este destinat să fie Domnul întregului univers. Prin contrast, destinul îngerilor este să continue să slujească, de aceea Cristos le este în mod infinit superior. Isus Cristos este superior pentru că a existat dintotdeauna. El este superior îngerilor prin numele moștenit, prin închinarea primită, prin natura ființei, existența și destinul Său.

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COMRADES IN CRISES: COMPARING THE WRITINGS ON ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHES IN HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER* AND GHOSH'S *GUN ISLAND*

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ABSTRACT. In recent years, environment and its related issues are the most discussed and drafted topic across the world, both in physical and social sciences. As the physical sciences focus on the technical aspects of a subject, the humanities are responsible for presenting a more personal and compassionate perspective. The recent literature emerging from various parts of the world, particularly from Africa and India, highlights this responsibility. This paper analyzes two novels, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019), which depict distinct environmental catastrophes in the two respective geographies. These narratives portray the devastating effects on local tribes and communities, resulting in the migration of both humans and non-humans, thereby connecting the two geographies beyond physical boundaries. Using the lens of eco-critical study, this paper aims to undertake a comparative analysis of the present-day environmentally degraded conditions of Nigeria and India. This analysis highlights the urgent need for both countries to implement effective environmental policies and practices to mitigate the negative impacts of human activities on their ecosystems.

KEY WORDS: **e**nvironment, India, Nigeria, Sundarbans, comparative studies

Introduction

In the last decade of 20th century and the first two of 21st, environment became the centre of political debates, policy making, aggressive activism and holistic economical progression. Even in literature, writers and critics took this field of study to present their views, thoughts and ideas which formed various related theories in works like Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Hellen Tiffin and Graham Huggan's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2006), Vandana

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Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988), etc. Pramod K. Nayar in his book *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* (2010) defines eco-criticism as:

> A critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment. (Nayar 2010: 242)

Today the material practices and industrial expansions are at the forefront with the environment, its associated agencies and their ethical utilization, at the backseat. There are regular reports and studies about natural resources being compromised for economic and consumerist growth across the Earth suggesting global warming as the biggest catastrophe to unfold. Pippa argues that, "because of these temporal and planetary implications of anthropogenic environmental destruction, no act or result of damage can be seen as purely local" (Marland 2013: 854). In the field of literature and academia too, the race of representation of nature, its abuse, and their subsequent effects on living conditions of not just individuals but societies have also paced up. With eco-critical theory, the former colonial centres and steadily progressing societies like Africa and India are finally getting a voice in a generally euro-centric discourse. This change has been acknowledged by Roman Bartosch in his work *EnvironMentality – Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction* (2013), as he says:

> In the beginning, ecocriticism sought to trace 'the natural' in cultural artefacts, claiming that 'nature' had almost been forgotten in modernist and postmodernist times – despite its pivotal role in human life. Ecocriticism today is a diverse field but all approaches share two main objectives: that ecocriticism constitute an active contribution to meeting a contemporary social challenge - environmental crisis - and that it provides a way of re-assessing scholarly practice with regard to the role nature has been assigned in academic studies. (Bartosch 2013: 10)

Helon Habila through his novel *Oil on Water* (2010) and Amitav Ghosh through *Gun Island* (2019) have tried to portray the reality on-ground and have discussed the different catastrophic outcomes negligence can lead towards. *Oil on Water* foregrounds the prevailing Nigerian politics around Oil and how through years it has led to violent protests, civil unrest, economic disparity, and a general distress among the masses. Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* on the other hand goes beyond geographies to draw similarities of crises in human and non-human lives.

The novel also shows how migration becomes inevitable in such scenarios, and jeopardizes communities as well as their age long cultural practices and traditions. This paper therefore focuses on the alarming environmental conditions as highlighted in the works with respect to the two delta regions, The Niger and The Sundarbans. The abuse by oil companies and growing industrial presence in the regions respectively has affected the biodiversity of the two lands resulting in unforeseen events. The study provides a comparative study of these catastrophes in the two regions. Finally, the ever-happening movement in the regions and what it means for the migrants and the cities and towns they leave and further acquire will also be studied thoroughly.

The Connection

In the 1990s, Nigeria experienced a period of political turmoil and violence under the dictatorship of Abacha. Despite international support and protests against the government, military, and oil industries, environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed in 1995.

In 2004, a massive undersea earthquake struck near Sumatra, triggering Tsunami waves that killed over 225,000 people in 14 countries, causing extensive damage worth billions of dollars. While India's southern states were among the hardest hit, the Sundarbans in the eastern region acted as a natural fortress, saving thousands of lives in Bengal and Bangladesh.

Geographical variations, content, motives, actors, and other obvious variables divide the narratives in several ways and forms, which, on the surface, appear to be just and valid. But on the other hand, the similarities are profound and unavoidable. The deterioration of the environment, oil wars, trafficking, migration, poverty, unemployment, and the unpredictability and fickleness of life bring together not only the stories, but also the humans and their moments of joys along with their eras of sufferings. These similarities, and parallels, of India and Nigeria, of the Sundarbans and the Niger Delta and of writers' subjectivity in treatment of the issues will serve as the foundation for further arguments in the subsequent sections.

The Burning Delta

Habila's novel *Oil on Water* falls under the category of 'petro-fiction' and explores the ramifications of the region's 'vicious ecological war' waged in the name of oil extraction (Feldner 2018: 1), "a war whose victims are a hapless people and the land on which they have lived and thrived for centuries" (Okonta and Douglas 2003: 64). Habila writes about two journalists on a quest to enquire and find out about a kidnapped white woman, wife of a senior petrochemical industrialist, in the oil rich but heavily conflicted islands of the delta region. The brutalized environment acts as the main actor in the eco-drama throughout the narrative. Although primarily, the war only seems to have two agents; the federal soldiers instituted by the governments to safeguard oil industries and the armed rebels fighting for the cause of protecting their homelands and revered environment, there are obviously the local masses and communities that are caught in the middle, changing homes and struggling to survive amidst violent clashes.

The USEPA's 2021 report on global greenhouse gas emissions reveals a significant increase in carbon emissions from fossil fuels since 1900, with fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes contributing to 78% of the total greenhouse gas emissions increase from 1970 to 2011. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) 2020 Annual Climate Report indicates a steady increase in land and ocean temperature since 1880, with the average rate of increase being twice as high in the last 40 years. Developing economies like India and Nigeria face a greater challenge in balancing development and natural resource conservation while preserving their culture and history.

Exploiting the Delta's resources to develop other places (mainly Europe and America) while neglecting the region has resulted in serious environmental deterioration, pollution, loss of traditional farming, and the local fishing industry. Byron in *Different Shades of Green* (2014) argues that, "this degradation has mostly been rendered invisible to the rest of the world as a result of the continent's extreme marginality both in imperial representation and in the world economic system" (Byron 2014: 11). As the Oil industries grew, other industries naturally went down. In his eye opening and famous report 'We Thought It Was Oil' Bassey notes that

> oil replaced agriculture as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy by the early 1970s. Commercial oil extraction began in 1958 and rose to a production level of 17,000 barrels a day. By 1966, production had risen to 420,000 barrels a day and hit two million barrels a day between 1970 and 1980. (Bassey 2002: 5)

Nigeria has lost 50 percent of its forest cover in last two decades and is losing the remaining at 5 percent every year. By 2047, it is projected that all of its forest cover will be lost to oil and charcoal mining. As a result, militancy, kidnapping, oil theft, and unthinkable health risks emerge. The oil spills in the region leads to the death of hundreds of species of flora and fauna every year. Habila's characters Rufus and Zaq, both journalists, experience this degradation and pollution way before they reach the destination they ought to: "We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw birds dropped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed while – bellied between tree roots" (Habila 2010: 8).

Oil on Water is a continuation of Habila's attempt of broadcasting Nigeria and its history through narrative fiction in the lines of his other works. The first novel *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) revolves around the Nigeria of 1990s and what was going on in the minds and lives of Nigerians during the horrific time of military dictatorship. His second, *Measuring Time* (2009) portrays the war ridden Nigeria through the eyes of twins, one a soldier and other a scholar-educator, and the internal human confrontations moving alongside nation's turbulent journey since independence. The reference to Abacha and his rule in the beginning was not only to hint on the gravity of the prevailing condition, the same time when protests and activism was at peak and Ken Saro was first put to jail and then subsequently hanged, but also to argue that his rule divided the independent state of Nigeria into two before and after phases. "Ken Saro's manifesto *Genocide in Nigeria* (1992) claimed that the Ogoni people were left 'half-deaf and prone to respiratory diseases' and that their main livelihoods, farming and fishing, were being destroyed by the poisoning of air, water, and soil" (82, in Byron 2014: 143).

After the discovery of oil in the Delta region in 1956 and four years later when Nigeria got independent, the mood in the ongoing decade was hopeful. A newly born nation with world's most in-demand commodity in their backyard, it was inevitable for the masses to not feel joyous in their present and secured for the future. But the leadership that fought against the imperialists a few years back was now the very leadership looking for favours from their former masters for orders and businesses. As Andrew Apter explains, "There was no sphere of *res publica* in Abacha's Nigeria; no effective system of interest articulation, legal process, public education, press coverage, or publicity, nor was the most basic protection of life and liberty even recognized by the state" (in Byron 2014: 134).

What these practices of the past led to is still incomprehensible. After the military dictatorship ended another disaster plagued the Delta region was of conditions forcing people to migrate. With the density of 226 people per km^2, the Niger Delta is home to several different tribes including the likes of Igbo, Ogoni and Ijaw who have inhabited the region for thousands of years. The violent clashes in an already degrading economy have forced individuals and tribes all the same to look for safety and stable future outside the region."Ken Saro-Wiwa famously characterized gas-flaring and oil-spills in the Niger Delta as a form of genocidal violence"(Byron 2014: 133). With Oil politics at the centre, migration is the only option left with people. "Communities had borne the brunt of oil wars, caught between the militants and the military, and the only way they could avoid being crush out of existence was to pretend to be deaf and dumb and blind" (Habila 2010: 33), or leave. The Chief Ibiram while answering Zaq's question on being happy during turbulent times says:

> We've lived in five different places but always we've had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace. But it is hard. So, your question, are we happy here? I say how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home? (Habila 2010: 41)

The characters are too proud to leave their home. Too proud? Too perplexed? Too scared? That's for the readers to decide, the truth remains that they are not leaving, until forced to.

> This was their ancestral land; this was where their fathers and their fathers' fathers were buried. They'd be born here, they'd grown up here, and though they may not be rich, the land has been good to them, they never lacked for anything. What kind of custodians of the land they be if they sold it off? (Habila 2010: 39)

The postcolonial occupation in Nigeria and the post-independent neo-colonialism by oil companies and local politicians has suffocated the life out of the region. Even for people that are moving out of the Delta, life is certainly not easy elsewhere. With young men indulging in criminal activities like theft, burglary, kidnapping, etc., women are forced to take up the path of prostitution and house-help where many a times they are sexually exploited. The cities have been distinctly divided in not just class structure but also as natives and outsiders. "The irony of living in a Lagos that thrives on oil wealth but which strips people of their dignity while forcing some into armed robbery and prostitution only to die in shameful and un-dignifying circumstances" (Olaoluwa 2019: 19). Habila's idea for Nigeria and its people, however unselfish and pure it may seem, questions the futility of aggression and how it is only the Nigerians who are suffering due to the crisis. He portrays, "rivers with floating dead and dying wildlife, poisoned fish, oil-soaked land that has become futile and heavily polluted air and toxic fumes" (Sakshi 2019: 271).

