VIATORUM

Contents

Book Review

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVII (2025/3) 209–210

Editorial

Notes from the Coasts of Bohemia: Persisting Beyond Sanctioned Categories

The Apostle Paul, James Cone, Ján Lajčiak and a contemporary Czech Protestant pastor walk into a room… What sounds like the opening of a twice-told Czech joke is, in truth, the very substance of this issue.

František Abel introduces Paul amidst his struggle with the "Judaizers" who so unsettled the Galatian Christians. Drawing upon the currents of New Testament scholarship that read the works of Paul of Tarsus within the multifaceted context of late Second Temple Judaism, Abel demonstrates that the motive of those seeking to compel Gentile converts to undergo circumcision was, at its heart, a reluctance to remain outside the safety of socially sanctioned categories.

Brach Jennings presents James Cone, a luminary of Black Theology, against the backdrop of Luther's seminal Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. It was here that Luther first articulated his "theology of the cross" in opposition to the "theology of glory." Cone's concept of Black Theology is not merely a byproduct of the social upheavals of the 1960s; it is a profound and original application of Luther's inverse logic of the cross – a gospel-derived subversion of the hierarchies of "high" and "low" – to the experience of African Americans and, indeed, all marginalised groups.

Sidónia Horňanová, in her study, introduces the Slovak theological *solitaire* Ján Lajčiak. As the first academically trained Slovak Old Testament scholar, Lajčiak remained an outsider within his own domestic milieu despite his international perspective. In the author's rendering, he becomes the embodiment of the very hero to whom he devoted his scholarly attention: the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel.

Ondřej Macek, for his part, brings into the room the figure of the Protestant pastor as revealed by his sociological survey, which focuses on the ministerial role within a postmodern European context. The findings highlight a startling discrepancy between what pastors value most in their own vocation and what the active members of their congregations actually expect of them.

This leaves us with the perennial dilemma: whether to mirror politely the expectations of others or to tread the solitary, if somewhat inconvenient, path of perceived truth. We trust that the contributions in this issue of *Communio Viatorum* will assist you in weighing this question with due intellectual honesty – an endeavour we felt compelled to encourage.

Petr Sláma
Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University
Černá 9, 110 00 Prague 1, Czech Republic
slama@etf.cuni.cz
ORCID: 0000-0001-7728-8266

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.1

The Riddle of Galatians 6:12–13 from a Historical-Critical Perspective

František Ábel

Abstract: Focusing on the historical (Jewish) context of Paul's message to the non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus in Galatia, regardless of the geographical location of the addressees, further issues arise that call for rethinking and re-examination. Among these, the strangeness of Paul's description of the people influencing the non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus within the Galatia churches stands out. Since the identification of these influencers is ambiguous – often thought to be Jews, either Christ-followers or not – it is also possible that they are former non-Jews, now proselytes who boast about their circumcision. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate this question from a historical-critical perspective, concentrating specifically on Paul's description of the Galatia influencers in 6:12–13, while considering the thesis that the matter at hand, which Paul addresses in the epistle, is not a defense of Christianity against the Jewish religion as a rival means of justification, but rather a concern for the Galatia churches dealing with the circumcision controversy.

Keywords: Galatian influencers; Jewishness (Judaism); justification; non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus; Paul the Apostle

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.2

Introduction

The debate over the interpretation of the Book of Galatians has gained renewed momentum with the emergence of new scholars interested in Paul and his message from a historical perspective, viewing the text as integral to Second Temple Judaism.[1] Continuing research into Paul's message within

1 This work was supported by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA), as part of the research project entitled "The Early Reception of Paul in the Corpus of New Testament Writings" (VEGA 1/0188/22), with its home base at Comenius University in Bratislava, at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty. The study is a revised and adapted version of my contribution presented during the EABS annual meeting in Sofia (2024, 15–18 July), in the New Testament Writings within Judaism section (Session 2.1.5). I am grateful and would like to thank Mark D. Nanos, who commented on an earlier version of this paper, and endeavored to save me from some incongruities caused by my own ignorance. I would also like to thank Kenneth

its Second Temple Jewish context convincingly demonstrates a significant finding: Paul never abandoned Judaism – or more accurately, Jewishness or the Jewish phenomenon – nor the Law (Torah).[2] Paul's life, missionary activities, and his calling to proclaim the gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, including the consequences of this event – among the non-Jews, *ethnē* (Gal 1:15–16), must be analyzed and interpreted in the context of contemporary multiform Jewishness, along with the beliefs and concepts, particularly the notion of the end-time redemption of Israel.[3] Therefore, the so-called "Galatia case" should be understood primarily not as a religious contest between Judaism and Christianity, but as a matter concerning the attraction of circumcision within the Galatia churches.

I am fully aware that countless scholarly works, books, and papers engage with this topic from various angles and points of view. Therefore, my intent is not to prove or disprove any hypotheses in this regard, nor to argue in favor of or against either of the two hypotheses concerning the location of the Galatian addressees (North or South Galatian hypothesis). Instead, I aim to explore the puzzling background and identification of the people advising the Galatian non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus regarding circumcision.[4] My approach mainly relies on the research of Mark D. Nanos, as well as Paula Fredriksen and others, who examine Paul within the context of Second

Atkinson for his willingness to comment on the final version and suggest some minor amendments.

2 In the present time it's primarily a case of the research findings of the scholars – among others William S. Campbell, Genevive Dibley, Kathy Ehrensperger, Neil Elliott, Pamela Eisenbaum, Paula Fredriksen, Mark D. Nanos, Matthew Novenson, Magnus Zetterholm, Karin H. Zetterholm – picking up the threads of a so-called the New Perspective on Paul and pushing the research forward beyond the frontiers of this platform (NPP). For the development of this historical-critical perspective on Paul, see in more detail Kathy Ehrensperger, "The New Perspective on Paul and Beyond," in idem, *Searching Paul: Conversation with the Jewish Apostle to the Nations. Collected Essays*. WUNT 429 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 353–75. For my recension of this monograph, see *ThLZ* 145:11 (2020), 1075–77.

3 In this regard, see František Ábel, "The Role of Israel Concerning the Gentiles in the Context of Romans 11:25–27," *JJMJS* 7 (2020), 26–53.

4 Concerning calling the non-Jewish members of the early Christ movement the "Christ believers in Jesus", I follow the categorization of Oscar Skarsaune who, while focusing on the issues of ethnic-based definition of the Jewish Christians, intentionally replaced the term "Jewish Christian" with "Jewish believer in Jesus". See in more detail Oskar Skarsaune, "Jesus Believers in Jesus in Antiquity – Problem of Definition, Method, and Sources," in Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (eds.), *A History of Jewish Believers in Jesus: The First Five Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 3–21.

Temple Jewishness. With their expertise in socio-historical and linguistic details, they challenge the longstanding traditional views on the Galatia issue, viewing it as primarily a local problem rather than an external one, while primarily considering the social dynamics within these communities.[5] I follow and expand on their opinions, aiming to highlight specific aspects that should be considered and could reinforce the hypothetical perspective on the identity of potential influencers presented in the following content of my study.

Regarding the structure of this study, I will first briefly discuss the recent broadly accepted views on identifying those people – we could hypothetically call them influencers. Then, I will explore Paul's references to his previous life in *Ioudaïsmos* (ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ), where he was a zealot for the traditions of his ancestors (1:13–14), along with his engagement with the issue of *ioudaïzein* during the Antioch incident (2:14). This analysis will be grounded in current knowledge and findings about what this may imply within contemporary Jewishness. Therefore, regarding the method, a language analysis of specific passages in Galatians – particularly based on current research about the meaning and possible implications of these terms within Second Temple Judaism – is central to this study. However, it clearly does not offer a definitive or straightforward solution to the issue. Following that, solely from this perspective, I will focus on the passage Gal 6:12–13, aiming to clarify the question regarding the influencers' background and identification. Since this study is limited in scope, there will be no room for extensive reflection on many other related aspects of this topic, especially a detailed analysis of the social profile of the Galatia non-Jewish members of the early Christ movement ("Christ believers in Jesus"), including potential patronage and meeting locations for both Jewish and non-Jewish members of the early Christ movement, aiming to uncover more insights about the implied recipients of the letter.[6] Regarding the Galatia addresses ethnic identity, I maintain the position that it refers only to non-Jewish Christian believers in Jesus. To

5 See especially Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in Fist-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002); Paula Fredriksen, *Paul the Pagan's Apostle* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2017).

6 For the social identity and many related issues regarding the early Christian communities within a broader historical context, see, among others, John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2019); John S. Kloppenborg, "Pauline Assemblies and Graeco-Roman Associations: The Person of Paul and His Writings Through the Eyes of

achieve the research goal of this study, I am not involved in a detailed analysis of all the specifics of current social identity research.[7] Due to the limited scope of the study, I also will not conduct a detailed exegesis of the selected texts or engage in a thorough review and evaluation of all interpretative options, but will contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding Galatians.

The Question of the Galatia Influencers

Countless scholarly works focus on the issues of Galatia from various perspectives. One serious point in this regard is the identification of the individuals influencing Paul's non-Jewish addressees in Galatia, specifically those advising them to be circumcised. This issue raises more significant questions: Who were these individuals? What program and intent did they have? Was there only one group, or should we consider two separate groups of influencers – a libertinistic group and a Judaizing group, or even a gnostic one? Were these individuals Jews, proselytes, or non-Jews with Judaizing tendencies (Judaizers)? Were they believers in Christ Jesus or not? If they were part of

His Early Interpreters," in Jens Schröter, Simon Butticaz, and Andreas Dettwiler (eds.), *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity*, BZNW 324 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 215–247.

7 Regarding social identity issues, it is proposed to describe the contributions of both the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-categorization Theory, originally developed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner during the 1970s and 1980s. The SIT introduced the concept of social identity as a way to explain behavior within a community or group (inter-group behavior), exploring the phenomena of the "ingroup" and "outgroup." The theory is based on the idea that identities are formed through differences that are defined in a relative or flexible way, depending on the activities in which a person engages. To explain further, it predicts certain behaviors within groups based on perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another. Since the term SIT is sometimes used as a tool for general theorizing about human social selves, there is also another, broader theory built on the insights of SIT that offers a more comprehensive account of self and group processes. For basic characteristics of the SIT, see Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in William G. Austin, Stephen Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47; Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour," in Stephen Worchel, William G. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7–24; John C. Turner, "Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-categorization Theories," in Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears, Bertjan Doosje (eds.), *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 6–34.

the Jesus Christ movement, were they under the patronage of the Jerusalem "mother" church, or were they independent of it?

All related questions represent an ongoing research conundrum.[8] In this regard, various hypotheses were presented, and it is not my ambition to argue with any of them. Rather, I want to focus on this issue from the perspective of the Galatians' historical context. Although this approach to the topic is and remains historical-critical and hypothetico-deductive[9], it would be a relevant way of identifying this group of people – particularly those mentioned by Paul in 6:12–13 – at least to examine their prospective identity through the lens of ethnic-based characterization, considering the meanings of the terms *Ioudaïsmos* and *ioudaïzein* in the context of current research.[10] First, let us briefly examine the program of those people as permitted by the contents of the letter.

In the introductory part of the letter, particularly in 1:7, we read that some people confuse the Galatian churches by proclaiming another, according to Paul, perverted gospel. While we might assume they came to Galatia from somewhere, the usual scholarly suggestion, in fact, Paul states no such thing.[11] In the concluding part of the letter (6:11–18), we learn about their aim to promote the circumcision of non-Jewish believers in Jesus. Considering the context of Paul's words in 2:3 (cf. Acts 15:1), they demanded the circumcision

8 For various stances and opinions on this issue in recent years, including their protagonists, see Robert Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," in Mark D. Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 334–36 (334–47). See also Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in Fist-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 110–92.

9 For this method and its application, see in more detail Dagfinn Føllesdal, "Hermeneutics and the Hypothetico-Deductive Method," in M. Martyn and L. C. McIntyre (eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 233–45; Dagfinn Føllesdal et al., *Argumentasjonsteori, språk og vitenskapsfilosofi* (4th ed.; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1986), 45–130. Mentioned by Magnus Zetterholm, "The Didache, Matthew, James – and Paul: Reconstructing Historical Developments in Antioch," in Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen Zangenberg (eds.), *Matthew, James and the Didache: Three Related Documents in their Jewish and Christian Setting* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 75–77 (73–90).

10 I engaged in this topic in my contribution, "*Ioudaïsmos* through the Lens of Remembering: Exploration of the Semantic Shift of the Term from Maccabees to the Early Second Century CE," presented during the EABS annual meeting in Syracuse (2023, 10–13 July), in the Memory, Method and Texts section (Session 2.1.14).

11 In this regard, as well as in other related issues, see Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*. NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 50–66.

of non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus. The usual interpretation is that it is an essential requirement for eschatological salvation; in other words, as Robert Jewett remarks, as “a condition *sine qua non* for salvation.”[12] However, based solely on Paul’s words, there is no implication that the influencers care about the salvation of the Galatians. And what does it mean if they do?[13] Supposing that there is only one group of influencers, Paul’s accusation that they want to change the gospel of Christ in 1:7, along with the reference in 6:12 to their effort to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ, would seemingly and hypothetically indicate their affiliation with the Jesus Christ movement, according to traditional interpretations.[14]

However, considering historical context, there is a real possibility of differing interpretations. Paul’s mention of the other gospel in 1:7 implies something different regarding the event of Jesus Christ. Perhaps their effort to bring the Galatians to full proselytism was driven by social dynamics within contemporary Asia Minor, compelling the local Jewish communities to function as an integral part of the larger non-Jewish society. As Tessa Rajak aptly remarks, this suggests that the character of a local synagogal community “would inevitably be dictated by the Greco-Roman polis norms. In this way, I would suggest, the Greek political system permanently shaped the evolution of Diaspora Judaism.”[15] Therefore, we should recognize that the options concerning the influencers’ intentions are likely to be varied.[16]

After all, if these people (influencers) were Christ believers in Jesus, it is not clear at all if they were Jewish or non-Jewish. Despite the usual understanding of their identity as Jewish by birth, it is improbable, as the following sections seek to demonstrate, just based on a historical-critical evaluation of the Jewish phenomenon, especially related to the semantics of the terms *Ioudaïsmos* and *ioudaïzein*.

---

12 Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation,” 336.

13 I appreciate Mark Nanos for bringing this to my attention.

14 Regarding the affiliation of these people, Mark Nanos has thoroughly explained why Paul’s rhetoric does not actually indicate this. See Nanos, *Irony*, 110–92.

15 Tessa Rajak, “The Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City,” in S. Fine (ed.), *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period* (London: Routledge, 1999), 165 (161–73). Stated by Nanos, *Irony*, 261.

16 Thus, Mark D. Nanos aptly and convincingly argues that there are further indications that the influencers are not Christ believers. See in more detail, Nanos, *Irony*, 282–316.

The Issues of *Ioudaïsmos* and *ioudaïzein* in Galatians Context

The very rare term *Ioudaïsmos* (Ἰουδαϊσμός) appears only four times in Jewish Second Temple literature: in 2 Maccabees (2:21; 8:1; 14:38 [2×]), once in its literary imitator 4 Maccabees (4:26), and solely in the New Testament corpus solely in Galatians (1:13–14 [2×]).[17] There are also two other known occurrences of the term; however, both originate from the later Roman period and are found in inscriptions.[18] This term is often translated as Judaism, which refers to the Jewish religion. However, this translation is not entirely accurate. By examining the historical context of all occurrences, we should consider the relationship of this term with its verbal cognate *ioudaïzein* (2:14).[19]

Recently, more scholars have made significant contributions to investigating the semantics of these terms, particularly Steve Mason, Shaye J. D. Cohen, Daniel Boyarin, Michael Murray, Matthew V. Novenson, Mark D. Nanos, and

17 In this part, I follow the contents of my papers: "*Ioudaïsmos* through the Lens of Remembering: Exploration of the Semantic Shift of the Term from Maccabees to the Early Second Century CE," *StBiSl* 16:1 (2024), 54–55 (50–76); "The Semantics of the Term ἰουδαΐζειν in Paul's Message: An Exposition on the Issue According to Luther's Interpretation and the Current Discussion about Paul within Judaism," in Maroš Nicák and Martin Tamcke (eds.), *500 Jahre der Reformation in der Slowakei* (Münster: Lit, 2019), 7–33.

18 The first (*CIJ* 537) is found in the funerary inscription from the third or fourth century CE for a woman from Porto (near Rome). The second (*CIJ* 694) is the synagogue benefaction inscription from the third century CE from Stobi in Macedonia. Both inscriptions are described in Jean-Baptiste Frey (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum, vol. 1: Europe* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1936), 398, 504–07. In the early second century CE, this term is found in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (Ign. *Magn*. 8.1; 10.3 [2×]; Ign. *Phld.* 6.1), however, there is also its opposite, the word *Christianismos* (Χριστιανισμός; Ign. *Magn.* 10.1, 3 [2×]; Ign. *Rom*. 3.3; Ign. *Phld.* 6.1), most probably being his own neoplasm (if not, then learned of it in Antioch). A little bit later, this word is attested in *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (*Mart. Pol*. 10.1). See Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Judaism without Circumcision and 'Judaism' without 'Circumcision' in Ignatius," *HTR* 95:4 (2002), 397 (395–415).

19 Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 146, remarks in this connection: "The only two occurrences of the verb in Josephus, which come in close proximity, mean much the same thing. At *War* 2.454 he describes the slaughter of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, which only Metilius survives – on his promise 'that he will Judaize all the way to circumcision' (μέχρι περιτομῆς ἰουδαΐσειν). A few sentences later (2.463), when hostilities erupt between Judeans and Syrians, Josephus reports that the latter killed most of the *Ioudaioi* in their midst, while remaining suspicious of the many Judaizers in each city (ἕκαστοι τοὺς ἰουδαΐζοντας εἶχον ἐν ὑποψίᾳ)."

others.[20] Given the current findings on this topic, we should recognize that the term *ioudaïzein* refers to something that only non-Jews can do. It is a phenomenon in which non-Jewish individuals observe specific aspects of Mosaic law, while full conversion to Jewishness (proselytism) is not required.[21] This phenomenon may stem from specific circumstances, such as the allure of Jewishness, its way of life, traditions, or customs to non-Jewish individuals, or from geopolitical factors. As previously mentioned, to judaize or to be judaized does not necessarily entail circumcision, although it may include it. The precise meaning of this term always depends on the context, and circumcision can be a factor if the circumstances, particularly geopolitical ones, require it.

According to standard etymological rules, this word should mean "the observance of Jewish customs by non-Jewish persons," not the "customs of the Jewish people" as it is commonly used.[22] Matthew V. Novenson argues that this term should be translated instead as "judaizing" or "judaization." However, what is significant – and etymologically exceptional – about the nominal form of the verb *ioudaïzein*, which is *Ioudaïsmos*, is that this term

20 See especially Steve Mason, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorisation in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38 (2007), 457–512; Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 141–84. For contesting these two essays, see Nanos' argument: Esth 8:17 LXX; Jdt 14:10; Josephus, *J. W.* 2.454; in Mark D. Nanos, "What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?" in Mark D. Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 303–12 (282–318). See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 69–106; Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE*, SCJud 13 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 3–7; Daniel Boyarin, "Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my *Border Lines*)," *JQR* 99:1 (2009), 7–36. In regard to Paul's message, see especially Matthew V. Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," in Mark W. Elliot, Scott J. Hafemann, N. T. Wright, and John Frederick (eds.), *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 24–39; Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look on Galatians 1 and 2," in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 235–60 (first published in *JTS* 42.2 [1991]: 532–64).

21 See Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 32–34.

22 Like the verb ἑλληνίζω means for a non-Greek to adopt Greek ways, and the noun Ἑλληνισμός means the adoption by non-Greeks of Greek ways. See Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 29, 30–32.

also applies to Jews like Paul, who identifies his former activity as *Ioudaïsmos*.[23] Thus, taking into consideration all these important facts, to live in *Ioudaïsmos* means "the defense and promotion of Jewish customs by Jewish people"[24], or in the context of the Maccabean revolt tradition, this word is used "to signify the suddenly radical choice by Jews to follow their own ancestral ways".[25] It is clear that this term's meaning also includes political aspects that are closely linked with religious ones.

What does it mean in the context of Galatians? When Paul uses the term *Ioudaïsmos*, he is not referring to his Jewish identity or Jewishness as a religion. Instead, he is discussing his former, zealous involvement in a movement advocating for a robust defense of Jewish ancestral traditions, likely associated with the Pharisaic faction to which Paul belonged. This movement functioned as a sectarian initiative within the broader Jewish phenomenon of that period, influenced significantly by the Maccabean movement tradition. In other words, Paul applies this term concerning his past actions against the burgeoning Jesus Christ movement. Robert Jewett highlights the growing influence and strength of the zealot campaign in Judea and Galilee in the late forties.[26] During this period, the countryside was still significantly influenced and controlled by the zealot underground movement (Josephus, *Ant*. 20.113, 118). The separation of Israel from non-Jews, aimed at maintaining cleanliness and purity, was taken seriously and often resulted in violence (*J. W*. 2.254–257, 264–265; 4.335–344). This geopolitical situation aligns well with Paul's recollection of his former behavior in *Ioudaïsmos* and simultaneously explains the reasons for the later strong opposition against Paul from zealous Jewish factions in Judea and Galilee (cf. Acts 23:12–22) after he changed his mind regarding the Jesus Christ event (Gal 1:15–16). These facts can also be directly connected to the increase in anti-Jesus Christ movement persecutions in Judea (cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16) and prompted some Jewish believers in Jesus to embrace a pro-proselyte campaign among non-Jewish believers in Jesus.[27]

---

23 Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 32.
24 Ibid., 33.
25 Ibid., 35.
26 Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," 340.
27 Ibid., 341–42.

Concerning Paul's use of the verb *ioudaïzein* (2:14)[28], which is *hapax* within the New Testament corpus occurring only in Paul's speech of the Antioch incident (2:11–14)[29], an important part of the autobiographical material of Galatians (1:13–2:14), by which Paul wants to dissuade his addressees in Galatia – non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus who were being persuaded by local influencers (or agitators)[30] – from completing the rite of proselyte conversion (5:3).[31] Following this intent, Paul recalls the situation in Antioch, where he rebuked Peter for his behavior. This behavior could have been, and likely was, perceived by the non-Jewish believers in Jesus in Antioch as negative discrimination from the Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus. This incident is

---

28 Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Nashville – Dallas – Mexico City – Rio De Janeiro: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 78, aptly remarks that it is "probably the most crucial term of this sentence for an understanding of Paul's rebuke of Cephas."

29 In this connection, multiple scholars observe that the controversy described in 2:11–14 is taken up again in verse 15, and continues in verses 16–18, which means that we can consider the passage 2:11–18 as a whole unit. See James D. G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch," in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 199–234. For discussion of whether the episode ends with 2:14 or goes on in 15–21 as the summary of this event, see Hans D. Betz, *Galatians. A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Church in Galatia*. Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 113–14. For the speech of Antioch incident see Nanos, *Irony*, 147–54; Mark D. Nanos, "What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?," in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 282–318; Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 337–71; Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch," 199–234; Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 235–60; Philip F. Esler, "Making and Breaking an Agreement Mediterranean Style: A New Reading of Galatians 2:1–14," in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 261–81.

30 The specific term utilized by Mark D. Nanos in his monograph *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in Fist-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), passim, is typically used for labeling groups of people most often as Judaizers, but also as opponents, rivals, agitators, troublemakers, and teachers. For the question of identity of the addressees as well as the influencers, with close presentation of particular hypotheses and their proponents, see especially Nanos, *Irony*, 75–85, 110–99, and the Part 3: The Galatian Situation(s) in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 321–433. The latter is one significant endeavor of the recent period designed to bring readers closer to the contemporary issues, significant and central to the interpretation of Galatians including an adducing amount of relevant literature. The contributors concentrate around three important research areas. The first part (3–154) examines contemporary rhetorical and epistolary analyses of the letter. The second part (157–318) investigates recent interpretations of Paul's autobiographical narrative (Gal 1–2), and the third part (321–433) looks into various interpretations of the situation among Paul and his addressees in Galatia.

31 See J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 45–60 with further literature.

typically interpreted as a polemic and a controversy over the law-free versus law-observant gospel.[32]

However, there are also innovative approaches, particularly the interpretation of Mark D. Nanos[33], which I find significant. In particular, Peter's behavior, along with that of other Jewish Christ-believers in Antioch, suggests a priority for Jewish identity and thus rejects the equality between Jews and non-Jews in Jesus Christ.[34] This situation could suggest to them a complete conversion to Judaism through proselytism. This change of behavior "drives these Gentiles to conclude they need to become Jews."[35] Since Paul, Peter, and others, Jews by birth, have turned to Christ in the same way as these non-Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus, they are all in Christ legitimized (justified before God) and thus equal with each other, along with all remaining ethnically Jewish and non-Jewish (Gentiles).[36] Therefore, Peter's behavior would lead these non-Jews to conclude that they remain subject to status

32 For more and detail information about particular interpretations see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 64.

33 Nanos, "What Was at Stake," 282–318.

34 In this regard, John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 368, stresses that "[b]y withdrawing from meals with Gentile believers, Peter has re-instituted the Jewish tradition as the supreme normative framework, with the effect of requiring other believers to adopt his Jewish rule of life." In this connection Barclay (368) clarifies that: "For those aligned to the Christ-event, 'the Jewish way of life' is no longer an unqualified standard of righteous behavior, *even for Jews*. Peter and Paul do not cease to be Jews (2:14–15), but the normative claim of the Jewish way of life has been subordinated to the higher, and in this case clashing, demand that their lives be oriented to 'the good news.'" However, as Barclay adds, it does not mean to abandon the Jewish tradition, nor that in some circumstances can Gentile believers also adapt their behavior to that of the Jewish believers, if this is necessary (cf. Rom 14:1–15:13). He explains (368 n. 45): "Thus, Paul by no means prevents Jews on principle from practicing the Jewish tradition; but he renders that tradition subordinate to the demands of a higher allegiance, which is always potentially, and sometimes actually, at odds with the requirements of the Torah (cf. Gal 2:19–20, on Paul's paradigmatic 'death to the Law')." Barclay (368 n. 45) emphasizes that it is important for both Jewish and non-Jewish believers to recognize that Jewish practice is an unnecessary expression of faith in Christ. Barclay finally says: "In fact, the good news is good precisely in its disregard of former criteria of worth, both Jewish and Gentile: the gospel stands or falls with the incongruity of grace." In Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 370.

35 Nanos, "What Was at Stake," 310.

36 As Nanos, "What Was at Stake," 310 aptly remarks: "There is no discrimination according to identity as Jew or Gentile in Christ, and Peter knows this – he was even there when this was confirmed at Jerusalem – yet later Peter behaved as though there were, because of fear of the consequences threatened by those who do not share this conviction."

discrimination within this group because they are not proselytes.[37] Hence the meaning of the phrase ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαΐζειν in 2:14.

Therefore, Paul's message and missionary intent in Galatians do not center on the conflict between Jewish ethnic and religious traditions and the so-called law-free Gospel. The following two verses (2:15–16) articulate this point precisely. I fully agree with Matthew V. Novenson that this passage suggests the opposite. Novenson explains: "In other words, pagan sinners (like the gentiles in the Galatian churches) might mistakenly think that the law is a mechanism for being justified, but Jews know better than to make that category mistake."[38] This fact might further suggest, as Novenson remarks, that "the agitators themselves are judaizing gentile Christians rather than Jewish Christians, which, if true, would resolve some of the difficulties surrounding Paul's description of them in Gal. 6:12–13."[39]

Gal 6:12–13: A Question of the Influencers' Background and Identification

Considering all these facts, the question of the background and identity of the people influencing the Galatians is coming to the forefront. The passage 6:12–13 raises the question of how Paul's words should be interpreted and, ultimately, who these people might be. As previously discussed, there are various approaches and interpretations of this passage, including the previously stated question.

Robert Jewett begins his study of the influencers in Galatia with a significant mention that, especially since the appearance of the studies by Walther Schmithals[40], "the identification of Paul's opponents in Galatia has become

37 Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 368, remarks similarly: "As Paul sees the matter, Peter's withdrawal implies that community can be restored only within the normative terms of the Jewish tradition (by the Gentiles 'judaizing,' 2:14)."

38 Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 37. In this regard, Mark Nanos remarked in personal communication that "it is possible they think doing Torah is a mechanism, but Paul's argument suggests instead it is initiation rite and they are not properly concerned about doing Torah".

39 Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 37 n. 64. Regarding the influencers' belief in Jesus as Christ, as I mentioned above (n. 13), Mark Nanos explains why they are probably not "Christ-followers" at all. See in more detail, Nanos, *Irony*, 282–316.

40 Walther Schmithals, "Die Häretiker in Galatien," *ZNW* 47 (1956), 25–67, reprinted in Walther Schmithals, *Paulus und die Gnostiker: Untersuchung zu den kleinen Paulus-*

increasingly problematic."[41] In his introductory pages, Jewett showcases some of the most well-known and respected positions and viewpoints in recent scholarship.[42] After that, he continues with his hypothesis, confronting it with other views. Jewett himself suggests that Paul's opponents are Jews by birth and attempts to answer the significant question of whether they come to the Galatian churches from outside, and if so, where their homeland might be or where their "headquarters" could be. He notes that the references to these people that Paul makes in this letter (1:8–10; 5:12; 6:12–13) indicate they were separate from the Galatians themselves (cf. 3:1–5; 4:8–16; 5:7–8). Finally, Jewett concludes that since the contents of the letter point to their Jerusalem-oriented viewpoint, the most probable origin of these individuals would be Judea. This conclusion aligns well with Paul's polemic against Jerusalem (4:25–31) and his reference to the Judean churches (1:22).[43]

If there is a direct connection between the geopolitical situation in Judea and Galilee and the increasing zealot campaign, as I previously mentioned, these facts could partially elucidate the political background and tactics of the influencers in the Galatian churches, including their objectives toward the Galatian non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus.[44] However, the question of the location of these influencers remains unclear. It may relate to various places; for example, the Antioch congregation of Christ believers in Jesus, or non-Jewish residents of Antioch who sympathized with Jewishness, thereby judaizing themselves and attempting to also judaize the members of the Galatian churches.[45] In any case, the social dynamics within contemporary Asia Minor are a direct indicator of the tendencies among non-Jews to *ioudaïzein*, even to undergo proselytism, as it was specifically in the case of the Galatian churches (2:3; 5:2–12).[46]

briefen (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Reich, 1965), 9–46; Walther Schmithals, "The Heretics in Galatia," in Walther Schmithals (ed.), *Paul and the Gnostics* (New York: Abingdon, 1972), 13–64; Walther Schmithals, "Judaisten in Galatien?" *ZNW* 74 (1983), 27–58; Walther Schmithals, *Paul and James*, SBT 46 (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1965); Walther Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1972).

41 Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," 334.

42 Ibid., 334–36.

43 Ibid., 339.

44 Ibid., 340–44.

45 See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, I996), 193–94.

46 See in this regard, Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 29–41.

Yet, what was the ethnic identity of the influencers? This question is crucial to our investigation.[47] While most modern scholars view them as Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus, there is also another possibility: that they were non-Jews.[48] We must not lose sight of the possibility that, in addition to the actions of these non-Jewish judaizing influencers in Galatia, other Jews may have engaged in activities that responded to the interests of Galatian non-Jews and might simply be reacting rather than promoting.[49] If so, the question of whether they were or were not Christ-believers in Jesus is coming to the forefront. In any case, the letter is directed to non-Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus in Galatia, not to the influencers.[50] Let us look into the particular text that is in the spotlight, Gal 6:12–13:[51]

> 12 Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται.
> 13 οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχήσωνται.
>
> 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.
> 13 Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. (NRSV)

This text is part of the postscript (6:11–18) added by Paul in the spirit of the ancient letter-writing conventions complemented by his handwriting that

---

47 For various opinions concerning the issue of the identity of influencers, see Nanos, *Irony*, 134, 135–83.

48 As Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 159 n. 15, remarks in this regard: "A. Neander (1847) first argued that the troublemakers were Gentile Christians who had submitted to the Mosaic law, including circumcision, and then tried to convince Gentile Christians in Galatia to do the same, but (as noted by Hawkins 1971: 22) this theory is usually associated with the work of Johannes Munck (1959), who argued that Gentile Christians applied the Septuagint to their own lives in order to become the people of God; other scholars who identify Paul's opponents as Gentiles who have accepted circumcision and are now pressuring others to be circumcised include Emmanuel Hirsch (1930); Richardson (1969: 89ft)."

49 See Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*. SNTSMS 10 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 96; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 193. Stated by Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 36.

50 As emphasized by Loyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987).

51 For detailed exegesis of this text see Betz, *Galatians*, 312–17; de Boer, *Galatians*, 393–405.

should confirm the authenticity of the letter and summarize the significant points of the letter.