The Sinking Delta

In his study of patterns and occurrences of natural disasters and whether those disasters were actually natural or rather manmade, Upmanyu Mukherjee takes his stand against the Imperialism of Victorian era and marks the beginning of such catastrophes as the outcome of the policies, governance and rule of late 1800s which defined the direction and state of the world. In his work *Natural*

Disasters and Victorian World (2013), he calls the rule as 'The Empire of Disasters' where even rulers' inefficiency, incompetence and short-sightedness were neglected to brand famines, floods and other controllable disasters as natural. The perpetual loss of environment and local communities on which imperialism rose, carried itself forward in the 1900s and with 'once colonized' but 'now free' nations continuing the approach of political favours and individual prosperity as against nation's social welfare and development, the civil war like situations develop in many countries.

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* is engulfed with the issues of rising sea level, increasing salinity in the ocean, constant floods and wildfires across different cities in the world. From Sundarbans to Los Angeles and from New York to Venice, the universality of crises has certainly brought the world on one forum. The entirety of the novel presents how environment is the biggest sufferer and why even government and local communities are helpless to save it. According to a recent study, the Sundarbans has lost 5.5 percent of its mangrove cover in last 30 years along with the loss of 9990 hectares of landmass to erosion and rising sea level in last one decade. Amitav Ghosh takes a position where he looks beyond theories, arguments, and debates surrounding the issues and advocates for clear and rapid actions acknowledging and involving the support of local communities.

The fiction of Ghosh has always portrayed history, culture and environment as an integral part of a society to attract and aware readers of the pertaining issues. From his first novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) until his most recent *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021), there is a continuous yet horrid pattern of deterioration of environment one can notice. Bartosch in *EnvironMentality* states that, "Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) makes a perfect starting point to address the aporias of ecocentric versus anthropocentric thinking, the role of science and (other) discourses in postcolonial ecocriticism, and the event of fiction" (Bartosch: 2013: 96). *Gun Island* too reflects on the notion how centuries old communities are forced to leave their ancestral habitation. While narrowing only to the environment issues of Sundarbans mentioned in the novels, there are primarily two areas to look at. First the deadly effects of cyclones on the region and its population, with rising sea level breaching through the smaller islands. And Secondly, the increasing salinity of water due to industrial setup and how sea as well as land animals are affected.

There are many ecological studies being carried out in present times in the field of sciences to measure the rising sea level across many coastal regions. The information, news and activism are able to construct a momentary image in the minds of watchers and readers but it is eventually the experiences, storytelling and narration that stay for longer time. The two cyclones being used as a reference of time in the novel are Bhola in 1970 and Aila in 2009. Bhola, ironic to its name resulted in the human lives loss of 500,000 in numbers in Bangladesh and West Bengal. While cyclone Aila has been referred as a tragedy where, "hundreds of miles of embankment have been swept away and the sea has invaded places where it has never entered before; vast tracts of once fertile land has been swamped by salt water, rendering them uncultivable for a generation, if not forever" (Ghosh 2019: 48). The cyclones are a regular occurrence in this part of the world during the months of April-June and Sept-Oct. With high density along this coastal line of nearly 3 million people there is not much to do for such peoples during a time of disaster.

Ghosh's narration of these consequences here makes the tale even more indulging. As Ursula Kluwick comments, "In his engagement with the scale of climate change, Ghosh expands the scope of his novel to embrace an extraordinary, and sometimes preposterous, mass of settings, topics, events, and characters" (Kluwick 2020: 10). Another prominent issue being raised by Ghosh is of the recent industrial growth around the area and their uncontrolled-unethical treatment of resources, which has blown the biodiversity of the region through the roof. The results are seen as the "change in the composition of the waters of the Sundarbans" (Ghosh 2019:92). The region also has a refinery from where chemicals are discharged into the ocean without any treatment. Not just the composition though, with rising sea levels salt water has entered deep inside the river stretches which makes both fishing industry and farming non-conductible. In the case of Sundarbans as highlighted by Ghosh, there is also an added factor. The two main occupations for the people of the region, farming and fishing, have suffered heavily in the last 20 years. The mangroves have fallen prey to the uncontrolled deforestation, with increasing salinity the fishing industry has completely collapsed and even the last resort of seasonal tourism that takes place, mostly because of the exoticism of the region, is on the decline too. This has resulted in the migration of not just humans but the animals too.

In *Southeast Asian Ecocriticism: Theories, Practices, Prospects* (2017), Editor John Charles Ryan shares his views while incorporating the alarming ecological effects on jungle cats (*Felischaus*) and saola *(Pseudoryxnghetinhensis)* of Thailand, Laos and nearby areas. Ryan studies the rise in poaching, trafficking and smuggling of *Felischaus* as an independent breed and how even though an animal of least concern in overall categorization in *IUCN Red list*, it faces extinction and verge of endangerment around Thailand and Laos. Saola on the other hand has been only limited to some areas of Vietnam and Laos in recent years. In further chapters while mentioning Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* and *The Great Derangement* (2016), the environmental issues are broadened to incorporate Sundarbans and nearby areas along with the more dangerous economic imperialism of the past. Quoting Ghosh, Ryan says, "that the continent of Asia is conceptually critical to every aspect of global warming: its causes, its philosophical and historical implications, and the possibility of a global response to it" (Ryan 2017: 64).

The human migration in the region takes place in two stages. The first phase or first batch so to say, is of Bangladeshi migrants coming to Indian side due to reasons of political instability, religious atrocities, and other factors. This migration includes both the legal and the illegal one. The border police, the kidnappers and the agents are all involved into the business of transferring people across the border. The second stage is of the migration from Sundarbans to other cities of India and countries across the world. This too happens because of the same reasons as in Bangladeshi side, but people now are more aware of their choices and at least legally, have more options to choose from. The varying migration been carried out is shown in the novel as:

> Making a life in the Sundarbans had become so hard that the exodus of the young was accelerating every year: boys and girls were borrowing and stealing to pay agents to find them work elsewhere. Some were slipping over the border into Bangladesh, to join labour gangs headed for the Gulf. And if that failed they would pay traffickers to smuggle them to Malaysia or Indonesia, on boats. (Ghosh 2019: 53)

Animals too are on the move as mentioned earlier. Although the novel in large considers many different species of animals across different geographies like snakes in Los Angeles and Shipworms in Venice, the Sundarbans in general and this novel in particular brings the lesser known aspect of migration of river dolphins. Ghosh takes the account of Rani and her pod, dolphins of the species Irrawardy dolphin, to show how they have been displaced from their natural hunting grounds because of the pollutants in the water. Piya, a marine biologist, in the novel maintains how:

> Dolphins had started to avoid some of the waterways they have frequented before; they had also, slowly, begun to venture further and further upriver, into populated, heavily fished areas. Over the last few years the pod had lost so many members that its numbers were now down to Rani and just two others. (Ghosh 2019: 93)

The other animals of the region are too being seen in 'never seen before' areas of the delta. Endangered snakes and spiders and their poaching i.e., illegal trafficking of prohibit animals and parts, are too on the rise. Charles Ryan claims that, "Over time, scarcely-seen animals—their environmental behaviors and adaptive modes remaining partially or wholly unexplained— become uncanny embodiments of the limits of techno-scientific universalization" (Ryan 2017: 11). Ghosh also mentions the plight of Los Angeles, New York and Venice and makes his subject, the catastrophes more than the characters, outright global.

Amitav Ghosh takes a strong stand, firstly in theory with his *The Great Derangement* and then in fictional narration and application with *Gun Island*, against these practices and the domino effect they create. He brings out, through different narrations and perspectives, the sight of devastation for all concerned parties. He also, in subsequent sections, engages in solution-oriented dialogues involving local communities and suggests even reading and learning about historic documents, tales and legends to incorporate practices to counter the severity of the situation.

Conclusions

The arguments not only provide the glimpses of the conditions to the outside world but also paint a picture of the uncertain and unbothered future for the internal social and power structures of the nations. Both Ghosh and Habila have tried to responsibly engage in solution driven dialogue which considers the history, traditions and cultural practices of the regions. These two works in their execution and propagation are unique but what brings them together is their common struggle against environmental catastrophes. The study depicts the sorry state of two of the liveliest and most diverse places on earth, how they have been ruined by different industries and what lies ahead for them are some questions to further think about.

The research also opens a spectrum of comparative study, not just between two geographic locations but two different yet captivating styles of narration. Not just environment though, communities too are at loss, as people along with animals are forced to migrate due to various socio-economical and nature related reasons. The readers will also be able to understand this unavoidable migration and the resulting cause and effect. The novels from start to end tell a tale of discontent, hardships, deaths and sorrow but finally end in hope and momentarily happiness thereby advocating the fact that 'Earth's story is yet to end'.

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PEACE AND PEACEMAKING IN THE BIBLE AND BEYOND

Iosif Riviș-Tipei*

ABSTRACT. This paper offers an argument on the role of the Christian as peacemaker. The argument is founded on Jesus' and Paul's teachings on peace recorded in the New Testament. It is shown that from the very beginning Christ's followers are commanded, as individuals and as community, to seek and promote peace. In the second part of this paper, peacemaking principles for the church are revaluated as exemplified by the early church, and still applicable to the contemporary Christian communities.

KEY WORDS: peace, peacemaking, Sermon on the Mount, Jesus on peace, Paul on peace, Church as agent of peace.

Introduction

As Jesus spoke to the multitudes on the mountain, the last teaching he gave them was the most controversial of all. He told his listeners to love their enemies and to pray for their persecutors (Matthew 5.44). As we look back over centuries of Christian history, it is evident that this has been the most difficult teaching of Jesus to follow. The further away in time we get from Jesus' utterance the less it seems this lesson has impacted our way of being and relating to others. Indeed, the Christian church has a dark history of violence and hatred, a host of enemies she should have prayed for but instead she fought with. The time has come, I surmise, that Christians rethink their role in the world and assume the mandate given by their Lord – to be a catalyst for peace in a society that knows violence in various forms and at all levels.

My purpose in this article is to rediscover this peacemaking mandate. I argue that the church is called to be a peacemaker in the world. The biblical witness speaks to the fact that Jesus commanded his followers, individually and as a community, to seek peace. The early church followed the principles of peace-

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making Jesus recommended. Therefore, it is imperative that the church nowadays undertakes her peacemaking mandate and considers concrete ways for carrying it out in the world.

Peace and Peacemaking – The Biblical Teaching

For a long time, the peacemaking mandate of the church in the New Testament has been debated based on Jesus' sayings from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). For some these teachings are presenting an impossible ideal, seemingly with the purpose of bringing the hearers to the understanding that they depend totally on God's grace (Buttry 1994: 14). Others would argue that in the context in which Jesus teaches these sayings were meant to offer an alternative way of being, a different model of behavior, other than the passive submission or violent resistance that were the typical responses to the Roman oppressors at the time (Wink 1998: 101). I submit that a *via media* is possible and desirable. In the Sermon on the Mount, the word "peacemaker" is used in the last of the nine beatitudes. Jesus says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.9-10). This is then expanded: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5.11-12). Jesus assigns a specific role to his followers, while also hinting that this is an ethic that far surpasses that of the surrounding society. The saying is quite political and provocatory since within the context, at that time, the only one who was called "son of god" was the Roman emperor. Also, he would have been acclaimed as the peacemaker, that is, the upholder of the *Pax Romana*. By assigning this title and role to his followers, low class rural inhabitants of the conquered Judaea, Jesus upturns the very world-order of his time – he ascribes the highest standing the society would have known to his disciples (Bainton 1986: 64).

To truly understand Jesus' attitude toward peace and peacemaking, one also needs to turn to the gospel of John. In John 14:27 Jesus tells his disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." This utterance comes at a crucial time. It is the moment when Jesus tells them about his departure from their midst. Undoubtedly, the disciples are distressed. Yet, Jesus bestows his peace upon them and expects them to react accordingly.