In this regard, Michael Murray argues that the influencers were non-Jews, that the interpretation of these two verses is complicated, and that two questions are coming to the fore in this regard.[52] First, who are the "circumcised" (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι) mentioned in v. 13? Second, are they the same individuals Paul speaks about in v. 12? The difficulties arise from a textual-critical issue; the available manuscripts present two variations of v. 13. The majority contain the substantive present middle participle (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι), while the minority, including P46, features the perfect passive participle (οἱ περιτετμημένοι). We can, however, follow the preferred majority reading, as it aligns with other instances of the same verb in the present tense found in this letter (5:2, 3; 6:12). Even Paul's biting remark in 5:12 (Ὄφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς [I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves! NRSV]) should be applied to non-Jewish proselytes who voluntarily underwent circumcision as adults, since this interpretation better fits the overall content of the letter.[53] However, since proselytes are arguably now Jews, this interpretation raises an objection unless we admit that they are "former" non-Jews.

Based on this suggestion, it is likely that the subject of Paul's words in v. 13 is the same group against whom Paul polemicizes in v. 12 and likely throughout the letter. Paul's criticism of the influencers in both verses (6:12–13) highlights self-centeredness as a common denominator in their effort to persuade the Galatian Christ believers in Jesus to submit to circumcision. They want to avoid persecution "for the cross of Christ" (v. 12). The phrase "the cross of Christ" may refer to early Jesus Christ tradition – teachings and lifestyle.[54] It would serve as an identification marker of the nascent Jesus Christ movement.

The influencers also want to boast about the success of the full conversion of the Galatian Christ believers in Jesus (v. 13). In 3:6–4:31, Paul addresses the influencers' arguments in favor of circumcision. However, since the Galatians have also faced other threats, particularly libertinism, Paul addresses this issue in 5:13–6:10. These two aspects of the situation of Galatian Christ

52 Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 35.
53 So also Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 35–36.
54 Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1994), 55.

believers in Jesus, among additional options, are either remain in the status they attained through faith in Christ (4:8–9) by God's mercy and life in the Spirit (3:6–9) or submit to proselytism or return to idolatry, which reflects the non-Jewish identity of the Galatian influencers. These individuals are submitting to the ritual of circumcision, or they may have done so earlier (depending on the interpretation of the etymological issues related to the substantial participle περιτεμνόμενοι in v. 13). Moreover, the appeal of proselytism among the Galatians could be heightened by the fact that some members of the Galatian churches have likely already been proselytized.

Although there is a relevant objection that circumcised individuals are no longer seen as ethnically non-Jews, what is significant is that they are not Jews by birth. Therefore, it is possible that some Jews may still consider them non-Jews. Moreover, there is a substantial theological argument supporting this assumption, particularly Paul's statement in 2:15–16, the passage mentioned by Matthew Novenson in his study regarding the *ioudaïzein* and *Ioudaïsmos* issues:

> 15 Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί· 16 εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σάρξ.
>
> 15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. (NRSV)

Since, as Novenson aptly emphasizes, Jews are acutely aware of the fact that the law itself does not serve as a mechanism for being justified, as the non-Jews in Galatia churches might mistakenly think.[55] Thus, they decided to submit to circumcision while they did not understand or were not sufficiently aware of the consequences of being circumcised, meaning to be incorporated into Israel – the obligation to live as Jewish people and to observe the whole law.

Regarding this passage (2:15–16), it must be noted, as Mark D. Nanos emphasized, that it belongs to the instances where Paul uses the phrase ἔργα νόμου positively referring to himself and Peter as "Jews from birth" (Gal

55 Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 37.

2:15–17).[56] Nanos explains that: "Rather than a binary contrast, Paul appeals to a complimentary relationship in their case; they have the benefit of ἔργα νόμου (circumcision rites, a seal of their identity as sons of Abraham) and yet also have πίστις in the gospel claims for Jesus as Messiah."[57] I assume that Paul's strong argument about the difference between Jews by birth and the "sinners from the nations" in v. 15, followed by his emphatic theological stance in v. 16, relates not only to Paul's description of the Antioch incident (2:11–14) but also to his criticism in 6:12–13 of the influencers' activity, including their ethnic background. Therefore, Paul would argue in this manner, considering the non-Jewish influencers throughout the letter.[58] These non-Jewish judaizing influencers may suggest that proselytism was not only a guarantee of gaining salvation within Israel but also a means of protection against potential accusations for violating communal norms concerning local deities, including persecution for the "cross of Christ." By becoming proselytes, the Galatians could also hope to identify themselves with local Jewish communities and secure a recognizable and respected position within Graeco-Roman society, based on the ideology of civic cults and the pyramid of honor, "using a combination of force, propaganda, and patronage that was held together by 'the workings of honor and pride"[59] (3:1–4:9; 4:21; 5:1–12; 6:12–13).[60] If this is the case, this situation "will function for the influencers as a symbol of honor, of victorious completion of their task".[61]

56 Mark D. Nanos, "Re-Framing Paul's Opposition to *Erga Nomou* as 'Rites of a Custom' for Proselyte Conversion Completed by the Synecdoche 'Circumcision'," *JJMJS* 8 (2021), 93, including n. 36 (75–115).

57 Nanos, "Re-Framing Paul's Opposition to *Erga Nomou*," 93. In this regard, Nanos makes very significant note: "That Paul would argue based on the complementary nature of their experience of ἔργα νόμου and πίστις as Jews is so universally incomprehensible that translators and commentators continue to render ἐὰν μὴ in v. 16 as 'but', even when noting that this refers to 'except'; that is, Paul is referring to their experience as Jews who express trust in Christ although circumcised in contrast to the non-Jews in Christ being discussed, who have not experienced circumcision because they have not undertaken ἔργα νόμου" (quotation from 93 n. 36).

58 See in this regard Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "4QMMT C 27,31 and 'Works Righteousness'," *DSD* 6:2 (1999), 139–47.

59 Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 48–51 (Quotation from 49).

60 See in more detail Nanos, *Irony*, 79–80. See also John Barclay, *Obeying the Truth. A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 60.

61 Nanos, *Irony*, 225. For a completely new approach to the question of the identity of the Galatian "influencers" see in more detail ibid., 193–99, 201–321.

As we can observe, the theological and social factors correlate with each other and therefore must be seriously considered. Although the identity of the Galatian influencers cannot be definitively determined, there is a high probability that they were judaizing non-Jews, prepared for full conversion to Jewishness, possibly having recently participated in the ritual but still not fully familiar with this radical change of ethnic identity. Alternatively, as suggested earlier by Johannes Munck, based on the participle περιτεμνόμενοι in 6:13, they could represent some of Paul's former non-Jewish converts who, due to their previous association with Jewish communities and current interaction with Jewish scriptures, had themselves been circumcised. Munck calls these influencers "circumcised Gentiles."[62] We cannot rule out the possibility that multiple groups of influencers operated independently of one another.

I assume that one of the most significant issues regarding this interpretative conundrum is the meaning of Paul's words in v. 13a, particularly that these influencers "do not themselves obey the law" (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν). For Paul, in the event of Jesus Christ, the age to come has dawned in full accordance with the law (Rom 3:21–31). However, the actions and intentions of the influencers regarding Paul's Galatian converts reside entirely within the present (old) age. Their ethnocentric activity, aimed at protecting the identity of prospective circumcised Galatian Christ believers in Jesus as the righteous ones in this present (old) age, serves as a symbol of honor for them. They overlook the significant change of the ages, particularly the beginning of the *eschaton*. According to Paul, this represents a serious failure in fully observing the law (6:13), especially the Great Commandment – to love God and one's neighbor, which is the central tenet of the law, as Mark Nanos points out.[63] The self-centered intent of those who emphasize the significance of the status of circumcised converts serves as the essential criterion for preserving their social identity. However,

62 Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959), 89, 129–34. Stated by Nanos, *Irony*, 135. Although Mark Nanos argues for the Jewish ethnic identity of these influencers, he mentions this possibility and refers in this regard to this work of Johannes Munck that has been, as Nanos remarks, the most influential concerning this option. Nanos himself, however, does not agree with Munck and states (Ibid., 136) that "the way Munck ostensibly conceives of this identity outside of Jewish communal life makes for a possibly unique situation calling for a unique taxonomy".

63 Nanos, *Irony*, 228. See in more detail ibid., 225–33. I assume that the argumentation of Mark Nanos fits also with the different interpretations, particularly that the influencers were non-Jews preparing for full proselyte conversion, or underwent it a little bit earlier.

for Paul, it remains part of the present (old) age, not the age to come that was initiated by the event of Jesus Christ. Thus, it constitutes a violation of the law, as the influencers prioritize their own interests over the welfare of the non-Jewish Galatian believers in Jesus. Although the *eschaton* has already begun, they persist in constructing boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish individuals, regardless of the fact that these non-Jews are, through faith in Jesus Christ, legitimized (justified) by God as equals to Jewish people. As Mark Nanos remarks concerning the influencers, although arguing in favor of their Jewish identity, "the issue becomes one of which party is doing the Law lawfully in the inclusion of these Gentiles – in view of the dawning of the age to come in Jesus Christ!"[64] In the event of Jesus Christ, God's people can live together, meaning Jews and non-Jews united as the "new creation," which is free from discrimination. For Paul, building boundary markers during this eschatological period contradicts God's ultimate will to save both Jews and non-Jews (nations) through and in the event of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Given the sociocultural dynamics of the time, the situation of Paul's non-Jewish converts in Galatia was serious. For Christ believers in Jesus, including Paul himself, this was a belief that "the end of the ages has dawned with the resurrection of Christ (though within the midst of the present age, and thus awaiting additional elements to arrive in full)."[65] Therefore, the activities of influencers in Galatia who want to bring non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus to proselyte conversion are what Paul considers to be a serious threat to the current status of his Galatian converts – to be equal to God's chosen people, Israel. In light of Paul's words in 6:12–13 and considering the meanings of the significant terms *ioudaïzein* and *Ioudaïsmos*, as well as the contents of the entire letter, we can suggest that these influencers were non-Jews either preparing for proselyte conversion (proselyte candidates) or recent (new) proselytes, but still regarded as non-Jewish outsiders trying to gain respectability within local Jewish communities. Paul's concept of the new creation in Christ in Galatians does not represent a law-gospel

64 Nanos, *Irony*, 229.
65 Nanos, "The Question of Conceptualization," in Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (eds.), *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 142–143 (105–143).

or Judaism-Christianity antithesis; rather, it expresses the role and inheritance of the nations in the narrative of Israel's restoration and redemption. As such, Paul's proclamation fits entirely within the framework of Jewish eschatological-apocalyptic notions from the late Second Temple period, and thus serves as an important hermeneutical key for interpreting and understanding Paul's message while providing a foundation for ongoing discussions in Pauline theology.

František Ábel
Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University Bratislava
Bartókova 8, 811 02 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
abel@fevth.uniba.sk
ORCID: 0000-0003-2364-5293

Traces of a Theology of the Cross in James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*

Brach S. Jennings

Abstract: Despite several scholars describing James Cone's final book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* as his theology of the cross, the possible presence of this theme in Cone's first book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, has not been explored. Therefore, this article examines Cone's first book for traces of the theology of the cross. The article investigates Cone's creative synthesis of black theology and the Black Power movement, Cone's early Christology, his collective-political and eschatological expansion of the "happy exchange," his references to texts from the early Martin Luther, and his re-interpretation of the Pauline-Lutheran themes of "neighbor love" and "new creation" for following Jesus Christ in the ghetto. By so doing, the article claims that Cone's theology up to 1975 contributed to the ongoing tradition of the theology of the cross, and that mystical-sapiential and prophetic theology can be connected through Cone's early theology for a contemporary Lutheran theology of the cross.

Keywords: James Cone; Martin Luther; Theology of the Cross; Martin Luther King, Jr.; Malcolm X

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.3

Introduction

James H. Cone (1938–2018) is widely known as the founder of black liberation theology, but his development as a black theologian is not typically thought of in connection with the constructive re-interpretation of Luther's theology of the cross in twentieth-century European theology.[1] Further, despite several scholars describing Cone's final book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*[2] as

1 I mean especially a re-interpreted theology of the cross as can be found in Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Anders Nygren, Jürgen Moltmann, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. James Cone draws from these theologians in his early work.

2 James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011). N. B. I have referred to Cone's *Cross and the Lynching Tree* as his final book, because it is the last book he published during his lifetime. However, his second autobiographical reflection, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, was published posthumously in 2018. See James

his theology of the cross, the possible presence of a theology of the cross in Cone's first book, *Black Theology and Black Power*,[3] has not been explored.[4] Therefore, this article examines Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* for traces[5] of the theology of the cross and proposes a previously overlooked hermeneutic for reading Cone's first book related to a contemporary Lutheran theology of the cross. We will explore Cone's creative synthesis of black theology and the Black Power movement, Cone's reception, synthesis, and development of several twentieth-century European theologians in his early Christology who can all be placed within the tradition of the theology of the cross, Cone's collective-political and eschatological expansion of the "happy exchange," his references to texts from the early Martin Luther, and his re-interpretation of the Pauline-Lutheran themes of "neighbor love" and "new creation" for following Jesus Christ in the ghetto. By so doing, we will examine how Cone's theology up to 1975 contributed to the ongoing tradition of the theology of the cross, and how mystical-sapiential and prophetic theology might be connected through Cone's (early) theology for a contemporary Lutheran theology of the cross.[6]

H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018).

3 James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Seabury, 1969).

4 My monograph on the theology of the cross and James Cone, from which the present article is based, reworked, and expanded, is an exception. See Brach S. Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023). For arguments that Cone's *The Cross as the Lynching Tree* is his theology of the cross, see Dominik Gautier, "The Cross and the Lynching Tree: Die Kreuzestheologie James H. Cones," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 64:2 (2015), 198–206; Dominik Gautier, "Theology as Blues: Zum Tod von James H. Cone," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 67:3 (2018), 426–29; Mark R. Glanville, "The Birth of the Blues and the Birth of Biblical Law in Parallel: A Dialogue with James Cone's Theology of the Cross," *Review and Expositor* 117:1 (2020), 114–27, and Joshua Heavin, "Power Made Perfect in Weakness: *Theologia Crucis* in 2 Corinthians 13:3–4," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 13:2 (2019), 251–79. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, "Personal Reflections of James H. Cone," *Theology Today* 75:2 (2018), 277–80.

5 My use of the term "trace" is indebted to the philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida emphasizes that original authorial intent and historical context is one level of textual interpretation among numerous possible readings, per his argument "there is no outside text." See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 61, 158.

6 I have chosen 1975 as the terminus for what I have called "Cone's early theology" because Cone's theology undergoes a change in *God of the Oppressed*, wherein he no longer first consults European theological hermeneutics indebted to Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich in particular for constructing his theology, but draws instead from black music, folk tales, and history as the building blocks for a new theological

Interpreting Martin Luther's Early Theology in Relation to James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* for a Contemporary Theology of the Cross

The motif "theology of the cross" has been synonymous with the German Augustinian monk and Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) since Walther von Loewenich's (1903–1992) historical-systematic survey in the 1920s of Luther's theology from the *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518 through the Reformer's mature *Lectures on Genesis* (completed 1545).[7] Employing an interpretive framework indebted to Karl Barth's dialectical theology, von Loewenich argued that Luther's "theology of the cross" centered in the *Heidelberg Disputation* is a theology of revelation, wherein God is known as hidden in suffering through the crucified Christ.[8] For von Loewenich, the theology of the cross was not only crucial to understanding Luther, but a "specific kind of theology" that "provides the center for all theological statements," including the doctrine of justification.[9] Von Loewenich's dialectical reading of Luther's theology has been nuanced, critiqued, and developed further through historical research into Luther's theology in the context of late medieval passion mysticism as pioneered by Heiko A. Oberman (1930–2001).[10] This research argues that the early Luther can fruitfully be seen as a late medieval Catholic friar who inherited and transformed the passion mysticism common in his day and before, seen in mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328), Johannes Tauler (1300–1361),

hermeneutic – even as his theology from *God of the Oppressed* onward remains in dialogue with European theologians. See James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Revised ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 5. I will occasionally still reference texts that fall outside what I have here denoted as Cone's "early theology," however, in so far as motifs from Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* are either found in the later texts, or are illumined by them.

7 See Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1976).

8 Ibid., 30.

9 Ibid., 18.

10 See Heiko A. Oberman, "Simul genitus et raptus. Luther und die Mystik," in Heiko A. Oberman, *Die Reformation: Von Wittenberg nach Genf* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 45–89, and Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

and Johannes von Staupitz (1460–1524).[11] Through this revisionist historical research, Luther is returned to his own premodern context, rather than being seen as the person responsible for the birth of modernity.[12]

When constructive systematic theology privileges this revisionist research, Luther's theology of the cross becomes a theological motif about the mystical-sapiential encounter with God hidden in suffering through the crucified Christ.[13] Understanding Luther's theology of the cross in relation to *sapientia* (wisdom) then means theology is existential, and is a written, lived, and even performed endeavor, wherein the words of the Bible stimulate human imagination, senses, desires, and longings amid suffering and the cross.[14] However, a distinct Protestant identity rooted in justification (arguably the reverse side of the theology of the cross) as the prophetic critique of idolatry should not be lost in the effort to show Luther's Catholic

11 See especially Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Re-Orientation*, trans. Martin Lohrmann (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013); Christine Helmer (ed.), *The Medieval Luther* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Volker Leppin, *Transformationen: Studien zu den Wandlungsprozessen in Theologie und Frömmigkeit zwischen Spätmittelalter und Reformation* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Franz Posset, *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt and Wittenberg* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011); and Ronald R. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

12 Both images of Luther have been examined in an historical survey by Christine Helmer. See Christine Helmer, *How Luther Became the Reformer* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2019).

13 According to Oswald Bayer, Luther understood theology primarily as wisdom (*sapientia*), which had to do with experience(s) gleaned from the pre-scientific world, even as he included science (*scientia*) rather than excluding it. See Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 28. Therefore, theology began in the church for Luther, and particularly with the monastic tradition of the public recitation of the Psalms, before he considered it as a university science. Luther's mystical-sapiential theology is related to his struggles with *Anfechtung* (agonizing struggle), and thus to the existential question of Christ's presence in suffering. See Ibid., 60. For *Anfechtung* in relation to Luther's theology of the cross, see Vítor Westhelle, "Luther's *Theologia Crucis*," in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomir Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 165.

14 Luther writes in his later lectures on the *Psalms of Assent*: "Therefore, theology is infinite wisdom, because it can never be learned" (*Ideo Theologia est infinitia sapientia, quia nunquam potest edisci*). Translation mine. See Martin Luther, *Vorlesungen über die Stufenpsalmen (1532–1533) [1540]*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe 40 (3)* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1930), 63 (17). Cf. Bayer's description of Luther's sapiential theology as related to *Anfechtung* in Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 63–67.

roots.[15] Fortunately, the mystical-sapiential and the prophetic are connected in Luther's early theology and do not need to be separated in constructive systematic theology in general.[16]

The theology of the cross as a theological motif has also expanded well beyond Luther, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. Whereas Luther focused on theology for the perpetrators of *spiritual* sin (inhabiting the Augustinian tradition's understanding of sin as "pride") with the sinner standing always as *simul iustus et peccator* before God, twentieth-century theologies of the cross radicalized Luther's perpetrator-oriented understanding of sin toward the question of justification for victims and perpetrators of *systemic-political* sin.[17] This expansion is pertinent to James

15 Here I have in mind Paul Tillich's argument for the creative tension between the Catholic substance and the Protestant principle (justification) for theology. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3: Life in the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 245, and Carl E. Braaten, "Paul Tillich's Message for our Time," *Anglican Theological Review* 72:1 (1990), 16–25. The revisionist historical research into Luther's thinking retrieves the Catholic substance that von Loewenich overlooked, even in the later editions of his text where he was more sympathetic to mysticism (see Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 147–66). Nevertheless, the caution for the revisionist approach to Luther remains not to lose the radicality of justification through an over-emphasis on Luther's Catholic roots. See Vítor Westhelle, "Justification as Death and Gift," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24:3 (2010): 249–62; 260. For justification as the reverse side of the theology of the cross, see Regin Prenter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 4. For Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* and *The Freedom of a Christian* as critiques of idolatry, see Lois Malcolm, "Rahner's Theology of the Cross," in Paul G. Crowley, S. J. (ed.), *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 115–31.

16 See Martin Luther, Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519), in Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works Volume 31: Career of the Reformer 1* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1957), 297–306, and Lois Malcolm, "Mystical and Prophetic: The Theology of Paul Tillich Reconsidered," *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society* 32:4 (2006), 9–14. I am emphasizing Luther's early theology in this article, because Cone draws exclusively from the pre-1525 Luther in his *Black Theology and Black Power*. This need not imply, however, that the motif "theology of the cross" only applies to the early Luther, even as direct references to the "theology of the cross" or the "theologian of the cross" disappear in Luther's writings after 1518. See Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 16–22, 98–102.

17 In Luther, the phrase *simul iustus et peccator* can be found as early as the *Romans Lectures* of 1515–1516. See Hilton C. Oswald (ed.), *Luther's Works 25: Lectures on Romans, Glosses and Scholia* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 260, and Hamm, *The Early Luther*, 163. The development of the theology of the cross and the corresponding doctrine of justification toward victims and perpetrators of systemic sin, seen especially in Jürgen Moltmann's theology, was undertaken in light of twentieth-century catastrophes such

Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, as this text is arguably a prophetic theology written for black victims of the white racist society of the late 1960s United States, critiquing the white perpetrators of the idolatry of racism for the healing of black victims and white perpetrators alike.

If Luther's own theology of the cross brings together the mystical-sapiential and the prophetic, and the theology of the cross is seen as an ongoing theological tradition rather than a motif restricted exclusively to Luther, then James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* can be explored in relation to this tradition. The present article will thus investigate how Cone's first book contributed to the ongoing tradition of the theology of the cross, and how this text offers a hermeneutic for connecting mystical-sapiential and prophetic motifs for a contemporary Lutheran theology of the cross.

Before examining selections from *Black Theology and Black Power*, there are some biographical facts that need to be noted about Cone. Cone never described black theology as a theology of the cross. Also, he was not raised in a theological-ecclesial tradition related to Martin Luther but in the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church in Bearden, Arkansas, where he was exposed to the personal presence of God in prayer, song, and sermon.[18] Therefore, the existential-experiential roots of Cone's early theology are not found in Martin Luther, but in the black church tradition of the United States. So, while Cone identified himself as a Protestant, he described his faith as being shaped "more by the faith of the African slaves of nineteenth-century America than by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation."[19] Finally, if Cone has a direct existential-experiential connection to the Protestant Reformation broadly understood, it is his appreciation for and radicalization of John Wesley's understanding of sanctification, rather than a personally acknowledged indebtedness to the theology of the cross.[20] These biographical

as the Holocaust and the Chernobyl explosion in 1986. See Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). Lewis engages thoroughly with European and white North American literature about the tradition of the theology of the cross and contributes to the expansion of this tradition for twentieth-century ethical-political questions in light of the Holocaust and Chernobyl. He does not, however, address James Cone's theology.

18 Cone, *God of The Oppressed*, 1.

19 James H. Cone, "A Theological Challenge to the American Catholic Church," in James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 50.

20 See Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, 29–34.

facts challenge this article's claim of a theology of the cross in his early thought.

However, Cone encountered Luther's theology of the cross *at least* indirectly in his doctoral studies under the British-American Luther scholar Philip S. Watson.[21] Therefore, through a method of close reading that synthesizes literary criticism, reception history and historical theology, hermeneutics, and ethics, we will attempt to uncover traces of a theological motif beginning in and expanding beyond Martin Luther in Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* that were first present in his work thanks to his doctoral studies under Watson, even as Cone did not refer to himself as a theologian of the cross in any of his writings.

Traces of a Theology of the Cross in James Cone's Creative Synthesis of Black Theology and the Black Power Movement

We begin by examining Cone's creative synthesis of black theology and the Black Power movement of the 1960s for traces of a theology of the cross. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone presented a strong critique of white theology's failure to engage racism as a theological issue. As the title suggests, the book was written in the context of the Black Power movement as it emerged out of the Civil Rights movement, and Cone intended it to be a prophetic indictment on white theology (and the corresponding white churches) in the tradition of the biblical prophets.[22] This book connected the

21 Cone would have encountered Watson's interpretation of Luther's theology of the cross particularly in Watson's 1947 Fernley-Hartley lecture published as *Let God be God*, which is cited in Cone's doctoral dissertation. See Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Mühlenberg, 1948). For Cone's personal recollections of his relationship to Philip S. Watson, see Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 4–6, 28, 56–57, 82–84, 108. In a personal telephone conversation with me on October 18, 2016, Cone said the following about his relationship to Luther: "Lutherans domesticate Luther! I read a lot of Luther in graduate school because of my teacher Philip Watson! Luther was so radical they wanted to kill him!"

22 For details on the origins of black theology amidst the Black Power movement of the 1960s, see Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, 1966–1979 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 15–21. Cone notes that it is unclear who first used the term black theology, but that he was the first person to use the term in relation to a new constructive theology. See James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 19. For Cone's analysis of the intellectual development of black theology in relation to the Civil Rights and Black

Christian theological identity of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the radical black consciousness of Malcolm X in a creative synthesis, which would be present in all of Cone's subsequent theological books.[23] What has so far been overlooked in Cone's first constructive book, is the possibility of an underlying theology of the cross acting as a connecting theological motif that synthesizes not only King, Malcolm X, and major European theologians of Cone's time, but also mystical-sapiential and prophetic motifs for theology. We are thus investigating how this book can be read as a creative combination of a new, prophetic black theology in relation to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements with traces of the theology of the cross.

Cone recognizes that his constructive work lacks the neutrality required in academic theology. "This work, then, is written with a definite attitude, the attitude of an angry black man, disgusted with the oppression of black people in America and with the scholarly demand to be 'objective' about it."[24]

Power movements, see Ibid., 6–24. For historical essays on the Black Power movement, see Peniel E. Joseph (ed.), *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006). Finally, for the Hebrew Bible prophets as impassioned proclaimers of God's justice, see Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 111–44. Especially important for Cone is Is. 61:1–3, from which Luke 4:17–20 is based.

23 See James H. Cone, "Introduction: Looking Back, Going Forward," in James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), xxi. Cf. James H. Cone, "Calling Oppressors to Account for Four Centuries of Terror," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31:3 (2004), 179–86. It is also important to note that Cone incorporates the parts of King's political theology into his own work that are either overlooked or seen as radical by many white US-Americans. However, it can be argued that the radical King is the actual King, and vice versa. An example of the "radical King" is found in King's support of democratic socialism, demonstrated by his solidarity with garbage workers in Memphis, Tennessee, for which he was executed in April 1968. See Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

24 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 2. Throughout this article, the text of Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* has been modified related to gender-inclusive language. This decision was made in relation to Cone's own insistence of the need to confront sexism as a black male theologian, and his decision to change the exclusive language of the 1970 edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation* to gender inclusive language in the 1986 edition. See James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), xx. Regarding the excerpt from *Black Theology and Black Power* cited here, Cone's tone is reminiscent of Malcolm X, who Cone also relates to the role of angry biblical prophet. See especially James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 95.

It is precisely this prophetic deviation from the academic norm where traces of the theology of the cross in *Black Theology and Black Power* begin to be found, as this text can be interpreted as a radicalized prophetic theology of wisdom (*sapientia*) centered in the cross of Jesus Christ that connects to and radicalizes the early Martin Luther's Pauline-Augustinian theology of the cross (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–31). In Thesis 22 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther contrasts the wisdom of the theologian of glory with the wisdom of the theologian of the cross. The former's wisdom "sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by human beings" and is "completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened." The latter's wisdom centers in the worldly foolishness of the crucified Christ, who is the source for "true theology" amid suffering (proof to Thesis 20).[25] However, whereas the subject of theology for Luther is the sinful human being and the God who justifies, Cone's early theology is a prophetic theology for oppressed black people. Luther's overall theology is thus a theology for the perpetrators of *spiritual* sin, and Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* is a theology for the victims of *systemic-political* sin.[26]

In Cone, we see an example of a "transfiguration" of Luther's Pauline-Augustinian theology of the cross through Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, wherein sapiential and prophetic theological motifs are connected for the liberation of black victims and their white perpetrators in a white racist society. Connecting King and Malcolm X arguably then means for Cone a synthesis between the motifs of divine delight and prophetic justice. The former relates to an Augustinian notion of theology as *sapientia* and

---

25 Martin Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation (1518)* in LW 31: 41, 52–53. Understanding theology as *sapientia* is rooted overall in the Western church in the writings of Augustine of Hippo. See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 36–37, and Benjamin T. Quinn, *Christ, the Way: Augustine's Theology of Wisdom* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022). Luther's Pauline Augustinianism is revealed in the *Heidelberg Disputation* when he calls Augustine Paul of Tarsus's "most trustworthy interpreter" (LW 31: 39).

26 See Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 73–76 for a constructive expansion of Luther's (perpetrator-oriented) spiritual understanding of sin as related to the justification of the victims of systemic sin through the pioneering feminist theologian Valerie Saiving-Goldstein, Lutheran ethicist William H. Lazareth, and James Cone. For Luther's understanding of the "subject of theology" as the sinful human being and the God who justifies, see Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 29–42.

the latter relates to a prophetic critique from the perspective of divine delight. However, Christian religious faith relates to justice in King's theology and justice relates to Islamic religious faith in Malcom X's theology. Therefore, Cone sees the two political-theological figures as complementary instead of exclusionary, even as they correct and challenge each other at various points.[27]

In any case, Cone argues theology must become prophetic if it is to remain faithful to Jesus Christ in relation to oppressed black people in the United States. Cone's angry and prophetic tone in light of the suffering of black people thus has a biblical and Christological basis and his first book is written as a challenge to the church to combat racism. "If the Church is to remain faithful to its Lord, it must make a decisive break with the structure of this society by launching a vehement attack on the evils of racism in all forms. It must become *prophetic*, demanding radical change in the interlocking structures of this society."[28] Cone urges the church and theology to become prophetic because he sees the Black Power movement as "Christ's central message to twentieth-century America."[29]

Given the systemic oppression of blacks in the United States, Cone believes theologians need to become emotionally involved with the struggle for racial justice distinctively *as theologians*. "It seems that one weakness of most theological works is their 'coolness' in the investigation of an idea. Is it not time for theologians to get upset?"[30] Cone's writing here has an unmistakable existential urging to it, related to his understanding of Truth as "that which places a human being in touch with the real" after which one

27 For the process of "transfiguring" Luther's theology in contexts far removed from sixteenth-century Germany indebted to Erich Auerbach, Jacques Derrida, and postcolonial studies, see Vítor Westhelle, *Transfiguring Luther: The Planetary Promise of Luther's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 7, 111–23, 190, 318–19. For Cone's argument that King and Malcolm X should be seen as complementary rather than exclusionary, see Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, 244–71. For a synthesis of the theological motifs of divine delight and prophetic justice, see Brach S. Jennings, "St. Augustine and Malcolm X as Theological Figures in Relation to a Contemporary *Theologia Crucis* in Solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter Movement," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 49:1 (2022), 64–70.

28 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 2. Italic in original.

29 Ibid., 1. Cf. Wilmore and Cone (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966–1979*, 15–23.

30 Ibid., 3.

is "prepared to give all for it."[31] Theologians being "upset" at the condition of oppressed blacks in the United States thus allows them to critique white oppressors for the sake of the existence of the oppressed. "This is a word to the oppressor, a word to Whitey, not in hope that he will listen (after King's death who can hope?) but in the expectation that my own existence will be clarified," writes Cone.[32]

Cone seeks to call white perpetrators to account for the systemic injustice of racism from the standpoint of an angry, prophetic black theologian. The goal of Cone's project becomes clear at the end of the Introduction to *Black Theology and Black Power*: he accents his own particularity as writing from "the attitude of an angry black man" for the sake of the United States, as a black American who wishes both for the dismantling of white America's oppression of black people and that some white people might be moved by his strong critique.

> I am critical of white America, because this is *my* country; and what is mine must not be spared my emotional and intellectual scrutiny. Although my motive for writing was not – did not want to be – dependent upon the response of white people, I do not rule out the possibility of creative changes, even in the lives of oppressors. It is illegitimate to sit in judgment on another human being, deciding how they will or must respond. That is another form of oppression.[33]

Even though Cone writes in an angry tone reminiscent of a biblical prophet, his anger is directed toward a country he is a part of and is demanding full recognition from as someone with the right to protest for full human dignity

31 Ibid., 9. Cone's existential understanding of Truth connects to Tillich's notion of "ultimate concern" in relation to the theologian's task of explicating Christian symbols for contemporary culture. Tillich can be fruitfully understood as within the tradition of theology as *sapientia* due to his argument for theologians to have an existential commitment to the content they expound upon. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Being and the Question of God* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 23. See also the article by Lois Malcolm referenced in n. 16 above.

32 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 3. Cone reflects theologically about King's "journey to Memphis" in ways reminiscent of Jesus's traveling to Jerusalem in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, which gives evidence both for Cone understanding King as a theologian of the cross and for his own theology containing traces of a theology of the cross overall. See Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 90. Cf. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, 127.