Evidently, peace and peacemaking are important to Jesus. In the passage from the gospel of Matthew "peacemaking" is the crowning ethical instruction given to the multitudes. In the gospel of John, "peace" is the last gift Jesus gives to those who have followed him for years. Given these, we ought to ask what he really means by "peace." Palmer (1984: 58-60) suggests that there are at least three specifics one could notice: Firstly, the peace Jesus speaks of is a peace divinely ordained – it originates with Jesus himself (John 14.27). Secondly, this peace includes healing – it is the answer to pressure and tribulation (John 16.33). Thirdly, it involves a return to wholeness, for the expectation in all of Jesus' saying is that the audience will "experience" the peace he offers. All these prove that the peace Jesus speaks about is more than lack of conflict, or inner calmness. He envisions "peace" along the lines of the Hebrew notion of *shalom*, with its implications of comprehensive well-being, restoration to wholeness, and flourishing in all aspects of life (Măcelaru 2017: 53-54; cf. Măcelaru 2014: 233-236 and Măcelaru 2012: 52). As such, the peace Jesus brings is the very fulfilment of Old Testament messianic expectations expressed in texts such as Psalm 72 and Isaiah 11 (cf. Măcelaru 2022b: 132-133; Măcelaru 2016: 134-146). Apostle Paul picks up the same concept of "peace" in Ephesians 2.14-18:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Significantly, the apostle also associates "peace" with another special New Testament term – reconciliation – to explain the act of peacemaking. There is a two-step process here, for before becoming reconciled one ought to experience of repentance. According to Palmer (1984: 60), at this stage one begins to practice restraint, to slow down, and to clear away the debris of sin. In this way the ground is prepared for a second step, a deeper level of "peace." It is at this level that a human being's four-fold relationship is restored: the relationship with God, with the neighbor, with the creation and with oneself (Măcelaru 2014: 235-236; cf. Palmer 1984: 60).

Thus, the peacemaking described here is neither a philosophical nor a political notion. It is not fanciful talk about "world peace." Rather, it is about the gift of God and the yielding of one's spirit. Jesus gives peace "not as the world gives" (Jn. 14:27). Thus, it is Christ himself that shows the way. At the cross he overcame evil with good, embodying the teaching he gave to his disciples: "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5.39). Jesus is not giving here an unrealistic plan for a better world. It is not about smiling when persecuted in the hope that the enemy will repent. The cost of adopting such a behavior was known to him. That is why he warns:

> If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (John 15.18-21)

However, Jesus came preaching and embodying peace (cf. Yoder 1985: 18-19). Jesus was not a demagogue, speaking of things he would not know or practice. Before asking his disciples to be peacemakers he modelled such a life: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15.12-13). Thus, the motivation to love one's enemies is God's own love for us. Furthermore, Jesus calls his disciples "friends" (John 15.14-15), hinting at the fact that the obedience of the Christian is not a slave's answer to her master but a willing imitation of her divine Friend's *modus operandi*. So, in conflict and suffering, Christians ought to continue the peacemaking work Christ had first begun (Yoder 1985: 35). In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus presents "peacemaking" as the fulfillment of the law:

> You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5.43-48)

This is placed in the context of six antitheses pronounced by Jesus to explain what true fulfilment of the Law is about. Thus, in addition to repeating the ideal of *Imitatio Dei* expressed by the Law (cf. Leviticus 19.18), Jesus commands love for one's enemy. The follower of Jesus is to love the enemy because that truly makes him a child of the Father, and as the Father is indiscriminately gracious, so must be his children (Senior 1984: 58). Although at first sight this may appear as a radical commandment, the explanations Jesus further gives show that what we have is an inventive, alternative way of behavior when faced with evil.

Walter Wink (1998: 98) calls this “Jesus’ Third Way”, which contrasts the “flight or fight” response deeply rooted within us. According to Wink, the three examples Jesus gives (Matthew 5.39) are not a model of passive behavior, but a call on the offended and the powerless to take initiative to assert her humanity and therefore to transform the nature of the relationship in the process. Thus, by turning the other cheek one shows that she is not scared, that she does not accept to be victimized, that she is the perpetrator’s equal (Măcelaru 2022a), that she has inherent dignity, and therefore is worthy of respect (see Măcelaru 2021a). When turning the other cheek, the violator cannot hit the other as an inferior, but as an equal. In this way, the supposedly powerless person redefines the relationship and forces the wrongdoer into making a moral choice (Wink 1998: 101).

The same goes for the two other examples Jesus gives. In both the “powerless” person is given the power to act outside the accepted norms of the society and therefore to have the initiative and to transform the situation by reclaiming her humanity without endangering the other (Wink 1998: 103). As he was beaten, tortured and crucified, Jesus embodied his teachings – he prays for the ones mistreating him, showing that he has the moral precedence over the situation. All these prove that it is God’s desire for the world to have and live in peace. The peace God gives is much different from that of the world. It is not only lack of violence, an environment of absence, where people are left on their own. Rather, it is the peace that expresses God’s very character, his grace and generosity (Bernbaum 1984: 247). It is the peace that “transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4.7), for it is neither found within humanity nor is it a result of human reasoning and action. It is God’s gift in Christ. As such, one can only experience it and act accordingly as a peacemaker because of a genuine relationship with God. That is because a fallen human being can become a peacemaker only after being herself reconciled to God.

Peace and Peacemaking – The Beyond

The peacemaking mandate was well understood by first century Christians. Although persecuted and living in a society that accepted and promoted violence, what characterized the first generations of Christians was their emphasis on love and a strong aversion to killing (cf. Bainton 1986: 81). One model in this regard was presented by Tertullian. For him, strict observance of the commandments was more important than the eschatological future that would bring justice. It was not for the Christian to decide on violence and war, but only to obey Christ.

Admittedly, vindication was also part of God's plan, but that would only happen at the return of Christ (cf. Bainton 1986: 81). The second approach formed under the influence of Gnosticism. It consisted of rejection of the Old Testament and contempt towards the body. But the most widely spread was a more pragmatic approach, which proceeded from a redemptive logic. This considered the nature of life on earth and the social constrains accompanying it, which sometimes result in strife, but also objected to war because of commitment to Jesus' teaching. Origen expressed this position as he observes that "men fight sometimes because of hunger, but more frequently because of avarice, the lust of power, an insane craving for vain glory..."; he then continues to show that our warfare is not with other humans but with the spiritual forces that change brothers into enemies (cf. Bainton 1986: 83).

Moving our discussion to the contemporary church, it is now time to ponder about the challenges to peacemaking facing Christians today and the ways in which this mandated can still be carried out. It seems to me that a first problem is the privatization of faith characteristic of today's world. For instance, generation after generation of evangelical Christians have been taught that Christ is a *personal* savior, thus turning the God of all creation into a private deity (Bembaum 1984: 251-252). This is a dichotomous mentality that separates the spiritual from the social and political; one that cannot see Christ as savior of the body and Lord of the Church at the same time. Evangelical Christians tend to emphasize the peace of Christ as the restoration of one's personal relationship with God. Although this is true, it is only partially correct. For Christ's peace includes peace with the neighbor and the creation. As important the vertical relationship of peace is, so are the horizontal ones.

Another issue to bring up here is the politicization of the peace process that led to the idea that peace among nations and states is not at all spiritual and therefore not a direct responsibility of the Christian. It is important however to keep in view the spiritual dimension of peacemaking. Raising one's voice against war and violence in not only political and should not be done only through political means. The Christian knows that she is engaged in a spiritual battle that influences the physical realm. Therefore, speaking for peace would include prayer, and that specifically directed at political issues.

Moreover, a renewed awareness of the full implications of the lordship of Jesus Christ is a decisive factor in the rediscovery of our peacemaking mandate. The New Testament announcement of the Kingdom of God is an affirmation of God's all-encompassing reign (cf. Măcelaru 2009). As such, a correct understanding of what it means that "Christ is the Lord" would necessarily lead to bridging the typical divides – between the sacred and the secular, between the private and the public (cf. Măcelaru 2021b). This, in turn, would lead to the church's involvement in various forms of concrete peacemaking initiatives, such as: nonviolent action (Cartwright and Thistlethwaite 1998), different forms of civil disobedience (Stassen 1998), cooperative conflict resolution (Steele at al 1998), etc. This because the church ought to be an active participant in world affairs, not so much via Christian policymakers, but by itself being a shaper of the world. According to Duane Friesen (1986: 205) there are five facets of such involvement: ethos, example, service, policy, and vocation. As the church demonstrates justice and peace within, she becomes a catalyst for the transformation of the society.

Conclusions

In John 14.27, Jesus leaves the disciples with these words: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world gives." Surely, this saying has been interpreted in many ways, from the inner peace of the believer to the outer peace of the community. The second part of the phrase however points strongly to the second option. The world is concerned only with itself and its own wellbeing. Jesus' way is different – he gives his peace to others. His peace is not only for the individual, but also for the group, church, tribe, ethnos, nation – the whole world. As Christians and as the church we should not ignore this aspect of Jesus' example. The mandate we have been given is clear: the peace within must prompt us to be makers of peace in the world.

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MENTORAREA DIN PERSPECTIVĂ CREȘTINĂ

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of mentoring from a Christian viewpoint and to argue that, in addition to the typical relation developed in a secular mentoring process, the Christian mentoring has much deeper meanings. Christian mentoring will not seek the fulfilment of man through himself, but through his likeness to Christ and his spiritual growth. Christian mentoring will be indicated as an efficient method for reaching these goals.

KEY WORDS: Christian mentoring, secular mentoring, growth, spiritual formation, model

Introducere

Mentorarea reprezintă una dintre cele mai des întâlnite forme de cunoaștere și dezvoltare personală, este cunoscută încă din cele mai îndepărtate vremuri și are prezență continuă în existența umană. În trecut, mentorarea era cea mai practicată modalitate de învățare: copiii își petreceau majoritatea timpului lângă părinți sau alți membri ai familiei, fiind asistați îndeaproape pe parcursul întregului proces de definire identitară și dezvoltare personală. Primele forme de activități educaționale se desfășurau în casa dascălului sau în atelierul maestrului, iar punctul central al procesului de învățare consta în relația umană dintre mentor și protejat. Tot procesul de formare avea o abordare personală, bazată pe relaționarea nemijlocită dintre mentor și protejat și concentrându-se asupra nevoilor celui din urmă. Mentorarea este întâlnită deopotrivă în viața bisericească, inspirându-se din modelele de ucenicie profundă practicată de Isus cu ucenicii din cercul restrâns (Băbuță 2021: 236-242). În ceea ce urmează voi analiza conceptul de mentorare atât din perspectivă seculară, cât și din perspectivă creștină, cu accent pe valoarea intrinsecă a mentorării creștine.

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Mentorarea din Perspectivă Laică

Merriam Webster definește mentorul ca fiind "un sfetnic sau ghid de încredere". Aceeași sursă arată că termenul "mentor" provine din mitologia greacă, Mentor fiind un personaj din *Odiseea* lui Homer. Plecând la război pentru mai bine de zece de ani, Ulise îl lasă pe fiul său, Telemac, aflat în fragedă pruncie, în grija lui Mentor, prieten vechi și de încredere al eroului. Mentor îl transformă pe Telemac într-un bărbat, de aceea numele lui descrie, metaforic, procesul de maturizare, adică mentorarea. Precum restul termenilor care descriu cuvântul, "mentorul" desemnează diferite lucruri pentru diferiți oameni: maestru, îndrumător, model, figură paternă, învățător, instructor, lider, consilier, antrenor (Hendriks și Hendriks 2018: 160). Mentorarea este procesul prin care mentorul se pune la dispoziția persoanei mentorate în vederea dezvoltării sale. Scopul inițial al mentorării, după cum este menționat în *Odiseea*, este dezvoltarea individuală și învățarea prin experimentare (Johnson 2017).