33 Ibid., 4. Italic in original. Cone shares another important commonality with Malcolm X in relation to the possibility of (healing) change in white oppressors. See Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1964), 422.

in light of innocent black victimhood. Cone's protest is done Christologically in his first book, as Cone creatively synthesizes the Black Power movement with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The question of Christ's presence in suffering stands behind his theological protest against black suffering. Cone thus defines the task of theology as being "to show what the changeless gospel means in each new situation," and describes how "contemporary theology from Karl Barth to Jürgen Moltmann" is engaged in this task. Here, Cone relates to Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich's hermeneutical projects concerning the creative tension between the existential questions formulated in modern culture and the answers to the questions of existence given in the Gospel kerygma.[34] What Cone finds missing in so-called "contemporary theology," though, is a revolutionary theology written from the standpoint of oppressed black people in the United States who are seeking freedom from white oppression. Therefore, Cone understands systemic racism in the United States as the cultural situation for which the changeless Gospel must be translated. He relates his understanding of theology to his constructive definition of Black Power, which he outlines at the beginning of his book.

> Black Power means black freedom, black self-determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity but as persons, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny. In short, as Stokely Carmichael would say,

34 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 31. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1958); Rudolf Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," in Hans-Werner Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma und Mythos I: Ein Theologisches Gespräch*, 4th ed. (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich, 1960), 15–48, and Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, 60–61. Bultmann can be read within the tradition of the theology of the cross due to his (in)famous "demythologizing hermeneutic," which centers in the proclamation of the crucified Christ as risen eschatologically in the kerygma. If Luther's understanding of justification is the reverse side of a theology of the cross, as Regin Prenter argued, then the relationship of Bultmann's demythologizing hermeneutic to the Pauline-Lutheran understanding of justification can be called a twentieth-century theology of the cross, even as Prenter himself sought a path between Bultmann and Karl Barth for a contemporary Lutheran theology of the cross. See Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 58, and Prenter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 4. For Tillich's connection to the tradition of the theology of the cross, see above, nn. 15 and 31 and below, n. 68. Cone's reception of Bultmann's "demythologizing hermeneutic" and Tillich's "method of correlation" is detailed in an essay he published in 1975 (coinciding with the first edition of *God of the Oppressed*), called "Christian Theology and Scripture as the Expression of God's Liberating Activity for the Poor." See Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, 4–17.

> Black Power means T.C.B., Take Care of Business – black folks taking care of black folks' business, not on the terms of the oppressor, but on terms of the oppressed.[35]

Cone's theology is concerned with an explicitly named particularity from the outset, which is partially how Cone's (early) theology can be understood as a radicalized theology of the cross for the victims and perpetrators of systemic-political sin. The prophetic and political task of theology as Cone understands it in *Black Theology and Black Power* can then be fruitfully read as an expansion of Thesis 20 of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, wherein the theologian of the cross is the one who "calls a thing as it is" in contrast to the theologian of glory who "calls evil good and good evil" (Is. 5:20).[36]

In an essay from 1994, Cone made explicit his appreciation for both Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* and Jürgen Moltmann's expansion of the *Heidelberg Disputation* in *The Crucified God*, even as he re-shaped these theologians from the perspective of suffering peoples of color in the two-thirds world. Cone writes:

> As black theologians have reread the Bible in the light of the struggles of the oppressed, the idea of the 'suffering God' has become important in our theological perspective. Our theological imagination has been stirred by Jürgen Moltmann's writings about 'the Crucified God,' as well as Luther's distinction between the 'theology of glory' and the 'theology of the cross.' But it has been the actual suffering of the oppressed in black and other Third World communities that has been decisive in our reflections on the cross of Jesus Christ. As Gustavo Gutiérrez has said: 'We cannot speak of the death of Jesus until we speak of the death of real people.' For in the deaths of the poor of the world is found the suffering and even the death of God.[37]

35 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 6.

36 LW 31: 40.

37 James H. Cone, "An African American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering," in Yacob Tesfai (ed.), *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 58. The material from Cone about Luther's and Moltmann's theologies of the cross is also found in Cone's first autobiographical reflection and in a *Festschrift* for Moltmann's sixtieth birthday. See James H. Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 105 and James H. Cone, "Black Theology in American Religion," in Hermann Deuser, Gerhard Marcel Martin, Konrad Stock, and Michael Welker (eds.), *Gottes Zukunft – Zukunft der Welt: Festschrift für Jürgen Moltmann zum 60. Geburtstag* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1986), 380–89. However, I have referenced the text from 1994 here because this essay is explicitly about the cross theme in relation to oppressed peoples of color worldwide, containing a continuity with and development of *Black Theology and Black Power*, the development being that suffering peoples of color in the two-thirds world has become an explicit concern of Cone's theologizing,

In Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, a theologian who *does not* take the suffering of black people as a subject worthy of hermeneutical reflection is analogous to a theologian of glory. Conversely, a theologian who *does* take the suffering of oppressed blacks in the United States as a valid starting point for hermeneutical reflection is analogous to a theologian of the cross. This analogy relates to Cone's sharp distinction between black theologians and white theologians, wherein black theologians write for oppressed black people struggling for freedom amid the idolatry of systemic white racism in the United States. Cone thus defines Black Power as the "complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary,"[38] and identifies a "desperate need" for black theology that applies "the freeing power of the gospel to black people under white oppression."[39] White oppression is exemplified by the exploitation white racists practice toward blacks, from which blacks seek survival.[40]

Traces of a Theology of the Cross in Cone's Early Christology

Cone's early Christology is arguably a synthesis of mystical-sapiential and prophetic Christological motifs from Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Jürgen Moltmann that draws from Wolfhart Pannenberg's description of a "Christology from below." Since these European theologians can all be placed within the tradition of the theology of the cross, we will investigate Cone's reception, synthesis, and development of them.[41] It is important to keep in mind for our investigation that Cone's early Christology connects the experiential particularity of oppressed black people in the United States to the particularity of Jesus Christ. This connection belongs to the core of Cone's arguments throughout *Black Theology and Black Power*, seen in Cone's understanding of Christianity finding its beginning and end in Jesus Christ.

---

even as he still begins with the particularity of oppressed black people in the United States.

38 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 6. This description again has commonalities with Malcolm X.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 19. Cf. James H. Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church: A Historical-Theological Interpretation," *The Annals* 387:1 (1970), 49–55; 50.

41 See again nn. 1 and 17 above.

> Christianity begins and ends with the human being Jesus – his life, death, and resurrection. He is the Revelation, the special disclosure of God to human beings, revealing who God is and what his purpose for humankind is. In short, Christ is the essence of Christianity. Schleiermacher was not far wrong when he said that 'Christianity is essentially distinguished from other faiths by the fact that everything in it is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.' In contrast to many religions, Christianity revolves around a Person, without whom its existence ceases to be.[42]

By defining Jesus Christ as the "special disclosure of God to human beings," Cone follows Barth's doctrine of election in Volume 2.2 of the *Church Dogmatics*. CD 2.2 can be fruitfully understood as Barth's theology of the cross, when he writes, "the *crucified* Jesus is the image of the invisible God" (drawing from the "Jewish wisdom Christology" of Col. 1:15), and through his use of the word "exchange" (*Tausch*) for the Golgotha event, wherein the "happy exchange" becomes collective by Jesus Christ electing the suffering of human beings onto himself.[43]

---

42 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 34. While Cone references Friedrich Schleiermacher in this excerpt, his overall argument relates to Karl Barth, which is why I am not exploring Cone's reception of Schleiermacher here. For Cone's reading of the discontinuity between Schleiermacher and Barth in his doctoral dissertation, see James Hal Cone, "The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth," PhD diss. (Northwestern University, 1965), 1, 13, 26, 29, 32. Subsequent scholarship on Schleiermacher and Barth sees the two theologians as more compatible in terms of the method of correlation than Cone's arguments imply, even as they have notable differences in content. See Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 106, n. 5–107, n. 8. In any case, Cone seems not to argue for a great discontinuity between Schleiermacher and Barth in *Black Theology and Black Power*, suggesting he may have modified his views between his dissertation in 1965 and his first book in 1969.

43 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 2, Part 2: The Doctrine of God*, trans. G. W. Bromley, J. C. Campbell, Ian Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R. A. Stewart (London: T&T Clark, 1957), 123, 164–67 (hereafter cited as CD). Barth cites von Loewenich with approval in relation to his own proposal that dogmatic science for the church should be undertaken as a theology of the cross. See CD 1.1, 14, 167. For arguments that Barth's doctrine of election is his theology of the cross, see Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 105–32; Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 163–97, and Jürgen Moltmann, "The Election of Grace: Karl Barth on Predestination," in Daniel L. Migliore (ed.), *Reading the Gospels with Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 1–15. For arguments for a collectivization of Luther's "happy exchange" in Barth's doctrine of election, see especially George Hunsinger's insightful article on Barth's reception of Luther in George Hunsinger, "What Karl Barth Learned from Martin Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13:2 (1999), 125–55; 135. For Col. 1:15 as an example of Christology rooted in the Jewish Wisdom tradition, see Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus, the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 96–118; 107, and Lois Malcolm, "No Wisdom, No Trinity: Why

Cone wrote his doctoral dissertation on Barth's anthropology and read deeply throughout Barth's *Church Dogmatics* for his dissertation; therefore, arguing for a connection to CD 2.2 in *Black Theology and Black Power* is warranted. Further, although Cone does not directly examine CD 2.2 in his dissertation, he argues for a connection between Barth's doctrine of election and Barth's anthropology in CD 3.2, writing: "Humankind's existence rests upon God's election! […] In this One human being all people have been elected by God. The starting point must be with God's election of this human being [Jesus Christ], and it will be shown that through this human being's election all people are elected."[44] Cone agrees with Barth that theological language should proceed from a Christological center so that theology does not become "idle, abstract words which have no relation to the Christian experience of revelation."[45] He thus sees Barth's approach as ensuring that Christian theology remains "Christianly Christian."[46] However, Cone differs from Barth by describing Jesus Christ in *Black Theology and Black Power* as the "special disclosure of God" to black people being oppressed by white racism in the United States.

Cone also describes Jesus as the "human being for others" similarly to Bonhoeffer, and particularly Bonhoeffer's *Prison* letters: "According to the New Testament, Jesus is the human being for others who views his existence as inextricably tied to other human beings to the degree that his own Person is inexplicable apart from others."[47] From Moltmann, Cone incorpo-

---

(the Biblical Figure Of) Wisdom Matters for Interpreting and Confessing the Trinity," *Word and World* 41:3 (2021), 221–30.

44 Cone, "The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth," 66. Language altered slightly for gender inclusivity.

45 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 34.

46 Ibid. Cone implicitly disagrees with Barth's polemic over the question of natural theology in his debate with Emil Brunner in the 1930s in *Black Theology and Black Power*. Thus, whereas Barth restricts revelation to salvation revelation in Jesus Christ (following Albrecht Ritschl), Cone aligns with Tillich's argument (based in Adolf Schlatter and Wilhelm Lütgert) for general *and* salvation revelation, which could be one reason why Cone turns toward Tillich's correlationism *at least* by the time of writing *God of the Oppressed*. See n. 34 above, Christian Danz, *Paul Tillich: Contexts and Key Issues* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2024), 79–110, and Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 229, n. 92. Cf. Cone's reading of the Barth-Brunner debate over natural theology in Cone, "Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth," 8–22, 143–45.

47 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 35. See John W. De Gruchy (ed.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 8: Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard

rates a "political hermeneutics of the gospel." "When black people begin to hear Jesus' message as contemporaneous with their life situation," Cone writes, "they will quickly recognize what Jürgen Moltmann calls the 'political hermeneutics of the gospel.'"[48]

Finally, Cone incorporates Pannenberg's Christology from below for his Christological methodology; Cone directly cites Pannenberg: "It is precisely Christology that discusses and establishes the justification and appropriate form of theological reference to Jesus in a methodological way."[49] Pannenberg's Lutheran stress on fleshing out the full humanity of Jesus in human history provides Cone with a way to anchor his own Christological arguments in the historical Jesus, in order to combat the critique that black theology is primarily ideology. However, Cone differs from Pannenberg by arguing for the contemporary presence of Jesus Christ in the sufferings and struggles of oppressed black people for justice and in his synthesis of a Christology from above (a mystical-sapiential Word/Wisdom Christology) and a Christology from below (a Lukan prophetic Spirit Christology).[50]

Krauss, and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 20010), 501 for Bonhoeffer's description of Jesus Christ as the "human being for others" (hereafter DBWE). This description relates to Bonhoeffer's July 18, 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge (DBWE 8: 480), wherein he expands his position in his poem "Christians and Heathens" that Christians are to stand by God in God's suffering (DBWE 8: 460–61). Cone cites this letter directly in Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 66 (see below). For a convincing reading of the whole of Bonhoeffer's theology as a theology of the cross, see H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's* Theologia Crucis *and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

48 Ibid., 37. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, "Toward a Political Hermeneutics of the Gospel," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 23:4 (1968), 303–23. Moltmann's reception and expansion of Luther's theology of the cross in the *Heidelberg Disputation* and Barth's Doctrine of Election is seen most clearly in his 1972 book, *The Crucified God*. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 40th Anniversary Edition, trans. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 285–418. For Cone's explicit connection to Moltmann's radicalization of Luther's theology of the cross, see n. 37 above.

49 Ibid. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1976), 9. For critical remarks on Pannenberg's Christology related to the tradition of the theology of the cross, see Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 29–32, and Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 53–54, n. 16. For Pannenberg's arguments about the difference between Paul of Tarsus's own theology of the cross and Martin Luther's subsequent reception of Paul, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Theology of the Cross," *Word and World* 8:2 (1988), 162–72.

50 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 34–35. This synthesis becomes clear in Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 106–12. See also nn. 14–16 above.

Cone's Collective-Political and Eschatological Expansion of the Happy Exchange

Further traces of the theology of the cross in Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* are found in Cone's argument that Christ takes the suffering and despair of the poor and oppressed onto himself. Here a collective-political and eschatological expansion of the "happy exchange," radicalized from Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*, Barth's doctrine of election, Bonhoeffer's *Christology* lectures and *Prison* letters, and Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* can be found. In Luther's theology, the "happy exchange" involves the mystical relationship between the individual-soul bride and Christ the bridegroom, who takes on the bride's sins and bestows the sinner-bride with his righteousness, as found directly in the German edition of *Freedom of a Christian*.[51] This theme becomes collective in Barth's doctrine of election (as was shown above), collective and political in Bonhoeffer's theology, and eschatological in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. Cone arguably then re-frames this theme to be collective-political *and* eschatological, with spiritual sin re-framed as systemic-political sin for critiquing and rebelling against the idolatry of white racism.

There is thus an important re-shaping of the "happy exchange" in Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* from Luther, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Moltmann toward political rebellion, even as Cone's early theology contains traces of all these theologians. Cone writes: "In Christ, God enters human affairs and takes sides with the oppressed. Their suffering becomes his; their despair, divine despair. Through Christ the poor human being is offered freedom now to rebel against that which makes him other than human."[52] While Cone's argument that Jesus Christ takes sides with the oppressed is similar

51 Martin Luther, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen (1520)*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe 7* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1897), 25 (30)–26: 4 (hereafter WA). The theology of the cross and happy exchange are interconnected in Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*. See Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 70–72. Cf. Hamm, *The Early Luther*, 176–89.

52 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 36. Cf. Cone, "Christianity and Black Power," in Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 3–12. Cone used explicit words from Bonhoeffer in this essay, when he defined Jesus as the "human being for others," which corresponds as well to Cone's reading of Volume 3.2 of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in his doctoral dissertation. See Ibid., 7, and Cone, "Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth," 88.

to Bonhoeffer's July 18, 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge, Cone re-shapes Bonhoeffer's "solidarity Christology" toward political rebellion on behalf of those oppressed by the idolatry of systemic white racism.[53]

Cone then argues for an eschatological reversal of poor and rich, due to Christ's entering into human affairs and siding with the oppressed.

> And the Kingdom which the poor enter is not merely an eschatological longing for escape to a transcendent reality, nor is it an inward serenity which eases unbearable suffering. Rather, it is God encountering humanity in the very depths of his being-in-the-world and releasing humankind from all human evils, like racism, which hold humankind captive. The repentant person knows that though God's ultimate Kingdom be in the future, yet even now it breaks through like a ray of light upon the darkness of the oppressed.[54]

Cone's eschatological arguments are concrete, corresponding to the concreteness of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Wisdom and Word of God, exemplified in Cone's phrase "God encountering humanity in the very depths of his being-in-the-world." This phrase is reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's *Christology* lectures, wherein Bonhoeffer writes, "God is bound up in the human being."[55] There is also a connection to Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, wherein an eschatology of promised hope coming from the future breaks into the present, in order that a Word of promise can be given to those who suffer, and the oppressed can break free in hope from their chains.[56]

---

53 DBWE 8: 480. For arguments as to how Bonhoeffer's July 18, 1944 letter to Bethge turns a theology of the cross toward the victims of sin in a way that is consonant with Cone's theology, see Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 157–61. For Cone's Christology as a "solidarity Christology" that is consonant with Bonhoeffer, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Vorwort*, in James H. Cone, *Kreuz und Lynchbaum*, trans. Ursula Sieg (Strufenhutten: Mutual Blessing Edition, 2019), 8.

54 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 37.

55 Larry L. Rasmussen (ed.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 12: Berlin 1932–1933*, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 344. For the relationship between Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God and the Jewish figure of Wisdom, see Prov. 8:1–9; 18, Wis. 6:1–25; 9:1–4; 9; 17–18, Eccles. 24:1–34, Matt. 11:18–19, 1 Cor. 1:24, Phil. 2:5–11, Eph. 1:3–10, Heb. 1:2–3, and Col. 1:15–20. See also n. 43 above.

56 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 37. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 148–54. For Moltmann's theology of hope as an eschatological expansion of the theology of the cross, see Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 163.

Radicalizing Luther's *Freedom of a Christian* and *Heidelberg Disputation*

Traces of a theology of the cross in Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* can also be found in Cone's (indirect) references to Luther's *Freedom of a Christian* and *The Heidelberg Disputation*. First, Cone defines Black Power as "the message of Christ himself."[57] He notes this is "both politically and religiously dangerous," given Barth's early theology maintaining the sharp distinction between God and humanity, and Christ never promising political security.[58] Nevertheless, Cone argues that his definition of Black Power as Christ's message is appropriate, given Luther's emphasis on neighbor love. Through Anders Nygren, Cone's theology shows traces of Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*, wherein Luther interprets Paul's argument for "faith active in love" (Gal. 5:6) for the Christian life.[59]

> But if Luther's statement, 'We are Christ to the neighbor,' is to be taken seriously, and if we believe the New Testament witness which proclaims Jesus as resurrected and thus active even now, then he must be alive in those very persons who are struggling in the midst of humility and humiliation.[60]

What is arguably Cone's radicalization of Luther's stress on neighbor love then shows traces of Luther's differentiation between human love and divine cruciform love in the poof to Thesis 28 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*. Luther writes: "the love of God which lives in the human loves sinners, evil persons,

---

57 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 37.

58 Ibid., 37–38. See again Cone's outlining of Barth's critique of natural theology, and Barth's polemic against Brunner on this topic, in Cone, "The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth," 1–22. See also n. 47 above.

59 See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953). For Luther's theology of the cross as a demonstration of God's love that is distinguished from the human love of the theology of glory, see Tuomo Manermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*, trans. Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 27–45; 28.

60 Ibid., 38. See again the German text of Luther's *Freedom of a Christian* in WA 7, 20–38. I am arguing here for a connection between justification and sanctification in Luther's emphasis on "neighbor love" as found in *Freedom of a Christian*. For an argument that justification and sanctification should be seen as two sides of the same coin in Luther's theological ethics (although without a direct reference to *Freedom of a Christian*), see William H. Lazareth, *Luther, The Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 244. Lazareth briefly addresses *Freedom of a Christian* in relation to neighbor love and the universal priesthood of Baptized Christians in Ibid., 221.

fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive."[61] While explicitly citing Nygren and the New Testament, Cone's language is strikingly similar to Luther's. Cone writes: "God's agape to human beings is spontaneous and creative, the starting point for the godhuman relationship. It is spontaneous in that there is no worth in a human being from God's perspective which accounts for God's love. The sole reason for God's love is found in God's loving character."[62]

Neighbor Love in the Ghetto and Blackness as New Creation

Final traces of the theology of the cross in Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* surface in his re-interpretation of the classic Pauline-Lutheran themes of "neighbor love flowing from faith" (cf. Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8–10) and "new creation" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17–19). Cone emphasizes that Jesus Christ was not only incarnate in the first century but is present in contemporary justice movements in the United States rebelling against injustice for the release of the captives.[63] This proclamation relates both to Cone's understanding of neighbor love in relation to Jesus Christ and to the church being found in the ghetto. Neighbor love means "joining God in his activity on behalf of the oppressed"[64] in a "radical identification with the neighbor" in order that God's grace not be cheapened.[65] For Cone, this means the white church is called to find Christ in the ghetto. Citing Bonhoeffer's July 18, 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge referenced above that develops the theme that Christians are called to stand by God in God's suffering, Cone writes, "Christ is to be found, as always, where human beings are enslaved and trampled under foot; Christ is in the ghetto – there also is his church."[66]

---

61 LW 31: 57.
62 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 50.
63 Ibid. Cf. Lk. 4:18–19.
64 Ibid., 51.
65 Ibid., 52. Cone cites Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* here. See Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey (eds.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 4: Discipleship*, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 43 for Bonhoeffer's contrast of "cheap grace" and "costly grace."
66 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 66.

As Cone understands the Gospel, if Jesus Christ is not present in the ghetto then the Gospel is a lie. Cone continues:

> If the gospel is a gospel of liberation for the oppressed, then Jesus is where the oppressed are and continues his work of liberation there. Jesus is not safely confined in the first century. He is our contemporary, proclaiming release to the captives and rebelling against all who silently accept the structures of injustice. If he is not in the ghetto, if he is not where human beings are living at the brink of existence, but is, rather, in the easy life of the suburbs, then the gospel is a lie. The opposite, however, is the case. Christianity is not alien to Black power; it is Black Power.[67]

Cone's argument contains traces of a theology of the cross, given Cone's drawing from Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* and his letter to Bethge. He is concerned with Christ's contemporary presence with oppressed people so that black people can love God, their neighbors, and themselves as people who have been given the gift of physical blackness by Jesus Christ.[68]

Cone's argument that blackness is a gift of God is akin to Paul's statement about New Creation in 2 Cor. 5:17: "When St. Paul speaks of being 'a new creature' in Christ, the redeemed black person takes that literally. He glorifies blackness, not as a means of glorifying self in the egotistical sense, but merely as an acceptance of the black self as a creature of God."[69] Blackness, love of God, and neighbor love are all interconnected in Jesus Christ, in order for oppressed black people to find freedom and flourishing through the Christian message in a society permeated by white racism. Cone's stress on neighbor love in the Ghetto and Blackness as New Creation thus interweaves a Pauline Wisdom Christology and a Lukan prophetic Spirit Christology (Lk. 4:18–19).

---

67 Ibid., 38.

68 Ibid., 53. Cone's theological understanding of blackness as a gift of God corresponds to his understanding of black consciousness and the Black Power movement. See Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church," 50. In this essay there is an explicit connection to Paul Tillich's notion of the "courage to be," which can be interpreted as Tillich's "existentialized" theology of the cross through Tillich's notion of the "God above the God of theism." See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 188.

69 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 53. Cf. Paul Tillich, "You are Accepted," in Paul Tillich, *Shaking of the Foundations* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1976), 153–63. For the connection between new creation and justification in a Pauline theology of the cross, see Jürgen Moltmann, "Justification and New Creation," in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation: Collected Essays*, trans. Margaret S. Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1979), 149–71.

Finally, for Cone, the Christian message as a prophetic critique of the idolatry of white racism in the United States means denying whiteness and affirming blackness. Yet this is not explicitly related to physical skin color, but rather an existential commitment of the heart. "To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are."[70] Therefore, Cone's understanding of "blackness" and "whiteness" is symbolic-ontological in the Tillichian sense.[71] This symbolic-ontological description of blackness is related to Cone's understanding of reconciliation, wherein "white people are prepared to deny themselves (whiteness), take up the cross (blackness), and follow Christ (black ghetto)."[72] Cone thus associates whiteness (and the corresponding systemic oppression of white racism) with a denial of the cross, blackness explicitly with Christ's cross, and Christian discipleship with following Christ in the ghetto. While Cone is not arguing that white people should literally change their skin color, he does advocate that white people should stand with oppressed black people. By so doing, white people follow the crucified Christ who is symbolically present in the ghetto and can be healed from their complicity as perpetrators in the systemic sin of racism.[73]

The Continuing Relevance of Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* for the United States and Beyond

It may seem at first as if Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* is a product of its time and cannot be applied to the contemporary political and theological scene either in the United States or elsewhere, given its original genesis amid

70 Ibid., 151.

71 Cone's symbolic-ontological understanding of blackness connects to Tillich's understanding of theological language as symbolic language. Cone's indebtedness to Tillich on this point becomes clear in his *A Black Theology of Liberation*, published in 1970. See James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 7–8. For a concise summary of Tillich's understanding of symbol, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: Existence and the Christ* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 9–10.

72 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 150.

73 This symbolic-ontological understanding of blackness is behind Cone's argument in *A Black Theology of Liberation* that God is black. See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 67.

the Civil Rights and Black Power eras.[74] However, the question remains if the United States has truly dealt with the history of systemic racism perpetuated against people of color both through overt forms of oppression such as slavery, lynching, and the forced migration of Native Americans to reservations, and covert oppression such as Jim Crow segregation laws. With the birth of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in 2013, the worldwide protests connected to the death of George Floyd in 2020, and the current political turmoil in the United States (also seen in Europe) around immigration where the majority of migrants are people of color the answer seems to be a resounding “no.” Further, legal theorist Michelle Alexander has written of a “New Jim Crow,” in which black people in the US are disproportionately targeted by the criminal justice system through being subjected to the death penalty at higher rates than their white counterparts and receiving harsher penalties than white people for using recreational drugs. All of this critiques the myth that the United States is a post-racial society, wherein black people particularly and people of color overall can now enjoy the same privileges as their Caucasian neighbors of European descent.[75]

Given this situation, Cone’s *Black Theology and Black Power* has renewed relevance for anyone who cares about re-framing a Lutheran theology of the cross to connect mystical-sapiential and prophetic theological motifs toward justice for the oppressed in the name of Jesus Christ. Cone’s early theology shows that the content for a contemporary constructive theology of the cross is found in the creative tension between the cross and oppressed black people in the United States in particular and oppressed people of color in general. Overall, Cone’s stress on Jesus Christ’s solidarity with oppressed people of color from the black experience as he understood it “transfigures”[76] a Lutheran theology of the cross for the twenty-first century to be attuned to concrete situations of global oppression, in order that a cruciform Word of healing hope for victims and perpetrators of oppression can be given.

---

74 See again n. 22 above.

75 See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010, 2012), 7–9, 98–102, 178–221, and Jennings, “St. Augustine and Malcolm X as Theological Figures in Relation to a Contemporary *Theologia Crucis* in Solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” 67.

76 See Westhelle, *Transfiguring Luther*, and n. 27 above.

In the United States (and arguably also in Europe), Cone's early theology can offer healing and hope for the victims and perpetrators of the idolatry of systemic white supremacy, if we are willing to heed his impassioned and prophetic critiques akin to Malcolm X and then work for just and nonviolent change in the vein of Martin Luther King, Jr.[77] Like the biblical prophets before him, Cone employs strong rhetoric in his early theology to wake his readers up from our respective slumbers around racism in particular and systemic-political sin in general. Once we have been awakened by Cone, have learned from him to seek Christ's presence as hidden in the literal "passions" of oppressed black people, and have died to systemic whiteness, we can begin to consider how to build just and nonviolent societies in solidarity with the most vulnerable among us. For this task, we will be aided both by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the so-called "peace theologians" from the twentieth century for the work of prophetic, nonviolent change.[78]

Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, and risen, sends us into the world to be blessed peacemakers, that we might be called "children of God" (Matt. 5:9). Regardless of our skin color, if we have the courage to follow the Black Christ into the ghettos of contemporary existence, we will find healing and hope through the one who brings the "peaceable kingdom" (Is. 11:1–9) and the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) that we all might have life and have it abundantly in his name (John 10:10). Living into abundant life in the Black Christ means victims and perpetrators of the idolatry of systemic white supremacy particularly and global oppression overall can find healing, hope, and

77 It is helpful to note that Cone's angry, prophetic tone in his early theology akin to Malcolm X calmed in his later works as he moved toward Martin Luther King, Jr.'s integrationist approach to racial justice, even while his theological argumentation remained passionate and engaged for the sake of oppressed black people in the United States and oppressed people of color worldwide. See Jennings, *Transfiguring a* Theologia Crucis *through James Cone*, 257.

78 See Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic & Brazos Press, 2004), 169–84; James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Ethics*, revised ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 86–89, 301–26; Jeffrey D. Meyers (ed.), *The Way of Peace: A. J. Muste's Writings for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 20–29, 171–88, 245–61; James Melvin Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 5–19, 12–20, 54–63, 217–20, 253–58, 313–30, and John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 1–20, 89–92, 228–47.

reconciliation “beyond tragedy.”[79] James Cone points us to this reconciling, healing, and hopeful abundant life in the Black Christ, both in the United States and beyond.

Conclusion

Martin Luther was not a liberation theologian in the twentieth or twenty-first century sense of this term, and James H. Cone did not set out to write an explicit theology of the cross in his *Black Theology and Black Power*. However, through a method of close reading that synthesized literary criticism, reception history and historical theology, hermeneutics, and ethics, the present article has attempted to show where traces of a theology of the cross might still be found in this book. We have investigated Cone’s theologizing for the sake of oppressed black people in relation to a prophetic expansion of Luther’s understanding of theology as “wisdom,” Cone’s reception, synthesis, and development of twentieth-century European theologians in his early Christology who can all be placed within the tradition of the theology of the cross, his collective-political and eschatological expansion of the “happy exchange,” and places in Cone’s text where he references the early Luther and re-interprets the classic Pauline-Lutheran themes of “neighbor love” and “new creation.” If the arguments presented here are justifiable, then Cone’s early theology contributed to the ongoing tradition of the theology of the cross. Further, the whole of Cone’s theology from his doctoral dissertation on Karl Barth’s anthropology in 1965 to *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* in 2011 can now be incorporated as material for a contemporary Lutheran theology of

79 This argument follows Cone’s understanding of reconciliation in *Cross and the Lynching Tree* that is akin to Martin Luther King, Jr., and which is a change from his earlier position in *God of the Oppressed*, where he argues for reconciliation between blacks and whites in a tone akin to Malcolm X. See Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 225; James H. Cone, “Black Theology on Revolution, Violence, and Reconciliation,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 31:1 (1975), 5–14; 13–14; Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 165, and Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York, NY: Scribner’s, 1937), 153–69. Cf. Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

the cross attuned to oppressed black people in the United States particularly, and oppressed people worldwide in general, that connects mystical-sapiential and prophetic theology.[80]

Brach S. Jennings
Grace Lutheran Church
625 2nd St. Lincoln, California 95648, United States of America
brach.jennings@gmail.com

80 This article is warmly dedicated to Stephen D. Morrison, in friendship and theological companionship. I am also grateful to Wesley W. Ellis for providing critical feedback on an early draft of this article, and to the anonymous peer reviewers who helped me refine my arguments. Any remaining errors are my own.

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVII (2025/3) 258–277

Die Transformation des pfarramtlicher Dienstes im postmodernen Kontext

Ondřej Macek

Abstract: The Transformation of Pastoral Ministry in a Postmodern Context

This study examines the transformation of parish ministry in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (Českobratrská církev evangelická) from two perspectives: from the point of view of lay people's expectations and from the point of view of pastors' professional identity.

Based on a quantitative cross-sectional survey conducted in 2023, the study analyzes the responses of 506 lay people and 109 clergy with the aim of identifying important trends in contemporary Protestant parish ministry. The results show a shift away from the traditional "universal" model toward specialized pastoral roles. Despite high satisfaction among both groups, the study identifies significant structural challenges, including administrative burdens, insufficient funding, and work-life balance issues.

The study shows a convergence between the expectations of laypeople and the priorities of pastors, who emphasize preaching, spiritual care, and community building within the parish as the core tasks of pastors, but also points to emerging tensions regarding the availability of pastors, the role of church buildings, and changing expectations of pastors' spouses. The study contributes to understanding current changes in Protestant pastoral care in a post-Christian European context and provides a solid empirical basis for strategic decisions by church leaders.

Keywords: Pastoral care; Protestant church; lay expectations; professional identity; church change; Czech Republic

Schlüsselwörter: Seelsorge; protestantische Kirche; Erwartungen der Laien; berufliche Identität; kirchlicher Wandel; Tschechische Republik

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.4

1. Einleitung

Die Evangelische Kirche der Böhmischen Brüder (Českobratrská církev evangelická; EKBB) steht den evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland und Österreich traditionell nahe und wurde durch eine tragische Fügung auch zur Nachfolgerin der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien.