În cartea sa *Mentorarea*, Bobb Biehl îl citează pe Gordon MacDonald, care prezenta principalele argumente pentru care mentorarea a fost importantă în trecut și rămâne relevantă azi:

> Probabil că acum o sută de ani nu era necesară o carte despre mentorare, iar editurile ar fi luat în derâdere un astfel de subiect. Asta pentru că, până de curând, mentorarea ca formă de dezvoltare personală a fost un mod de viață între generații. Ea era pentru relațiile umane ceea ce este respirația pentru trup. Mentorarea era asumată, așteptată și de aceea aproape neobservată, dat fiind caracterul ei curent în experiența umană. În trecut mentorarea era peste tot. (...) Se înregistrează azi o renaștere a ideii de mentorare în literatura de afaceri, în sistemul educațional și în asistența socială. Această nouă conștientizare se evidențiază desigur și în comunitatea urmașilor lui Cristos. (...) De aceea, editurile secolului XXI cel mai probabil vor valorifica oportunitatea de a prezenta publicului o carte bună despre mentorare, chiar dacă editurile din secolul al XVIII-lea ar fi ignorat-o. Contemporanii înțeleg nevoia disperată de a recupera funcția mentorării, de a o face o activitate de prim-rang în relațiile umane. (Biehl 2019: 8-9)

În contextul contemporan secular, mentorarea este descrisă ca "sistem în care oamenii cu multă experiență și cunoștințe îi sfătuiesc și ajută pe ceilalți la locul de muncă sau pe tinerii care își pregătesc debutul profesional" (Bullon 2003: 1031). De aceea, mentorul este persoana "experimentată, care sfătuiește și ajută o persoană mai puțin experimentată" (Bullon 2003: 1031). Mentorarea poate fi întâlnită în afaceri, în sport și în aproape toate sferele sociale și economice. Termenii "mentorare/ mentorat" și "mentor" au devenit parte a limbajului nostru comun și pot fi întâlniți atât în domenii academice, profesionale, de leadership sau business, cât și în mass-media sau discuțiile informale dintre indivizi. De comun acord, un mentor este cineva care asistă și încurajează în împlinirea deziderateIor personale sau profesionale. După Johnson (2017), "relațiile de mentorare îi sprijină pe protejați în dezvoltarea încrederii, competenței și credibilității." Totodată,

> Daniel J. Levinson, psiholog de la Yale recunoscut pentru studiile sale despre vârsta de mijloc, definea mentorul ca fiind cu opt până la cincisprezece ani mai în vârstă decât protejatul, un coleg sau un frate mai mare, mai degrabă decât o figură paternă distantă. Mentorul ia persoana mai tânără sub aripa sa, îi împărtășește din înțelepciunea sa, îi poartă de grijă, îi pune la dispoziție resurse, critica și binecuvântarea sa. (Tenner 2004: 2)

Zander van der Westhuizen (2008: 235) analizează în teza sa de doctorat perspectiva narativă a mai multor autori cu privire la mentorare, concluzionând că sunt trei aspecte specifice mentorării în aceste studii, și anume: relația, creșterea și reciprocitatea. Fundamentul și cadrul în care se desfășoară orice raport de mentorare este relația dintre mentor și protejat. Calitatea relației dintre mentor și protejat este direct proporțională cu succesul mentorării, respectiv cu efectul de creștere obținut și influența reciprocă dintre mentor și protejat:

> relația de mentorare este una din cele mai complexe din punctul de vedere al dezvoltării adultului (...). Mentorarea nu este definită în raport cu rolurile formale, ci în funcție de caracterul relației și al funcțiilor pe care le deservește. (...) Mentorul poate avea rolul unui profesor care pune în valoare abilitățile tânărului și intensifică dezvoltarea intelectuală. Poate sluji ca sponsor/susținător, își poate folosi influența pentru a facilita accesul într-un anumit loc și dezvoltarea tânărului. Poate fi gazdă și ghid, încurajând intrarea novicelui într-o nouă sferă ocupațională și socială, asigurându-i accesul la valorile, obiceiurile, propriile-i resurse și la distribuția rolurilor. Prin virtuțile, realizările și modul său de viață, mentorul poate fi exemplul pe care protejatul să-l admire și imite, poate oferi sfat și suport moral în perioade de stres. Mentorul mai are o funcție, cea mai importantă: să sprijine și să faciliteze împlinirea visului. (Levinson 1978: 97-98)

Scopul final al mentorării seculare, și totodată indicatorul unei relații de mentorare de succes, este dezvoltarea personală și împlinirea visului protejatului de a ajunge la nivelul pe care și l-a fixat ca obiectiv. John Maxwell asocia mentorarea cu atingerea succesului personal, considerând că "adevăratul succes este să-ți cunoști scopul, să crești pentru a-ți atinge potențialul maxim și a semăna semințe spre folosul altora“ (Maxwell 2008: 6). În acest sens, protejatul are șansa să crească și să se dezvolte ca individ în cadrul facilitator al relației cu un mentor:

> Abilitatea de a identifica potențialul altuia presupune angajament, diligență și dorința autentică de a te concentra asupra celuilalt. Trebuie să vezi înzestrarea, temperamentul, pasiunile, succesele, bucuriile și oportunitățile celuilalt. Odată descoperit potențialul, trebuie să-l întreții prin încurajare și oportunități. Procedând astfel, celălalt va înflori în fața ochilor tăi. (Maxwell 2008: 6)

Același John Maxwell consideră că mentorarea este una dintre legile supreme după care se ghidează liderul de succes. Legea multiplicării, la care face referire Maxwell, statuează că “este nevoie de un lider pentru a promova un alt lider. Sponsorii nu pot face asta, și nici programele instituționale. Este nevoie de un lider care cunoaște un alt lider“ (Maxwell 2002: 128). Dacă, la nivel personal, prin mentorare se realizează dezvoltarea individului astfel încât să experimenteze succesul, la nivel corporatist mentorarea produce efectul de multiplicare a liderilor și joacă un rol important în leadership. În studiul său, Maxwell (2002) testa ipoteza după care “este nevoie de un lider pentru a promova alt lider“, iar studiul său sonda motivele ce-i determină pe unii să devină lideri. Grupul-țintă era format atât din clerici, cât și din oameni de afaceri. Respondenții au avut trei variante de răspuns: talent înnăscut, rezultatul unei crize, influența unui alt lider. Răspunsurile au confirmat în mod covârșitor ipoteza studiului: 85% dintre respondenți au fost motivați să devină lideri datorită influenței exercitate asupra lor de un alt lider, în timp ce doar 10% au ales să fie lideri pe baza talentului înnăscut, iar 5% ca rezultat al unei crize.

Exercitarea influenței în cadrul relației de mentorare este reciprocă, însă există o diferență de grad aici. De regulă, mentorul, care ocupă poziția expertului în actul mentorării, exercită influență mai amplă asupra protejatului decât invers. Totuși, relația de mentorare este atât de strânsă încât va avea efect și asupra vieții mentorului. Specificitatea relației de mentorare, cât și trăsăturile individuale și modul unic de raportare a protejatului la procesul de mentorare, vor aduce un plus de valoare în viața mentorului.

Linda Phillips-Jones (2003: 5) arată că “lucruri cu adevărat puternice se întâmplă când cineva respectat și cu experiență își arată interesul și se angajază să ajute un alt individ în procesul de dezvoltare, mai ales când acest individ se lasă influențat.“ Argumentând, autoarea se folosește de studiul profesorului Albert Bandura de la Stanford University, care relevă trei aspecte importante:

12. Ca indivizi, cele mai multe lucruri le învățăm observând alte modele de succes sau insucces.
13. Învățăm mult mai rapid și mai eficient când primim un feedback pozitiv din partea unei persoane pe care o respectăm.
14. Facem progrese în învățare când trebuie să abordăm chestiuni dificile.

În cadrul relațiilor de mentorare regăsim toate cele trei aspecte: mentorul constituie un model de succes pentru protejat sau îi poate indica astfel de modele dintre cunoscuții săi, facilitând astfel învățarea prin observare; mentorul va oferi protejatului feedback constant și sprijin motivațional, pe măsură ce acesta dobândește noi cunoștințe și le implementează în situații concrete; protejatul va avea curaj să abordeze situații sau provocări cu un grad sporit de dificultate bazându-se pe sprijinul mentorului, gradul de dificultate generând și un nivel înalt al învățării.

Mentorarea Creștină

În context creștin, mentorarea este de o profunzime semnificativ mai mare decât mentorarea în general. Deși are multe elemente în comun cu mentorarea laică, ea beneficiază de instrumente biblice specifice prin care implementează aceste elemente, slujind unui scop mai măreț. Mentorarea seculară are individul în centru, în timp ce mentorarea creștină este cristocentrică. Mentorarea seculară își propune să scoată la lumină cea mai bună versiune a individului, în timp ce mentorarea creștină își propune să faciliteze transformarea individului astfel încât Cristos să ia chip în el. Apostolul Pavel își slujea semenii într-un mod extrem de asumat și focalizat: "Copilașii mei, pentru care iarăși simt durerile nașterii, până ce va lua Cristos chip în voi" (Galateni 4:19). În Predica de pe Munte din Evanghelia după Matei, Isus stabilește în cel mai clar mod posibil nivelul spre care fiecare om trebuie să tindă. Mentalitatea seculară ne direcționează spre cea mai bună versiune a noastră. Prin Evanghelie, însă, Isus statuează un standard superior: "Voi fiți, dar, desăvârșiți, după cum și Tatăl vostru cel ceresc este desăvârșit" (Matei 5:48 VDC). Acest standard poate fi atins doar prin lepădare de sine și identificarea cu Cristos la nivel identitar și în scop:

> Fără Dumnezeu, nu ne avem decât pe noi înșine. Avem o viziune limitată, resurse limitate, tărie limitată, speranță limitată și suntem, pe scurt, fără mântuire. În Vechiul Testament, cuvântul folosit pentru a descrie reorientarea omului spre Iehova este *shw*, care înseamnă a ne îndepărta de noi și a ne îndrepta spre Dumnezeu. (Schindler 2021: 68)

Mentorarea creștină va facilita identificarea cu și dezvoltarea după chipul lui Cristos. Mentorarea seculară vizează aspecte ce țin de dezvoltarea profesională, a abilităților practice de orice fel și de atingerea succesului personal, în timp ce mentorarea creștină urmărește dezvoltarea holistică, armonioasă a persoanei – trup, suflet și duh – astfel încât să ajungă la maturitate spirituală și la o tot mai mare asemănare cu Cristos. Luke Wong definește oamenii maturi spirituali ca fiind persoane "sănătoase emoțional, care se aseamănă cu Cristos, se uită spre Împărăție și se multiplică prin ucenicie" (Wong 2019: 23). După cum arătau Andreson și Reese (1999: 15),

> credința creștină este imitativă. Dintotdeauna a fost așa. Începând de la cuvântările lui Isus înaintea bărbaților și femeilor care I-au devenit ucenici în credință, creștinismul s-a definit ca o credință predată de la o persoană la alta. Viața lui Isus Cristos trebuie considerată unicul model vrednic de imitat de către creștini. Astfel, Isus este întotdeauna sursa care atrage și standardul spre care tinde spiritualitatea creștină. "Urmează-mă" este, probabil, cea mai simplă descriere a spiritualității.

Folosirea sintagmei "mentorare creștină" are la bază următoarele raționamente:

- ≈ Își are originea în ucenicia biblică, fiind considerată extensia ei (cf. Măcelaru 2011: 11-22).
- ≈ Este o relație interpersonală, ce are scopul de a dezvolta protejatul în vederea glorificării lui Cristos.
- ≈ Este o practică ce se desfășoară în cadrul Trupului lui Cristos, Biserica, facilitând influențarea mutuală a mentorului și protejatului.
- ≈ Este o practică implicând protagoniști al căror Domn și Mântuitor este Isus Cristos.
- ≈ Mentorarea creștină va răspunde nevoilor de creștere ale protejatului în mod holistic: trup, suflet și duh.
- ≈ Mentorarea creștină vizează creșterea beneficiarului în asemănarea cu Cristos la nivel identitar și funcțional, protejatul experimentând maturizarea spirituală.
- ≈ Mentorarea creștină se desfășoară după principiile biblice ale uceniciei transformatoare/ spirituale.