Tschechische und deutsche Gemeinden pflegen unterschiedlich intensive und langjährige Partnerschaften, wobei die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), das Gustav-Adolf-Werk (GAW) und andere Organisationen seit Jahren die tschechischen evangelischen (Diaspora-)Gemeinden unterstützen. Zahlreiche tschechische evangelische Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer verbrachten Semester an deutschen theologischen Fakultäten oder in Wien, was zu einem relativ intensiven theologischen Einfluss führte. Die Bibliotheken der tschechischen evangelischen Pfarrhäuser waren bis vor kurzem mit deutschen Bibelkommentaren und Dogmatikbüchern gefüllt, was von einer tiefen Gegenseitigkeit des theologischen Denkens zwischen beiden Traditionen zeugt.

Die unierte Evangelische Kirche der Böhmischen Brüder entstand 1918 durch den Zusammenschluss der tschechischen und mährischen Gemeinden helvetischen und augsburgischen Bekenntnisses. Die Gründung ihrer ältesten Gemeinden wurde durch das Toleranzpatent von Kaiser Joseph II. vom 13. Oktober 1781 ermöglicht, wobei diese Gemeinden von bis dahin geheimen Protestanten gegründet wurden, die bis zur Zeit der tschechischen Reformation im 15. Jahrhundert eine familiäre Kontinuität aufwiesen.

Die EKBB hat in ihren „symbolischen Büchern“ die Vier Prager Artikel von 1420, das Bekenntnis der Brüderunität von 1535, die Confessio Bohemica von 1575, die Augsburger Konfession von 1530 und das Zweite Helvetische Bekenntnis (Confessio Helvetica posterior) von 1566. Die EKBB gehörte auch zu den Gründungskirchen der Leuenberger Konkordie.

Der heutige Pfarrdienst in der EKBB steht vor grundlegenden transformativen Herausforderungen, die sich aus umfassenden gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen, Veränderungen in der Finanzierung (ab 2030 werden die Kirchen in der Tschechischen Republik ohne staatliche Subventionen auskommen müssen, von denen sie seit den 1950er Jahren abhängig waren), Säkularisierungstendenzen und sich wandelnden Erwartungen der Gläubigen ergeben. Diese Veränderungen erfordern eine empirische Erfassung der Einstellungen und Erwartungen sowohl der Laien als auch aus der Perspektive der Geistlichen selbst. Die vorliegende Studie stellt die erste systematische Analyse dieser Dimensionen im tschechischen protestantischen Kontext dar.

Vielleicht kann sie auch deutschen Forschern einen Vergleich zwischen tschechischen und deutschen Daten ermöglichen. (Der Autor des Artikels kann nicht verschweigen, dass er selbst als Pfarrer in der Kirche tätig ist und neben der Analyse der Daten auch eigene Überlegungen zu diesem Thema anstellt.)

2. Theoretischer Hintergrund und Forschungsfragen

Aktuelle Forschungen zum protestantischen Pfarrberuf in westlichen Gesellschaften dokumentieren einen grundlegenden Wandel vom traditionellen universellen Modell des Pfarrers bzw. der Pfarrerin hin zu spezialisierten pastoralen Rollen.[1] Dieser Trend spiegelt umfassendere Veränderungen im Verständnis von Autorität, in der Professionalisierung der Pfarrdienst und in der Individualisierung der religiösen Erfahrung wider.

Das tschechische protestantische Umfeld zeichnet sich darüber hinaus durch einige Besonderheiten aus, die den Charakter des Pfarrdienstes beeinflussen, darunter die historische Erfahrung einer vierzigjährigen kommunistischen Unterdrückung, während der der Staat die Kirchen finanziell abhängig machte; den Prozess der Trennung von Kirche und Staat und einer allgemeinen Skepsis der tschechischen Gesellschaft gegenüber religiösen Institutionen, die ihre Wurzeln in der Gegenreformation (1623–1781) und im langen 19. Jahrhundert hat.

Die Studie konzentriert sich auf vier zentrale Forschungsfragen. Erstens: Welche Erwartungen haben Laien derzeit an den Pfarrdienst und wie strukturieren sich diese nach Prioritäten? Zweitens: Wie sehen Pfarrer*innen ihre berufliche Rolle und welche Hauptanforderungen stellen sie an den heutigen Pfarrdienst? Drittens: Inwieweit gibt es eine Konvergenz zwischen den Erwartungen der Laien und den Prioritäten der Geistlichen? Viertens: Welche strukturellen Veränderungen erfordert die gegenwärtige Transformation des Pfarrdienstes?

1 Vgl. Michael Klessmann, *Das Pfarramt. Einführung in Grundfragen der Pastoraltheologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2012); Herbert Pachmann, *Pfarrer sein – Pfarrerin sein. Ein Beruf und eine Berufung im Wandel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Uta Pohl-Patalong, „Pastoraltheologie", in Christian Grethlein and Helmut Schwier (eds.), *Praktische Theologie. Eine Theorie – und Problemgeschichte* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 515–574; David Plüss, „Der Pfarrberuf zwischen Zeitgeist und Zeitgenossenschaft", *Theologische Zeitschrift* 3.4:68 (2012), 355–376; Friederike Erichsen-Wendt and Adelheid Ruck-Schröder, *Pfarrer:in sein* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022); Isolde Karle, *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession. Eine Berufstheorie im Kontext der modernen Gesellschaft*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001); Michael Klessmann, *Das Pfarramt. Einführung in Grundfragen der Pastoraltheologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2012).

3. Methodik

Die Studie wurde als quantitative Querschnittsanalyse unter Verwendung paralleler Befragungen von Laienmitgliedern und Geistlichen der EKBB durchgeführt. Diese doppelte Perspektive ermöglicht eine vergleichende Analyse der Erwartungen und der Realität des Pfarrdienstes.[2]

Die Befragung der Laien fand vom 30. Oktober 2023 bis zum 1. Januar 2024 mittels eines strukturierten Online-Fragebogens statt. Von den 817 Personen, die den Fragebogen aufgerufen haben, haben 506 ihn ausgefüllt, was einer Rücklaufquote von 62 % entspricht.

Der Fragebogen für Laien enthielt 27 Fragen, die in fünf thematische Abschnitte gegliedert waren. Der erste Abschnitt erfasste die demografischen Merkmale der Befragten einschließlich ihrer kirchlichen Biografie. Der zweite Abschnitt ermittelte die Erwartungen an den Pfarrdienst anhand semantischer Differenziale auf einer Skala von minus fünf bis plus fünf, wodurch sowohl positive als auch negative Einstellungen zu einzelnen Aspekten der Arbeit des Pfarrers bzw. der Pfarrerin erfasst werden konnten. Der dritte Abschnitt konzentrierte sich auf die Zufriedenheit und das Verhältnis zum/zur aktuellen Pfarrer*rin unter Verwendung von Likert-Skalen. Der vierte Abschnitt befasste sich mit institutionellen Fragen, darunter Vorstellungen zur Vergütung, Arbeitszeit und Wohnsituation von Pfarrer*innen. Der fünfte Abschnitt enthielt offene Fragen, die es ermöglichten, qualitative Dimensionen der untersuchten Phänomene zu erfassen.

Die Umfrage unter Geistlichen fand vom 6. November bis zum 15. Dezember 2023 online statt. Insgesamt wurden 246 Zugriffe auf den Fragebogen verzeichnet, von denen 109 Befragte den Fragebogen erfolgreich ausgefüllt haben. Der Fragebogen umfasste 36 strukturierte Fragen, die in sieben thematische Abschnitte gegliedert waren, darunter demografische Merkmale, Arbeitsbedingungen und Belastungen, berufliche Aktivitäten und Prioritäten, Zufriedenheit und Stressfaktoren, Wohn- und Lebensbedingungen, finanzielle Aspekte und Zukunftsperspektiven.

2 Ich habe das professionelle Tool survio.com verwendet.

4. Ergebnisse[3]

4.1 Demografische Merkmale und Repräsentativität

Die EKBB hat aktuell knapp 60.000 Mitglieder in 251 Gemeinden. (Damit ist sie die größte protestantische Kirche in der Tschechischen Republik.) Im Jahr 2023 betrug die durchschnittliche Besucher*innenzahl der Sonntagsgottesdienste 7336 Personen.[4]

Im Jahr 2023 hatte die EKBB 197 aktive Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer, die sich 168,16 Vollzeitstellen teilten. Die meisten Pfarrer*innen der EKBB sind über 50 Jahre alt. Ein Viertel davon sind Frauen.[5]

Die demografische Struktur der Laien-Forschungsgruppe spiegelte die Altersstruktur der Kirchenbevölkerung wider, wobei die stärkste Gruppe die 41- bis 50-Jährigen mit einem Anteil von 23,5 % waren, gefolgt von der Altersgruppe der 61- bis 70-Jährigen mit einem Anteil von 19,6 % und der Altersgruppe der 51- bis 60-Jährigen mit einem Anteil von 18,2 %. Hinsichtlich der Geschlechterverteilung überwogen Frauen mit einem Anteil von 53,2 %. Die regionale Abdeckung umfasste alle Regionen der Tschechischen Republik mit der höchsten Vertretung in Prag, der Region Südmähren und der Region Mittelböhmen.

Die Stichprobe der Geistlichen zeigte eine Dominanz der jüngeren bis mittleren Generation, wobei die größte Gruppe Pfarrer*innen im Alter bis zu 50 Jahren mit einem Anteil von 39,8 % darstellten, gefolgt von der Kategorie bis zu 60 Jahren mit einem Anteil von 29,6 %. Männer stellten 62,5 % der Befragten.

4.2 Hierarchie der Prioritäten der Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer und Konvergenz der Perspektiven

Die Analyse der Daten ergab mehrere wichtige Trends in der Einstellung der Laien zum Pfarrdienst, wobei die bemerkenswerteste Erkenntnis die außergewöhnlich hohe Gesamtzufriedenheit der Befragten mit ihren derzeitigen Pfarrer*innen war. Konkret bezeichneten sich 35,5 % der Befragten als sehr zufrieden, während weitere 36,7 % die Situation als „in Ordnung" bewerteten,

---

3 Ich habe die tschechischen Leser in einem ausführlichen Text über Pastoraltheologie mit den Ergebnissen der Untersuchung vertraut gemacht: Ondřej Macek, „Farář:ka Českobratrské církve evangelické mezi očekáváními, možnostmi a vlastními představami", in Jiří Šamšula (ed.), *Ordinace. K čemu?* (Praha: Eman, 2025), 15–47.

4 Interne Statistiken der EKBB, verfügbar für registrierte Nutzer auf evangnet.cz.

5 Mitteilung des Zentralen Kirchenbüros.

was insgesamt einen Zufriedenheitsgrad von 72,2 % ergibt. Demgegenüber äußerten nur 4 % der Befragten Unzufriedenheit oder den Wunsch, dass ihr/e Pfarrer*in die Gemeinde verlässt.

Die Analyse der Prioritäten von Pfarrer*innen ergab eine klare Struktur der Erwartungen der Laien an die geistlichen Ämter. Auf einer Skala von minus fünf bis plus fünf wurde das Predigen als höchste Priorität genannt, das von 49,6 % der Befragten als entscheidend bezeichnet wurde. An zweiter Stelle stand die Seelsorge mit 39,9 %, gefolgt von der Organisation von Gottesdiensten mit 33,4 % und der Schaffung oder Vernetzung von Gemeinschaft in der Gemeinde mit 33,8 %. Diese vier Bereiche bilden sozusagen den Kern des Pfarramts, den die Befragten als unersetzlich empfinden.

Ein Vergleich mit der Perspektive der Geistlichen zeigt eine deutliche Konvergenz der Prioritäten. Die Befragten identifizierten die wichtigsten Aktivitäten ihres Pfarramtes anhand einer Fünf-Punkte-Skala, wobei Gottesdienste mit 42,2 % der höchsten Bewertungen als wichtigste Aktivität angesehen werden. Es folgen die Seelsorge mit 37,6 % und die Predigt mit 30,3 % der höchsten Bewertungen.

Diese Ergebnisse bestätigen das traditionelle Verständnis der Rolle des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin mit Schwerpunkt auf liturgischen, homiletischen und seelsorgerischen Funktionen.

Im mittleren Bereich der Wichtigkeit rangieren Kompetenzen im Zusammenhang mit der Arbeit mit einzelnen Generationen. Dieser Trend deutet darauf hin, dass Laien von Pfarrer*innen die Fähigkeit erwarten, als Brückenbauer*innen zwischen den Generationen zu fungieren und verschiedene Altersgruppen innerhalb der Kirchengemeinde spirituell zu begleiten.

Die niedrigste Priorität erhielten bauliche Aktivitäten mit 5,2 % hoher Bewertung, das Verfassen von Förderanträgen mit 8,5 %, die wirtschaftliche Verwaltung mit 13 % und die administrative Verwaltung mit 10,2 %.

4.3 Berufliche Zufriedenheit und strukturelle Stressfaktoren

Die berufliche Zufriedenheit der Pfarrer*innen der EKBB ist angesichts der identifizierten beruflichen Herausforderungen überraschend hoch.

Auf einer Zehn-Punkte-Skala bewerten insgesamt 35,1 % der Befragten ihre Zufriedenheit mit der Note acht und weitere 26,6 % mit der Note sieben. Nur 12,8 % der Befragten bewerten ihre Zufriedenheit mit der Note fünf oder weniger, was trotz objektiver Schwierigkeiten auf eine überwiegend positive Wahrnehmung des eigenen Berufs hindeutet.

Die Hauptquellen der beruflichen Zufriedenheit sind laut den Befragten die Wertschätzung durch die Mitglieder der Gemeinde, das gute Gefühl nach einem gerade stattgefundenen Treffen und die Verwirklichung der eigenen inneren Werte. Diese Faktoren weisen auf die Bedeutung der intrinsischen Motivation und des positiven Feedbacks aus der Gemeinde für die Aufrechterhaltung der beruflichen Zufriedenheit hin.

Gleichzeitig identifizierten die Befragten jedoch auch erhebliche Stressfaktoren, die ihre Arbeit beeinflussen.

Auf die Frage nach der subjektiven Wahrnehmung der Belastung in den letzten sechs Monaten antworteten 39,4 % der Befragten, dass sie sich etwas gestresst fühlen, während nur 25,5 % ein Gefühl des Wohlbefindens angaben. Beunruhigende 9,6 % der Befragten fühlen sich einem Burnout nahe.

Zu den am häufigsten genannten Stressfaktoren gehört die Büroarbeit, die 65,6 % der Befragten als ungeliebte Tätigkeit bezeichnen. Es folgen Reparaturen an Gemeindegebäuden mit 56,7 %, das Management der Gemeinde mit 47,8 % und die Motivation der Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter mit 37,8 %. Diese Ergebnisse zeigen ein Problem des (heutigen) Pfarrberufs auf, nämlich die Verschiebung von primären geistlichen Aufgaben hin zu administrativen und leitenden Tätigkeiten.

4.4 Arbeitsbedingungen und finanzielle Aspekte

Die Analyse der Arbeitsbedingungen zeigt ein komplexes Bild des heutigen Pfarrrberufs. Die meisten Befragten (62,8 %) üben ihren Beruf als Pfarrer*in in Vollzeit aus, ein erheblicher Teil muss jedoch den Pfarrberuf mit anderen Tätigkeiten kombinieren. Konkret haben 6,4 % neben ihrer Vollzeitstelle als Pfarrer*in eine weitere Beschäftigung und 5,3 % müssen aufgrund unzureichender Einkünfte gelegentlich dazuverdienen. Diese Diversifizierung der beruflichen Tätigkeiten deutet auf wirtschaftliche Belastungen hin, denen der Beruf des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin ausgesetzt ist.

Die zeitliche Belastung der Pfarrer*innen weist eine erhebliche Variabilität auf, die die heterogene Natur der pastoralen Aufgaben widerspiegelt. Die am häufigsten angegebene tägliche Arbeitszeit beträgt acht Stunden (sieben Tage pro Woche!) mit 22,9 % der Befragten, gefolgt von zehn Stunden mit 15,6 %. Ein erheblicher Teil der Pfarrer*innen arbeitet also deutlich mehr als die Standardarbeitszeit, wobei einige sogar bis zu zwölf Stunden pro Tag angeben. Diese langen Arbeitszeiten weisen auf Probleme bei der

Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Privatleben und ein potenziell hohes Risiko für berufliches Burnout hin.

Die Befragten äußerten klare Vorstellungen über die angemessene Höhe des Pfarrer*innengehalts, wobei 43,5 % das Zweieinhalbfache des Grundgehalts (2023: 17.300 CZK = 720 EURO) in Höhe von 43.250 CZK fordern, 39,1 % das Doppelte des Grundgehalts und 12 % das Dreifache.