Atât mentorul, cât și protejatul (persoana mentorată) dezvoltă o identitate primară în Cristos. Înainte de a se identifica ca mentori sau protejați, ei sunt frați în Cristos, părtași ai aceleiași realități spirituale a răscumpărării și înfierii divine. Scopul lor lucrativ în procesul mentorării este de a crește în asemănarea lui Cristos la orice nivel al vieții lor:

> Dacă l-ai fi întrebat pe apostolul Pavel care este obiectivul său în slujirea lui Dumnezeu, ți-ar fi răspuns: «Să înfățișăm pe orice om desăvârșit [matur] în Cristos Isus» (Coloseni 1:28). Dacă i-ai fi cerut să descrie lucrarea bisericii locale, ți-ar fi răspuns: «Pentru desăvârșirea sfinților, în vederea lucrării de slujire, pentru zidirea trupului lui Cristos, până vom ajunge toți la unirea credinței și a cunoștinței Fiului lui Dumnezeu, la starea de om mare [matur], la înălțimea staturii plinătății lui Cristos» (Efeseni 4:12-13). Indiferent ce spun unii "predicatori de succes", obiectivul lui Dumnezeu cu viața noastră nu-l constituie banii, ci maturitatea; nu fericirea, ci sfințenia; nu a obține, ci a dărui. Dumnezeu se află la lucru, transformându-și oamenii înspre asemenea cu Fiul Său. Acesta este obiectivul slujirii creștine. (Wiersbe 2007: 51)

Mentorarea creștină, ca formă de ucenicie aprofundată și extensie a uceniciei biblice, va răspunde nevoilor protejatului în două domenii distincte:

Identitate – protejatul va fi ajutat de mentor să-și cunoască identitatea în Cristos, precum și să se cunoască mai bine ca persoană, identificând darurile native și pe cele primite de la Dumnezeu, modalitățile în care le poate dezvolta și folosi, domeniile de slujire în care se poate implica în biserică și, ca obiectiv existențial, felul în care poate crește în asemănarea cu Cristos.

Scop – cum să transpună în viața de zi cu zi conștiența identității lui în Cristos și cum să se dedice mai eficient împlinirii scopurilor lui Dumnezeu cu privire la propria-i persoană. Viața întreagă este privită ca fiind pusă în slujba lui Cristos și a trupului Său, Biserica.

Aceste două domenii au a face cu descoperirea semnificației personale a protejatului, pentru că "suntem în căutarea scopului și sensului și dorim să dăm lăstari care să dăinuie. Ne ținem strâns de moștenirea noastră, și totuși tânjim după o moștenire mai bună" (Weber 2008: 48). Cu alte cuvinte, în ceea ce privește identitatea noastră,

> răspunsul pe care-l dăm la întrebările "Cine sunt?" și "De ce exist?" va determina felul în care căutăm să ajungem la sens. Impulsul de a satisface această dorință poate ori să ne apropie, ori să ne îndepărteze de Dumnezeu. Valoarea autentică și durabilă poate fi dobândită doar în Cristos. Isus a zis: «Eu sunt Vița, voi sunteți mlădițele. Cine rămâne în Mine și în cine rămân Eu, aduce multă roadă, căci despărțiți de Mine nu

> puteți face nimic» (Ioan 15:5). Aceasta înseamnă că nu putem ajunge la semnificație autentică durabilă departe de Cristos. (Morley 2019: 65)

Mentorarea creștină plasează protejatul în compania mentorului – un credincios matur spiritual – care va încerca să-l țină concentrat asupra a două aspecte principale: cine este el în Cristos și care-i este scopul. Aceste două aspecte, respectiv "identitatea" și "scopul", sunt coordonatele care aduc semnificație în viața individului:

> Ne dobândim sensul și identitatea în viață când înțelegem cine suntem în Cristos. Este vorba, așadar, despre statut, despre o relație cu Dumnezeu, nu despre ceva ce poate fi dobândit prin faimă, noroc și putere. Pe de altă parte, Dumnezeu are un scop cu viața noastră – o misiune, un destin – un motiv pentru care existăm. Acesta este celălalt aspect al căutării noastre după semnificație. După ce am aflat răspunsul la întrebarea privind identitatea noastră, următoarea întrebare care se ridică este "Ce vrea Dumnezeu să fac cu viața mea?" Singurele scopuri ce vor dăinui sunt cele ancorate în Dumnezeu. (Morely 2019: 79)

Credinciosul se închină cu tot ce este, posedă și întreprinde: acesta este modul în care devine duhovnicesc, exemplificativ fiind ceea ce le scrie apostolul Pavel credincioșilor din Roma: "Vă îndemn, dar, fraților, pentru îndurarea lui Dumnezeu, să aduceți trupurile voastre ca o jertfă vie, sfântă, plăcută lui Dumnezeu; aceasta va fi din partea voastră o slujbă duhovnicească" (Romani 12:1). Este foarte interesant de observat că închinarea care implică un trup pământesc se constituie într-o slujbă duhovnicească. Actul închinării îl implică pe credincios în mod holistic: cu trup, suflet și duh. Isus S-a dat ca jertfă pentru a-i face desăvârșiți pentru totdeauna pe cei ce sunt sfințiți (Evrei 10:14), și în virtutea acestei realități și a faptului că Isus este Mare Preot la dreapta lui Dumnezeu, îndemnul este "să ne apropiem cu o inimă curată, cu credință deplină, cu inimile stropite și curățite de un cuget rău și cu trupul spălat cu o apă curată" (Evrei 10:22). De asemenea, fiecare acțiune a credinciosului se constituie într-un act de laudă la adresa Creatorului: "fie că mâncați, fie că beți, fie că faceți altceva, să faceți totul pentru slava lui Dumnezeu" (1 Corinteni 10:31). Ceea ce la prima vedere pare pământesc, fără tentă duhovnicească, devine sacru când este închinat în mod intenționat Domnului. Mentorarea creștină îi facilitează protejatului evadarea din starea neconstructivă, din viața aflată sub imperiul conflictului dintre sacru și profan, și-i oferă perspectiva biblică corectă, conform căreia fiecare aspect al vieții este sacru în contextul vieții predate în întregime lui Cristos (cf. Măcelaru 2021: 80-84). Protejatul va fi încurajat și asistat să atingă excelența în felul în care trăiește și în ceea ce întreprinde, fără a închina succesul pe altarul propriei gratificări. Mentorul care este un credincios matur spiritual îl va ajuta pe protejatul aflat în căutare de sens să-și organizeze viața în jurul singurului scop semnificativ: glorificarea lui Dumnezeu:

> Catehismul mic de la Westminster, unul dintre materialele cele mai importante adoptate de Adunare, formulează întrebări și răspunsuri asupra a o sută patru probleme esențiale și formează principalele dogme ale credinței creștine. În mod profund, prima întrebare este: "Care este scopul suprem al omului?", și am putea s-o reformulăm astfel: "De ce există omul pe pământ?" Răspunsul este deopotrivă elocvent și simplu: "Scopul suprem al omului este să-L glorifice pe Dumnezeu și să se bucure veșnic de El." (Morley 2019: 82)

Orice alt aspect al vieții va fi considerat un mijloc de a servi atingerii scopului suprem, și nu un scop în sine. Protejatul va fi îndrumat să nu se jertfească pe altarul egoului sau realizărilor vanitoase, ci să se dedice unui scop care transcende propria-i persoană și obiective. Se trece, astfel, de la o viață defocalizată și neroditoare la o viață cu semnificație și rodnică, se realizează tranziția de la o viață trăită sub imperiul mediocrității la o viață care tinde spre desăvârșire.

Concluzii

Am argumentat prin cele de mai sus că mentorarea creștină nu transpune pur și simplu un termen din literatura seculară în sferă teologică și nici nu adoptă practici laice în viața eclezială sau în Trupul lui Cristos. Mentorarea, așa cum este exemplificată în Biblie și cum este practicată în Biserică, are semnificație mai complexă decât mentorarea din alte medii instituționale. Mentorarea creștină nu ignoră și nu anihilează aspectele profane ale vieții, ci le aduce în sfera sacrului. Mentorul creștin va fi interesat atât de bunăstarea și dezvoltarea omului din interior, respectiv a sufletului, cât și de omul din exterior, de trup, și inclusiv de realizările pământești ale protejatului. Mentorarea creștină va aborda și dezvoltarea abilităților protejatului de a întreprinde acțiuni care să-i asigure bunăstare materială, sănătate trupească și succes profesional, însă fără a face din acestea un scop în sine. Scopul în sine este de a-L glorifica pe Dumnezeu prin fiecare aspect al vieții. Protejatul va fi îndrumat să integreze fiecare obiectiv al vieții într-un scop mai măreț decât propria persoană și propriile realizări.

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POWER IN WEAKNESS – THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IN PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Cristian Sandu*

ABSTRACT. This article gives an exposition of Paul's theology of the cross available in the Corinthian correspondence. It is argued that Paul responds in the two Corinthian letters to challenges against his apostolic authority resulting from an erroneous understanding of power and weakness. Paul's response is that true power does not depend on one's wisdom or spiritual prowess but on the identification with Christ's death and resurrection. The article closes with a few remarks regarding the implications of such theology for the believer today.

KEY WORDS: Cross of Christ, Corinthian church, power, weakness, 1 & 2 Corinthians

Introduction

The cross of Christ is unquestionably the most significant symbol of Christianity. Even though it primarily alluded to the death of Christ as recorded in the gospels, over the past two millennia of Christian history the cross has also taken on connotations that can hardly be reconciled with the object itself and its historical use as a tool of torture. What the Romans have once invented and used to perform brutal humiliating executions is now adorned as jewellery and employed as elaborate decoration in sacred places – quite an ironic twist, indeed. The symbolical meaning the cross seems to have taken on is a theme implied in some of the New Testament writings, but it is not one readily available. Anyhow, if an ancient execution device could be "domesticated" in this way over the years, is it not possible that there is also a corollary theological adaptation at work?

To answer the question above I suggest one ought to turn to the teaching of Paul the Apostle, specifically to the way he describes the significance of the cross. Just as at the cultural level Christians have taken an object and enriched its meaning to be the faith symbol it now is, so did Paul use the cross as a symbol for Christ's self-giving sacrifice. In Paul's theology of the cross we have a reinterpre-

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tation of "power" in terms of "weakness". This became evident during the debate Paul had with the Corinthian Church and is available to us in the two epistles he wrote to them. By examining these two letters in the light of the historical situation to which they allude I hope to illustrate below the central role the cross played in Paul's re-envisioning of such notions as "power" and "wisdom".

The Context of the Corinthian Correspondence

Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians in response to several major problems that emerged within their community. Although these letters have been criticized for their lack of theological content and systematic order, it is quite evident that there is a theological thread that binds them together. I suggest that this is Paul's theology of the cross. The letters probably mark a midway point in a longer conversation Paul has with the Corinthian believers. As such, in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul, who is no longer in their midst, answers questions posed by the Corinthian Christian community, questions we do not have. Given these, most of the content in the Corinthian correspondence is applied theology (Conzelmann 1975: 6-9). Therefore, to better understand Paul's underlying theology of the cross in these letters, it is necessary to enter the discussion by considering the upfront themes Paul addresses: his apostolic authority, the Corinthians' errant theology and the resulting aberrant value system they had adopted.

Paul's Apostolic Authority

It has been long argued that pride, jealousy, and disobedience are the most obvious causes for the problems in Corinth (Young and Ford 1987: 47). These can be deduced from Paul's corrective instructions, especially in regard with the divisions caused in the community (1 Corinthians 1.10-17), the improper use of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14), and the abuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11.17-34). Also, throughout 2 Corinthians, the same fallacies are implied as Paul addresses the believers' rebellion against his apostolic authority. In fact, their opposition to Paul is so pronounced that Gordon Fee has come to suggest that it is the principal issue addressed in both letters (Fee 1987: 6). Paul remains impartial in his approach but must rebuke the Corinthian believers, who had begun to embrace alternative teachers and teaching. Hafemann (1993: 174) argues against Fee's point, noting that Paul's ethical instructions in 1 Corinthians 8-10 are sufficient proof that his authority and the legitimacy of his apostleship were still recognised. Nevertheless, Fee's point is supported by other authors (e.g. Horsley and Silberman 1997: 172) who see in Paul's rebuke of the "immoral brethren" (1 Corinthians 5.9-11) a proof that the teaching of the Apostle was slowly replaced by a gospel of "social prestige." The inference is that the people Paul opposes were status seeking wealthy patrons of the church in Corinth who used their financial means to gain influence and enhance their social status. Since such social advancement also required their participation in pagan social events, the message and behaviour of these "immoral brethren" was syncretistic and was leading the congregation away from the gospel preached by Paul. This is why all the ethical instructions given by the Apostle address pagan customs (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5.1-13; 8.1-13).

Although some have argued that the situation surrounding Paul's second letter is quite different from that of the first, I submit that the issues Paul addresses in both letters are closely linked. A close reading of the material reveals that the problems looming in the background in 2 Corinthians are in fact anticipated in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Admittedly, the insertion of false apostles within the community acerbates the problem – a fact evident in 2 Corinthians. However, Paul's authority is questioned much earlier (see 1 Corinthians 4.18). Thus, the rift between Paul and the Corinthian community was already there before the arrival of the false teachers. The change in the manner Paul writes, from correction (in 1 Corinthians) to defence (in 2 Corinthians) is caused by the escalation noted above – as the threat to his authority becomes more direct, so does his defence becomes more personal. Thus, both letters spring out of the same situation and both tackle the theme of Apostolic authority, albeit in different ways.

Errant Theology in the Corinthian Church

Barrett (1994: 36) has proposed that the "false apostles" Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians were likely Judaizers with connections to Jerusalem who had adapted their message to suit the Corinthian audience, hence the lack of circumcision talk. Paul's relationship with the Jewish Christians was already on the fray and this could have been an attempt to rip the church out from his care. It is difficult however to precisely determine the status of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians, and the identity of those who sought to lead the Corinthians astray. What *is* clear is that not only did the Corinthians find it difficult to accept Paul's authority, but also, they failed in following Paul's teaching.

Fee (1987: 4) notes that the Corinthians had an "inordinate amount of Corinth yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviours that required radical surgery without killing the patient." Thus, it could be that their cultural setting, coupled with issues internal to the community, worked against Paul's attempt to teach them to live as followers of Christ. Because the Corinthians' *Weltanschauung* was Hellenistic, they easily mixed Paul's teaching with Hellenistic dualism. For instance, Martin (1986: xxxi) has pointed out that the Corinthians possessed an incipient Gnosticism, giving the "spiritual" a higher value than the that of the lower physical. Because of this, the Corinthians simply misunderstood how believers partake in the power of Christ's resurrection (Ellis 1974: 74). Their spiritual (charismatic) experiences led them to believe that they had already attained a higher level of existence – hence the expression "the tongues of angels" for the *glossolalia* (1 Corinthians 13.1). By considering the Spirit's manifested presence to be the fulfilment of the eschatological promises, they probably believed that they were already living the resurrection, spiritualising it. This may be the mindset Paul sarcastically criticises in the words: "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings..." (1 Corinthians 4.8). Such spiritualized eschatology would have led them to belittle the importance of their physical existence and therefore to "get rid" of ethical considerations when it came to the "use: of their bodies. In other words, since the eschaton was already present, it did not matter if one committed sexual immorality or ate food dedicated to idols. Christ's death and resurrection had ushered them into the new age of spiritual enlightenment (Fee 1987: 12).

Added to the above, Paul's critique of "worldly wisdom" in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians may provide a hint to yet another issue. Grayson (1990: 22-23) has argued that in the context of Paul's argument, where "worldly wisdom" is contrasted with the "wisdom of God," the focus is on the Corinthians' desire to be "socially acceptable". However, Paul's opposition is not an argument in favour of social awkwardness. Rather, it is a warning against seeing God's wisdom as the typical socially acceptable rationale used to achieve social cohesion and advancement. In other words, Grayson argues, the Corinthian believers were obsessed with social acceptability, and that made them turn the message of Christ into a vehicle for personal advancement and power. This pursuit of prestige can be seen in the way the church divided, each party seeking to stake its own claim of power (Grayson 1990: 22; cf. Horsley and Silbermann 1997: 172). Seen in this light, Paul's opposition to "wisdom" becomes more understandable.

Paul's Theology of the Cross – Addressing the Corinthian Problem

The theology of the cross (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.18-2:10) is the central feature of Paul's response to the Corinthian problem. The message is both, polemic and didactic, for he employs the cross, both, to teach the Corinthians about the nature of God and to deflate their errant theology and the resulting immorality. Furthermore, Paul uses it in connection with the theme of resurrection, aiming to correct the Corinthian misconception in regard with the relationship between the two (Conzelmann 1975: 40-41). In fact, 1 Corinthians is framed by these themes – it begins with a discussion of the cross in the first two chapters and it ends with a discussion about the resurrection in the fifteenth chapter. As for Paul's specific instructions, these are placed in between.

It has been suggested that the structure of the letter is important because it reveals Paul's purpose. For instance, Karl Barth argued that 1 Corinthians is mainly about the resurrection because it climaxes with it in the fifteenth chapter (cf. Beker 1980: 176). However, Käsemann (1970: 177) rightly notes that in Paul's formulation of the gospel, it is the cross that gives meaning to the resurrection. Thus, the resurrected Christ is the crucified Christ, for he would not need to be resurrected had he not been crucified. The cross defines the nature of the resurrected One and of his followers, and not the other way around. In this way Paul teaches the Corinthian believers the correct relation to eschatology in the now. Paul does specify that the resurrection is a future reality (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.7-8). However, "in the present life [Christians] are called to actualize the crucifixion with Christ" (Ellis 1974: 74). This is how Paul counteracts their over-realized eschatology and at the same time offers a model for the Christian life in the present.

It is evident from the way Paul argues his case that the Corinthians understood "salvation" as a *spiritual* reality, which was ushered in by the Spirit through the resurrection of Christ (Beker 1980: 165). This gave them the "freedom" to "escape" bodily and worldly entrapment. However, Paul declares that such eschatology is utterly wrong, for believers ought to expect a bodily resurrection as the eschatological fulfilment of Christ's work. As for the present, they are to live in the shadow of the cross. Only then will they partake in the resurrection power of Christ. In Dunn's words, "the new creation is not possible without the crucifixion of me to the world and the world to me" (Dunn 1998: 412).

An important aspect of Paul's argument is the contrast between worldly wisdom and the message of the cross. He writes to the Corinthians:

> For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1.17-18)

It is probable that the term "wisdom" is a catch word in Corinth, for Paul gives it a considerable amount of space in his letter (Conzelmann 1975: 37). As previously noted, though, in the context of Paul's argument, "wisdom" does not refer to general knowledge, but to a particular attitude or outlook on life. Hafemann (1993: 165) notes that it is practical wisdom, focused on accomplishments and extravagant lifestyle, that resulted in "addiction to power, prestige, and pride." In the light of this, Paul's message about a crucified Messiah, in the context of the Greco-Roman culture, seems like nonsense – a "socially destructive stupidity" (Grayson 1990: 22), for it did not meet the requirements of wisdom. Wisdom, they thought, brought social cohesion and advancement to its possessor. The result was a festival of boasting among the Corinthians concerning who was wiser, who was associated with the wiser leader (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.12), and who was most in touch with the source of wisdom – the Spirit.

Paul does not oppose wisdom *per se.* Instead, he proves that the Corinthians do not know its true meaning. For him true wisdom is the crucified Messiah himself, rather than any human notion of social success. The juxtaposition of "Messiah" and "crucified" is paradoxical because the first denotes victorious salvation while the second absolute humiliating failure (Cousar 1990a: 29). To the Jew, therefore, Paul's message would have been scandalous (Käsemann 1970: 156) and to the Greek foolish. Paul has a disturbing announcement, though. The crucified Christ is necessarily the wisdom and power of God. Thus, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has overturned the standards of wisdom and power in the world (Green 1993: 203). What once was wise and strong has now become weakness while that which was foolish, and failure has become the power of God (1 Corinthians 1.20, 25). Salvation, then, cannot be found through human efforts, for the wisdom of the world failed to acknowledge God (1 Corinthians 1.21). There is nothing left for humans to boast about except the Lord (1 Corinthians 1.31).

To conclude, the horrifying death of Jesus Christ on the cross was not an obstacle that was overcome through the resurrection (Cousar 1990b: 172). Rather, it was, and is, the revelation of God's identity and plan of salvation for the creation. It is precisely God, Paul argues, that is revealed in the face of the crucified Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 4.4). Therefore, to neglect the cross was to abandon Christ himself.

Paul's Theology of the Cross – Implications

It follows from the above that the message of the cross is an ultimate criticism of human knowledge and expectation (cf. Lampe 1990: 122). In the act of Christ on the cross God contradicts everything that humans would expect from a god to do. Paul admits that the cross is the weakness and foolishness of God (1 Corinthians 1.25) and that the exalted Messiah himself was crucified in weakness (2 Corinthians 13.5). In Christ, then, God announces power as weakness and weakness as power – a message that also fits Isaiah's vision of God's perfect reign (cf. Măcelaru 2016: 131-146). This is not simply scandalous; this is a complete deconstruction of what humanity knows and believes to be wisdom and power.

Being that it defies human expectation, the gospel demands a drastic change in the perception of the hearer in order to be seen as it truly is: God's wisdom and power for salvation. Thus, whosoever has seen Christ's "act of apparent weakness as the expression of God's power to save has entered into a new way of perceiving power" (Brown 1998: 270). Through the cross of Christ God begins a transition into a new age (Hays 1996: 27), one that breaks into the old one to both judge and destroy it. The cross is at the same time a negation of the present order, and an affirmation in the form of an invitation into a new order. Paul recognized that the concepts of power and wisdom the Corinthians were operating with worked to maintain the *status quo* of the present age – a project God opposed. This is why Paul refuses to employ human wisdom to preach the gospel, for to do so would undermine God's intentions and betray God's methods. The gospel of the cross dismantles structures and pretensions built upon false power and wisdom (cf. 2 Corinthians 10.3-5) while at the same time it creates a new reality (cf. 2 Corinthians 5.16-17). As Grayson (1990: 51) concludes, "to those who are sharing in God's transformation [the gospel] is a powerful agent of change."

By presenting weakness as strength and strength as weakness, Paul radically reinterprets the meaning of power. This language is, of course, employed polemically. It helps with correcting the self-seeking mindset and immoral practices of the Corinthians. Nevertheless, it is also more than that. Moving from the cross to power, in his defence, Paul rethinks his personal experiences. Weakness, failure, and humiliation, instead of being occasions for resignation, become reasons for boasting, for they are "a vehicle of God's power" (Peterson 1998: 262). Weakness does not disqualify Paul as an apostle. Rather, it sets him in opposition to the lifestyle and pride of the false teachers that invaded the Corinthian church. Paul is the antithesis of what these teachers were representing: rhetorically polished speeches (2 Corinthians 11.6), good religious connections (2 Corinthians 11.22), and financial stability at the expense of the Corinthian believers (2 Corinthians 11.7-11). Paul does not boast in his strengths and accomplishments, for to do so would undercut the gospel that he preaches. All self-sufficiency, pride, and power mongering had been thrown out at the cross. The true servant of God can only boast in his weaknesses. This is scandalous, for it contradicts everything that the world sees as valuable and desirable.

The implications of Paul's defence address not only the Corinthian church but also the contemporary one. There is an important corelation between Paul's self-defence and his soteriology. The divine humiliation and self-giving at the cross form a paradigm for salvation. Even though Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor so that humanity could have a part in his riches (2 Corinthians 8.9). Salvation therefore requires participation in Christ, in his death and resurrection, and thus participation in his weakness (Black 1984: 86). And this is not only about one's conversion but is in fact a paradigm for the entirety of Christian life. The Christian, therefore, is to emulate the weakness of Christ by identifying with his death on the cross, but also expecting God to release his power amid weakness. What does this mean concretely? It is not that Christians should seek to suffer for the sake of suffering, but that they are to adopt the mind and attitude of Christ. Therefore, the message of the cross calls Christ's followers to sacrificial love. Those who have received life through the death and resurrection of Jesus "should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them" (2 Corinthians 5.15). This is a "new economy" that requires the Christian to become a servant of others for the sake of Christ.

Conclusions

The peculiar adaptation over the centuries of the symbol of the cross has a theological corollary. Attempts to domesticate the gospel of Christ into a justification for the structures of the passing present order, which God has already judged, are as unacceptable and foreign to the true meaning of the Christ event as is the transformation nowadays of an ancient instrument of torture into a decorative object. The Corinthians were guilty of treating the gospel as a means for social enhancement and advantageous positioning. Paul's response to this is "the message of the cross," which is a scandalous foolishness for the nonbeliever, but power for the one approaching God by faith.

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MUZICA, MODALITATE DE EVANGHELIZARE: PLANTAREA DE BISERICI LIBERE ÎN AUSTRIA ÎNTRE 1960-1990

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ABSTRACT. This historical contribution shows that free church missionaries and church planters in Austria discovered music as an evangelistic tool to address the "Austrian soul" since the early 1960s. Initially, it were German missionary organizations such as the Mission House Wiedenest Bible School, the mission organizations Neues Leben and the Janz Team that integrated music into their evangelistic mission work. Then, in the 1980s, Agape Austria (Campus Crusade for Christ) and Operation Mobilisation Austria which took up music as a tool in their evangelistic ministry in Austria.

KEY WORDS: evangelism, music, Austria, Church planting

Introducere: Austria și Muzica

Dacă cereți anglo-saxonilor un răspuns spontan la întrebarea: "Ce știți despre Austria?", în marea majoritate a cazurilor răspunsul este: filmul *Sunetul muzicii*. Pe de altă parte, este de-a dreptul remarcabil că, până nu demult, aproape nici un austriac nu ar fi asociat *Sunetul muzicii* cu țara lui. Ceea ce a fost un succes de box-office în lumea anglo-saxonă, cunoscut până și de copii, a rămas în mare parte necunoscut în Austria – atât musical-ul, cât și filmul. Această situație s-a schimbat însă în ultimii ani, în special în punctele turistice din *Salzburger Land*, datorită excursiilor "Sunetul Muzicii" organizate acolo. Un exemplu, printre multe altele, de asociere a acestui film cu Austria este autobiografia americanului William (Bill) Wagner, fost misionar și plantator de biserici, care a contribuit la fondarea Facultății de Teologie Evanghelică (ETF) din Leuven (Belgia) și a Seminarului Biblic din Bonn. Cartea lui Wagner la care facem referire este *From Classroom Dummy to University President: Serving God in the Land of Sound of Music* din 2020.

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Dar, chiar dacă *Sunetul muzicii* a rămas în parte necunoscut austriecilor, asocierea dintre "muzică" și "Austria" este cu siguranță reală. Renumitul *Österreich Lexikon* arată că "Austria este considerată țara muzicii prin excelență și se definește în lume în primul rând prin muzică" (Bamberger 1995: 84; Rathkolb 2005: 52). Dacă vă întrebați care sunt austriecii importanți din istoria muzicii, veți întâlni nume precum Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn, Anton Bruckner, Franz Schubert, dirijorul Herbert von Karajan, dar și cântăreți moderni precum Udo Jürgens, Peter Alexander, Falco sau, în prezent, Andreas Gabalier. Lista se poate extinde cu ușurință, încât să cuprindă mult mai multe nume, iar cele 3500 de coruri ce fac parte din "Chorverband Österreich", incluzând aproximativ 105000 de cântăreți, vorbesc de la sine despre importanța muzicii în această țară (cf. Chorverband 2022). Prin comparație, Germania, care are de aproape zece ori mai mulți locuitori, are doar aproximativ 15000 de formații corale (vezi Statista 2022). Prin urmare, nu ar trebui să ne surprindă că relația specială a austriecilor cu muzica, în toată diversitatea ei, merită luată în considerare și în munca misionară. Relevanța "sufletului austriac" și a mentalității austriece în evanghelizare, în plantarea de biserici și în construirea de biserici este specială (Podobri 2011: 92-105).

Observații Preliminare

Acest articol se dorește o contribuție istorică ce prezintă și documentează utilizarea selectivă a muzicii în lucrarea de plantare a bisericilor libere din Austria între 1960-1990. Această limitare temporală este cauzată de specificul surselor disponibile nouă, având în vedere faptul că doar din anii 1960 există evidența unor eforturi deliberate de a folosi muzica în evanghelizare și plantarea de biserici. Încheierea studiului nostru cu anii 1990 a fost determinată de dispariția treptată a utilizării muzicii ca instrument de evanghelizare în cadrul activității de plantare de biserici a vremii, aspect motivat în parte de situația bisericilor libere, care în perioada respectivă au lăsat în urmă faza de pionierat și au intrat în faza de consolidare (cf. Hinkelmann 2014: 430-505). Deoarece acest articol are mai degrabă un scop istoric decât misionar-teologic, materialul de mai jos are caracter descriptiv, informator. Totodată, deoarece sursele folosite sunt în mare parte necunoscute și greu accesibile, am ales în mod deliberat să le prezentăm prin citări extensive pentru a da cititorului acces la informație.

Utilizarea Muzicii în Activitatea Misionară a Armatei Salvării

Un prim exemplu, timpuriu, de utilizare a muzicii în evanghelizare ne parvine de la deschiderea misiunii Armatei Salvării în Viena în anul 1926. Într-un raport făcut ulterior evenimentului se descriu următoarele:

> Întregul corp muzical al Armatei Salvării din Berlin, 22 de ofițeri de stat major, suflători și cântăreți... au interpretat piese muzicale selectate... și astfel s-au prezentat bine la Viena, capitală iubitoare de muzică și cunoscătoare de muzică. Anterior, piesele fuseseră interpretate pe străzile Vienei, în fața mulțimilor de oameni nelipsite. Din nefericire, sala, în care se aflau aproximativ 1000 de persoane, a fost mult prea mică pentru a găzdui mulțimile care se înghesuiau. Mii de oameni nu au fost lăsați să intre de către forțele poliție desfășurate în mare număr. (Monsky 1927: 22)

Cu toate acestea, nu mai există surse care să documenteze utilizarea specifică a muzicii în evanghelizare și în activitatea de plantare de biserici la vremea respectivă. Câteva decenii mai târziu, un misionar și plantator de biserici american, privind înapoi la lucrarea sa care a început la mijlocul anilor 1960, remarcă oportunitatea folosirii muzicii, fapt ce dovedește că aceasta nu era încă o practică răspândită: “Austriecii au o preferință pentru muzică și artă. De asemenea, sunt sceptici dacă nu știu ceva. Muzica poate construi o punte. La țară, am cântat odată la acordeon cu vecinul și asta a fost o ocazie de a stabili relații“ (Hinkelmann 2014: 91).

Utilizarea Muzicii în Congregațiile Creștine din Wiedenest

Folosirea muzicii ca unealtă în activitatea de evanghelizare și plantare de biserici devine o constantă abia din a doua jumătate a anilor 1960 și în principal în bisericile libere. Iată ce preciza anunțul unui astfel de eveniment din *Weckruf*, revista congregațiilor creștine Wiedenest din Austria, în vara anului 1967:

> Cântărețul Franz Knies, ale cărui discuri au devenit populare cu prilejul a numeroase evenimente, a fost invitat într-un turneu în Austria. Knies combină performanțele muzicale solo cu propovăduirea lui Isus Cristos, pe care l-a experimentat personal în viața sa. Îi așteptăm cu nerăbdare vizita și ne rugăm ca Domnul să se reveleze prin acest tip foarte diferit de mărturie a Evangheliei. Serile muzicale sunt planificate, printre altele, în următoarele locuri: Wolfsberg (21 septembrie 1967), Judenburg (22 septembrie 1967), Knittelfeld (23 septembrie 1967) și Graz (24 septembrie 1967). (Knies 1967: 15)

Câteva luni mai târziu, un reportaj despre evenimentele organizate în jurul acestui cântăreț a apărut sub titlul "Evanghelizarea – cândva cu totul altfel":

> Evanghelizarea – altădată cu totul altceva: așa ne-am simțit la serile muzicale cu cântărețul de muzică *gospel* Franz Knies, organizate în Judenburg și Knittelfeld pe 21 și 23 septembrie 1967. Ambele evenimente, care au avut loc în spații publice, au înregistrat o participare numeroasă. Un procent mare din public era format din străini. Fie că Franz Knies a interpretat aproape exclusiv piese clasice, fie că, în cealaltă seară, a venit cu mai multe corale și cântece evanghelice pe lângă arii individuale, de fiecare dată a fost vorba de Evanghelia cântată. Înainte sau în timpul spectacolelor, a mărturisit despre Isus Cristos. Fiecare program a avut o linie bine gândită în cadrul temei. Vizitatorii au fost purtați în mijlocul evenimentelor din textul biblic – care a fost cântat de un tenor bariton. Prin intermediul benzilor și difuzoarelor, solistul însuși a asigurat un acompaniament orchestral excelent. Un ziar local descrie această metodă ca fiind "originală și impresionantă". Serile au fost bine primite. "Experții" prezenți și-au exprimat, de asemenea, aprecierea. Aici au fost atinși oameni care, altfel, nu asistă la predici, așa că suntem foarte recunoscători Domnului pentru aceste serate evanghelistice diferite, muzicale. (Klatt 1967: 16)

În aceeași vară, grupul muzical elvețian Bibellesbund a făcut un turneu în Austria și a sprijinit, printre altele, lucrarea misionară din Graz (Teilnehmer 1967: 8), iar în vara anului 1968, tineri germani au venit la Knittelfeld cu "tromboane, tobe, chitare electrice și voci minunate" (Augustin 1968: 8) și au primit permisiunea de a concerta în fiecare seară în piața principală a orașului pentru a atrage atenția asupra evenimentelor de evanghelizare ulterioare. Un raport asupra acestor evenimente consemnează:

Acest lucru a făcut ca populația să se ridice și să ia aminte. Ferestrele se deschideau și oamenii ascultau spectacolele. Din când în când se produceau ambuteiaje, pentru că toți voiau să audă ce era în piața principală. Locul se umplea cu tot mai mulți vizitatori în fiecare seară, iar la mese nu era suficient spațiu pentru a găzdui toți oaspeții. (Augustin 1968: 8)

Fără îndoială, cercetarea noastră ar putea continua cu multe alte exemple din perioada respectivă privind activitatea congregațiilor creștine din Wiedenest. Ne limităm însă la cele deja prezentate în ziarele citate și în *Weckruf*, revista congregațiilor creștine din Wiedenest, precum rubricile lui Eyl (1979: 10) și Czeskleba (1979: 15). Un fapt interesant de remarcat este durata scurtă a acestui mod de evanghelizare. Sursele de informare disponibile sugerează că, cel puțin în ce privește activitatea misionară a celor din Wiedenest, accentul cade pe o nouă abordare la începutul anilor 1970, anume evanghelizarea prin film.

Muzica în Campaniile pentru Credință ale Agenției de Misiune "Neues Leben" și în Cruciadele de Evanghelizare "Janz-Team"

Ca mijloc de evanghelizare, muzica nu a fost folosită doar de congregațiile creștine din Wiedenest. Organizația misionară "Neues Leben", fondată de Anton Schulte, a desfășurat numeroase "campanii pentru credință" în anii 1960, în special în orașele din Austria, unde muzica era văzută ca important instrument de evanghelizare. Astfel, pentru campania din Zeltweg, din nordul regiunii Styria, nu numai că s-a format un cor de 60 de cântăreți veniți din Germania, Austria, Elveția și Iugoslavia, dar a fost invitat și cântărețul american de operă Vernon Wicker, care a performat ca solist (Rath: 1969: 10).

O altă organizație misionară care și-a extins activitatea din Germania în Austria a fost Janz-Team. Fondată în 1954 de canadianul Leo Janz și având sediul în Pădurea Neagră, această organizație a desfășurat campanii de evanghelizare similare celor organizate de Neues Leben, muzica având un rol important pe întreg parcursul acestor evenimente (Walldorf 2019: 119-137). În Austria, primele activități de evanghelizare ale echipei Janz-Team sunt documentate la Linz în 1961. Un membru al personalului "Misiunii Populare" din Linz menționează "sute" de persoane care "au luat decizia de a-l urma pe Cristos", printre care aproximativ 80 de membri ai "Misiunii Populare" (Mayrhofer 1962: 3-4). După 1970, Janz-Team și-a intensificat activitățile de evanghelizare în Austria. Numeroase rapoarte despre aceste campanii de evanghelizare sunt disponibile, și toate menționează rolul muzicii în cadrul evenimentelor. De exemplu, Larry Janz și cvartetul Janz-Team, numit "Ambasadorii", au evanghelizat în perioada 4-11 noiembrie 1973 în sala Oficiului Muncii din Bludenz (Mauerhofer 1974: 7). Într-un raport asupra evenimentului, un colaborator implicat în eveniment subliniază în special legătura dintre evanghelizare și muzică: "Marele avantaj al acestei echipe a fost că se ocupa ea însăși de muzică, de cântat și de mesaj. Nouă, congregației, ni s-a cerut doar să ne rugăm pentru ei, să invităm și să aducem oameni interesați" (Mauerhofer 2006: 41).

În toamna anului 1973 a avut loc o "campanie pentru credință" și în Wels, cu același personal ca în Bludenz, la care au participat aproximativ 2000 de persoane. Cu toate acestea, punctul culminant din Wels a fost marșul interconfesional combinat cu un miting public în piața orașului: "Cu bannere, cântece și scandări, 250 de creștini din Wels și din împrejurimi au mărturisit ce înseamnă Isus pentru ei" (Funck 1973: 12). Alte evanghelizări de mare amploare au avut loc în

Linz, combinate cu trei evenimente muzicale speciale, ținute la uzinele siderurgice Voest-Alpine în toamna anului 1974 (Idea 1975: 12) și în noiembrie 1976 la Viena (Janz 1976: 13). Toate acestea fac parte din istoricul activităților echipei Janz-Team din Austria (cf. Mauerhofer 1981: 9-10).

La mijlocul anilor 1970, din ce în ce mai frecvent artiștii implicați în evanghelizare au început să vină din afara Austriei. În 1975, de exemplu, un ansamblu de muzică de la Columbia Bible College din Carolina de Sud a concertat la Graz pentru iubitorii de muzică clasică, dar și în cadrul unor adunări cu caracter evanghelistic (Taul 1975: 12). Totodată, Jonköping Brassband din Suedia a susținut un concert la Salzburg Mozarteum, în colaborare cu biserica penticostală locală, și a cântat la două concerte în aer liber la Alter Markt (Wagner 1978: 10-11). La începutul anului 1981 sunt consemnate reprezentațiile Corului Tabor College din Hillsboro, Kansas, care a concertat și în Austria în cadrul turneului său european de la Linz și Viena, ia cântăreți asociați cu Janz-Team au concertat în mai multe orașe mai mici (Singet 1981: 9).

Muzica în Activitățile Organizațiilor "Operation Mobilisation" și "Agape Austria" din Anii ,80

În anii 1980, muzica a fost folosită în principal de organizțiile misionare pentru tineret Operation Mobilisation și Agape Austria (varianta austrică a Campus Crusade for Christ). Astfel, Agape Austria înființează propria filială muzicală sub numele de "Crescendo", concentrându-și activitatea în zona Salzburg:

> "Crescendo" – cine sau ce este? Crescendo a fost fondată în urmă cu opt ani la Basel, ca lucrare creștină neconfesională printre cântăreții de muzică clasică. De aici, mai multe "ramuri" ale ei s-au format în diferite țări europene [...]. În Austria, până în prezent există o astfel de "ramură" doar în Salzburg. Ideea principală a lucrării a fost formulată pe scurt astfel: "Mai multă muzică printre creștini – mai mulți creștini printre muzicieni!" [...]
>
> Desigur, obiectivul nostru ca studenți la muzică în Salzburg este și să-i conducem pe alții la credința în Isus Cristos. La Universitatea Mozarteum avem o varietate de oferte pentru meditație, yoga, Zen și alte "grupuri de *self-discovery*", motivul fiind evident: cei ce fac muzică se confruntă constant cu sentimentele și psihicul lor, căutând noi surse de putere. Adesea, Evanghelia le pare prea limitată studenților, care caută mai degrabă libertatea fără limite, gândirea pozitivă. Cu toate acestea, încercăm

> să le aducem la cunoștință, în multe feluri, adevărul după care credința clar definită în Isus Cristos cel înviat este o eliberare. Am organizat deja de două ori concerte cu muzicieni creștini renumiți, care au spus câteva cuvinte despre credința lor personală în Isus Cristos prin piesele interpretate. Cântările cu mesaj spiritual interpretate de Yulio Imanaka în primul concert au fost deosebit de frumoase și emoționante. (Engelken (1994: 3)

Câțiva ani mai târziu, activitatea va fi reformulată, punându-se mai mult accent pe concerte în care aspectul evanghelistic este subliniat în mod explicit:

> “Crescendo“ înțelege și folosește muzica ca modalitate de a proclama Vestea Bună a lui Isus Cristos. Muzica poate fi descrisă un limbaj fără cuvinte, pe care Cel Atotputernic îl poate folosi pentru a vorbi cu ascultătorii și, bineînțeles, cu interpreții. (Kuhleber 1996: 9)

Operation Mobilisation a invitat pentru prima dată un grup muzical din Canada în vara anului 1979, grup care a făcut un turneu în Austria, a susținut concerte și a sprijinit activitatea de evanghelizare a altor echipe de ajutorare din teren. De atunci, muzica a devenit din ce în ce mai importantă ca mijloc de evanghelizare în activitățile acestei organizații. Unul dintre participanți nota:

> Dumnezeu se folosește de echipa de muzică, și o mulțime neobișnuit de mare de oameni ascultă. 200 de persoane au fost în Eisenerz, iar după piesele muzicale locuitorii se întâlnesc cu echipa de evanghelizare staționată acolo. Alte 50 de persoane s-au adunat în Amstetten. Nu pare un număr mare, dar misionarul local ne-a spus că este cel mai mare număr de oameni pe care l-a întâlnit vreodată la un eveniment evanghelistic. (*Resume* 1979: 1)

La scurt timp după aceste evenimente, organizația a angajat un lider calificat din punct de vedere muzical, iar Operation Mobilisation Austria, ca parte a misiunii sale anuale de sensibilizare a tinerilor, și-a format propria echipă muzicală în primăvara anului 1982, numită “Siloah – Apă vie pentru Austria“. “Siloah“ s-a pus la dispoziția bisericilor pentru concerte misionare și, în același timp, a avut ca obiectiv fondarea și promovarea altor grupuri muzicale austriece (vezi *OM-Kurier* 1973: 3). “Siloah“ a susținut concerte de evanghelizare în toată Austria, dar și în Elveția, Germania și Norvegia (Gallmayer 1981: 33; Liezen 1981: 46). Iată ce scria în 1982 un ziar local din Austria, sub titlul “Concert neobișnuit“:

> *În multe locuri,* "Siloah" este deja cunoscut ca grup atipic: o formație internațională cu o muzică variată, de la folk la gospel și până la stilul "cantautor", cu versuri care te fac să gândești. Kerry (din Canada) și Brigitte (din Elveția) cântă cu vocea, Wolfgang (din Austria) și Christoph (din Germania) cântă cu vocea și la chitară. Oybind (din Norvegia) cântă la chitară bas, Volker (din Germania) cântă la saxofon și clarinet, iar Welfhard (din Germania) cântă cu vocea și la clape. Cei șapte tineri din cinci țări s-au reunit timp de un an pentru a face muzică în Austria și a împărtăși cu alții experiențele lor cu Dumnezeu. Sunteți invitați la concertul lor din 24 august în sala Oficiului Muncii din Scheibbs. Intrarea este liberă, pentru că "Siloah" nu vrea să facă bani, ci să aducă bucurie. (Copie a unui articol de ziar, probabil *Erlaftalboten*, publicat în august 1982 în Scheibbs)

Numai în luna august 1982, "Siloah" a susținut concerte în orașele austriece: Braunau, Perg, Enns, St. Valentin, Purkersdorf, Tully, Ybbs, Melk, Viena, Mödling, Klosterneuburg, Hollabrunn, Horn, Korneuburg și Scheibbs (*OM-Kurier* 1982: 3). Operation Mobilisation a organizat, de asemenea, turnee de concerte evanghelistice pentru cântăreți și grupuri străine, precum cântăreața americană Karen Lafferty, care a fost invitată de mai multe ori:

> Aflată într-un turneu de concerte prin Austria, Karen Lafferty, de data aceasta însoțită de grupul muzical "Timotheus", a vizitat miercuri, 16 septembrie, și orașul Steyr, unde era deja cunoscută publicului de la două concerte anterioare. Aproximativ 200 de persoane, în special tineri, au umplut până la refuz vechiul și romanticul teatru al orașului. Tema unificatoare care a traversat atât interpretarea lui Karen Lafferty, cât și a grupului muzical a fost dragostea lui Dumnezeu pentru oameni. Dacă versurile în limba engleză au fost înțelese mai puțin, interpretarea lui Karen a creat o atmosferă remarcabilă, din care se desprinde clar dragostea ei. Prin mai multe mărturii, muzicienii și-au împărtășit experiențele cu Dumnezeu. După concert, fiecare vizitator a primit o carte cu dedicație din partea artistului. Au urmat multe conversații, și sperăm că și cărțile distribuite vor aduce roade în tăcere. (Reischl 1981: 53)

La începutul anilor ,90, un grup olandez a efectuat un turneu în Austria în cadrul unei campanii de vară a Operation Mobilisation, interpretând "Patimile" lui Adrian Snell. Totodată, grupuri precum duo-ul finlandez-austriac *Outi und Lee* și grupul german-austriac *Tom, Chris und Artin* din Linz și-au folosit talentul muzical în eforturile misionare. După 1990, însă, remarcăm că utilizarea muzicii ca instrument de evanghelizare în activitățile de plantare de biserici a început să scadă.

Concluzii

Muzica atinge sufletul, iar austriecii sunt deosebit de deschiși spre muzică. Misionarii străini au remarcat și ei acest lucru, folosind muzica în mod special ca “instrument“ de evanghelizare și plantare de biserici încă din anii 1960. Dacă, la început, organizațiile misionare Neues Leben și Janz-Team au fost primele care au folosit concertele sau contribuțiile muzicale în scop evanghelistic, practica s-a răspândit în anii ‚80, când organizații misionare precum Agape Austria și Operation Mobilisation au pus un mai mare accent pe evanghelizarea prin muzică. Totuși, utilizarea muzicii în evanghelizare s-a diminuat în mod considerabil și, probabil, nejustificat la începutul anilor ‚90, deși, așa cum dovedesc sursele citate, relevanța muzicii ca instrument în lucrarea misionară și de plantare de biserici în anii precedenți poate fi un model pentru viitor și în alte contexte.

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