Bemerkenswert ist die Übereinstimmung zwischen den Erwartungen der Laien und der Geistlichen in diesem Bereich. Die Laien halten das Zweieinhalbfache des Grundgehalts in 45,1 % der Fälle und das Doppelte des Grundgehalts in 37,7 % der Fälle für angemessen. Diese Übereinstimmung deutet auf ein gemeinsames Verständnis des Wertes der Arbeit eines Pfarrers/einer Pfarrerin in der gesamten kirchlichen Gemeinschaft hin.

Paradoxerweise sind jedoch 47,3 % der Geistlichen bereit, auch für dreitausend Kronen weniger im Monat zu arbeiten, als sie derzeit verdienen. Diese Bereitschaft zu finanziellen Kompromissen deutet auf eine starke intrinsische Motivation und Hingabe an den Beruf hin, die gegenüber den materiellen Aspekten überwiegt. Gleichzeitig kann diese Haltung jedoch das System der unzureichenden finanziellen Bewertung der Arbeit von Pfarrer*innen perpetuieren. Wahrscheinlich spiegelt dies auch wider, dass Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer sich bewusst sind, dass die Personalkosten für die meisten Gemeinden eine kaum zu bewältigende Belastung darstellen.

4.5 Spezifische Dimensionen des Pfarramts

Seelsorge als Paradox des heutigen Pfarramts

Seelsorge wird von Laien erwartet, gefordert und als relativ wichtig angesehen. Kompetenzen in der Seelsorge wurden sogar als vorrangig angesehen. Auch die Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer selbst legen Wert auf Seelsorge. Ein detaillierter Blick auf diesen Bereich liefert jedoch weniger eindeutige Antworten.

Auf die Frage, ob sie bereit wären, Lebenskrisen mit ihrem Pfarrer/ihrer Pfarrerin zu besprechen, antworteten 38 % der Laien, dass sie dies nur tun würden, wenn sie davon ausgehen könnten, dass ihr Pfarrer/ihre Pfarrerin für das Thema kompetent ist. 30 % antworteten eher mit Ja und 15 % mit Ja, während 12,7 % eher mit Nein und 3,2 % mit Nein antworteten.

Zwei Drittel der Laien erwarten auch, dass sich der/die Geistliche in einer Krisensituation von sich aus meldet. Wenn sie im Krankenhaus liegen, wissen 35 % der Gemeindemitglieder nicht, ob sie ihren Pfarrer/ihre Pfarrerin darüber informieren würden, 13 % würden dies nicht tun und 29 % würden bei einer schweren Erkrankung um einen Besuch bitten.

Wenn Gemeindeangehörige über einen längeren Zeitraum nicht am Gottesdienst teilnehmen können, erwarten sie von ihrem/ihrer Geistlichen verschiedene Formen der Kontaktaufnahme, wobei 34 % einen Anruf, 29 % einen Brief oder eine E-Mail und 28 % einen persönlichen Besuch erwarten.

Auf der anderen Seite äußerten 45,8 % der Kirchenmitglieder Interesse an der Krankensalbung gemäß dem Jakobusbrief. Die Geistlichen beschrieben ihre Erfahrungen mit der Krankensalbung jedoch ganz anders. 69,15 % haben noch nie eine Krankensalbung vorgenommen, 13,83 % nur sehr selten, 10,64 % können die Fälle an einer Hand abzählen, 5,32 % gelegentlich und nur 1,6 % führen die Krankensalbung relativ häufig durch.

Dieser Widerspruch deutet darauf hin, dass die Gemeindemitglieder zwar großen Wert auf Seelsorge legen, aber teilweise vielleicht nicht wissen, was ihnen ein Treffen mit dem Pfarrer/der Pfarrerin bringen könnte, oder dass es sich um einen so persönlichen Bereich handelt, dass sie sich letztlich scheuen, sich ihrem Seelsorger/ihrer Seelsorgerin zu öffnen.

In den oft sehr kleinen Gemeinden stoßen wir auf die Tatsache, dass wir den Pfarrern und Pfarrerinnen in verschiedenen Rollen begegnen, als Freunde, Erzieher*innen, Mithelfer*innen bei Reparaturen und Reinigungsarbeiten in der Kirche, als Bekannte der Familie, Kolleg*innen im Ältestenrat oder Nachbar*innen, was wahrscheinlich dazu führt, dass die Laien keine große Lust haben, sich ihnen anzuvertrauen oder zu beichten.

Das Phänomen des Pfarrhauses

Das Pfarrhaus wird von den evangelischen Gläubigen als Zentrum des Gemeindelebens wahrgenommen, wobei 40,8 % der Laien diese Ansicht teilen und davon ausgehen, dass es als offenes Haus dienen wird. Es herrscht relative Einigkeit zwischen Laien und Geistlichen hinsichtlich der Bedeutung der Wohnsituation des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin im Pfarrhaus, wobei 57 % der Laien und 63 % der Geistlichen diese Regelung für wichtig halten.

Die Pfarrer*innen rechnen eher nicht damit, dass sie im Pfarrhaus absolute Privatsphäre haben, sind aber gleichzeitig froh über die Nähe zum Arbeitsplatz und die günstige Miete bei gleichzeitig großzügigen Räumlichkeiten. Zu den positiven Aspekten des Wohnens im Pfarrhaus zählen die Befragten am häufigsten die Nähe zum Arbeitsplatz, die von 27,5 % der Befragten am höchsten bewertet wird, ausreichend Platz für die Familie mit 21,1 % und

Zugang zu einem Garten mit 16,5 %. Zu den negativen Aspekten zählen die Befragten am häufigsten die soziale Kontrolle durch die Gemeinde und den Wunsch nach mehr Privatsphäre.

Sie wären dankbar für eine stärkere Trennung der privaten Räume, wobei die günstige Miete als deutlicher Vorteil angesehen wird. Sowohl Pfarrer*innen als auch Laien sind sich bewusst, dass es sich nicht um ein vollwertiges Zuhause handelt, sondern um einen Teil des Dienstes. Es scheint jedoch, dass die Pfarrhäuser aufhören oder aufgehört haben, Zentren eines alternativen Lebens oder einer vorbildlichen christlichen Kultur zu sein, eine offene Bühne, auf der der christliche Lebensstil präsentiert wurde, allerdings oft um den Preis einer lebenslangen „Traumatisierung" ihrer Bewohner.

*Wandel der Rolle der Partner*innen von Pfarrer*innen*
Nur für 14 % der Kirchenmitglieder ist es keine wesentliche Frage, mit wem ihr Pfarrer oder ihre Pfarrerin das Leben und Wohnen im Pfarrhaus teilt. In dieser Hinsicht ist die EKBB sicherlich noch Erbin eines bestimmten Kirchenmodells, und es gibt wohl nicht viele Berufe, in denen der Träger/die Trägerin dieses Amtes so stark mit seinem/seiner Partner wahrgenommen wird.

11 % der Laien erwarten ausdrücklich, dass der Partner oder die Partnerin des Pfarrers oder der Pfarrerin in das Gemeindeleben einbezogen wird. Mindestens die Hälfte der Pfarrhäuser wird auch tatsächlich von Partner*innen bewohnt, die in das Gemeindeleben eingebunden sind. Die Pfarrer und Pfarrerinnen wären dankbar, wenn dies nicht als selbstverständlich angesehen, sondern mehr als bisher geschätzt würde.

Seit der Entstehung der Toleranzkirchen prägten die Ehefrauen der Pfarrer die Kultur der protestantischen Gemeinden und pflegten einen Stil, der sich durch Dienstbereitschaft, aber auch durch Offenheit, Empathie und Bildung auszeichnete. Sie unterstützten ihre Partner, waren unbezahlte Mitarbeiterinnen der Gemeinden und hatten einen informellen, aber starken Einfluss. Eine Wende brachte der Eintritt von Frauen in das Pfarramt im Jahr 1953. Die Emanzipation der Pfarrfrauen wurde jedoch teilweise durch die kommunistische Gewaltherrschaft gebremst, die sie oft automatisch vom Arbeitsmarkt ausschloss.

Die Partner*innen der Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer können ihnen aus ihren Berufen und Lebenserfahrungen andere Impulse und Perspektiven vermitteln, gleichzeitig führt jedoch der aktuelle Trend zu einer höheren sozialen Belastung dazu, dass die Pfarrhäuser nicht mehr so offen sind. Auch die

Erwartungen an den Pfarrer/die Pfarrerin selbst müssen reduziert werden, da ihm/ihr die Unterstützung für seinen/ihren Beruf im häuslichen Bereich fehlt und die Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie schwieriger geworden ist.

Soziale Medien
Bemerkenswert ist auch, wie wenig Bedeutung soziale Medien für Laien haben (4,9 % gaben die Note 5, 28,3 % die Note 0). Die Aktivitäten ihrer Geistlichen in diesem Bereich halten sie für völlig überflüssig. Vielleicht „ignorieren" sie damit die Tatsache, dass sich Religiosität in den virtuellen Raum verlagert, dass Seelsorge in Chats stattfindet und Podcasts zu Predigten werden (und umgekehrt). Auch nach dem Abklingen der Covid-19-Pandemie ist vieles aus dem kirchlichen Leben online geblieben. Wir wissen jedoch vielleicht noch nicht, wie wir mit dieser neuen Realität umgehen sollen. Wir haben einen kleinen Sprung in den digitalen Raum gewagt, aber vielleicht betrachten wir ihn weiterhin skeptisch, weil er doch keine lebendige Gemeinschaft ersetzen kann. (Die Realität zeigt jedoch, dass er das kann und auch tut.) Dank des Internets sind Laien auch viel freier geworden und können aus einem vielfältigen spirituellen Angebot wählen.

Gebet
48,5 % der Befragten beten regelmäßig oder gelegentlich für ihren Pfarrer/ihre Pfarrerin (12,4 % regelmäßig, 36,1 % gelegentlich), was fast der Hälfte der Befragten entspricht. 27 % der Befragten beten unregelmäßig (14,2 % selten, 12,8 % gelegentlich), was darauf hindeutet, dass insgesamt 75,5 % der Gläubigen ihren Seelsorger/ihre Seelsorgerin in unterschiedlicher Intensität in ihre Gebetspraxis einbeziehen. Nur 4 % der Befragten beten überhaupt nicht für ihren Pfarrer/ihre Pfarrerin. Bemerkenswert ist die Tatsache, dass 20,4 % der Befragten angaben, dass ihnen dies „nicht in den Sinn gekommen" sei.

5. Diskussion

5.1 Konvergenz von Erwartungen und Realität

Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung zeigen eine Ambivalenz im heutigen Beruf des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin in der EKBB auf. Einerseits beobachten wir eine relativ hohe berufliche Zufriedenheit und eine positive Einstellung zum Beruf, andererseits identifizieren wir jedoch erhebliche Stressfaktoren und strukturelle Herausforderungen. Die hohe Zufriedenheit steht im Gegensatz zu objektiven Belastungsindikatoren wie langen Arbeitszeiten, finanzieller Unsicherheit (wird meine Pfarrstelle bestehen bleiben, werde ich weiterhin Pfarrer*in sein können?) und einem hohen Verwaltungsaufwand.

Die hohe Bewertung der geistlichen Aufgaben, insbesondere des Predigtdienstes und der Seelsorge, steht im Gegensatz zur geringen Bewertung der Verwaltungsaufgaben.

Bedeutsam ist die Übereinstimmung zwischen den Perspektiven der Laien und der Geistlichen in der Prioritätenhierarchie. Beide Gruppen identifizieren Predigt, Seelsorge, Gottesdienstgestaltung und Gemeindebau als Kernaufgaben des Pfarreramts, während sie administrative Tätigkeiten, Bauarbeiten und die Finanzverwaltung als weniger wichtig erachten.

5.2 Strukturelle Herausforderungen des heutigen Pfarramts

Die Analyse identifiziert mehrere zentrale strukturelle Herausforderungen, die die Natur des heutigen Pfarramts beeinflussen. Das wohl bedeutendste Problem ist die fortschreitende Bürokratisierung des kirchlichen Umfelds, die sich darin widerspiegelt, dass die Verwaltung am häufigsten als Stressfaktor genannt wird. Diese Bürokratisierung führt zu einer Abkehr von den primären pastoralen Aufgaben und schafft Spannungen zwischen dem Ideal des Pfarreramts und der Realität des Alltags.

Die Frage der Work-Life-Balance erweist sich als entscheidend für die langfristige Nachhaltigkeit des Pfarramts. Lange Arbeitszeiten, die Kombination von Wohnort und Arbeitsplatz im Pfarrhaus und die ständige Verfügbarkeit für die Bedürfnisse der Gemeinde stellen besondere Herausforderungen für die Trennung von Berufs- und Privatleben dar. Fast zehn Prozent der Befragten, die kurz vor einem Burnout stehen, sind ein deutliches Warnsignal für die Unhaltbarkeit der aktuellen Arbeitsbedingungen.

5.3 Wandel der Identität des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin

Die Identifizierung von Kommunikationsfähigkeiten, pastoralen Kompetenzen und Kooperationsfähigkeit als Schlüssel für die Zukunft deutet auf eine Verlagerung hin zu einem stärker beziehungsorientierten Modell des Pfarreramts hin. Dieser Trend spiegelt einen breiteren gesellschaftlichen Wandel wider, in dem Autorität, die auf Tradition und institutioneller Position beruht, zugunsten von Autorität, die auf persönlichen Qualitäten und der Fähigkeit, Beziehungen aufzubauen, basiert, zurücktritt.

Das traditionelle Modell des Pfarramts, das auf totaler Verfügbarkeit und Selbstaufopferung basiert, erweist sich im Kontext moderner Vorstellungen von Work-Life-Balance und psychischer Gesundheit als problematisch. Die Notwendigkeit, die Grenzen zwischen beruflichen und persönlichen Verpflichtungen neu zu definieren, wird für die Attraktivität des Berufs für jüngere Generationen entscheidend.

5.4 Seelsorge als mögliche Herausforderung für die postmoderne Pastoraltheologie

Das festgestellte Paradoxon der Seelsorge offenbart die Spannung des heutigen Pfarramts. Einerseits wird Seelsorge als Schlüsselkompetenz und Erwartung identifiziert, andererseits stößt ihre praktische Umsetzung auf verschiedene Hindernisse.

Die Multifunktionalität der Rolle des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin in kleinen Gemeinden führt zu Situationen, in denen Laien den Pfarrer gleichzeitig spirituelle/n Ratgeber*in, Freund*in, Nachbar*in und Mitarbeiter*in wahrnehmen, was möglicherweise die Entstehung einer vertraulichen spirituellen Beziehung erschwert (oder ist das umgekehrt?).

Die geringe Nutzung spezifischer Rituale wie der Krankensalbung bei gleichzeitig hohem Interesse der Laien deutet auf einen Bedarf an besserer Kommunikation und Aufklärung über die verfügbaren Formen der seelsorgerischen und spirituellen Betreuung hin. Die Erwartung eines proaktiven Ansatzes seitens der Geistlichen bei gleichzeitiger Unsicherheit der Laien hinsichtlich der Angemessenheit, um Hilfe zu bitten, schafft eine paradoxe Situation, die neue Ansätze in der Seelsorge erfordert.

5.5 Institutionelle und generationsbezogene Herausforderungen

Die hohe Priorität der Arbeit mit allen Altersgruppen spiegelt die Erwartung wider, dass der Pfarrer/die Pfarrerin im Kontext der alternden tschechischen Gesellschaft eine Brücke zwischen den Generationen schlägt. Gleichzeitig erhöht diese Erwartung jedoch die Komplexität der Rolle des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin und erfordert ein breites Spektrum an Kompetenzen, von der Arbeit mit Kindern bis zur Senior*innenseelsorge. Vor dem Hintergrund sinkender Pfarrer*innenzahlen und erweiternder Pfarrbezirke wird diese Erwartung immer schwieriger zu erfüllen.

Das Phänomen des Pfarrhauses als Zentrum des Gemeindelebens wandelt sich vom traditionellen Modell des offenen Hauses hin zu einem differenzierteren Verständnis von öffentlichem und privatem Raum. Die veränderten Erwartungen an die Partner*innen von Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrern spiegeln umfassendere gesellschaftliche Veränderungen in den Geschlechterrollen und auf dem Arbeitsmarkt wider, was eine Neudefinition traditioneller Modelle des pastoralen Dienstes erforderlich macht.

6. Die Reformherausforderung der Gegenwart

Die heutige Generation von Geistlichen und Gläubigen steht vor einer Herausforderung, die als Reformstress charakterisiert werden kann. Dieser Begriff fasst die Situation zusammen, in der sich vor allem Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer, aber sicherlich oft auch ihre Gemeinden befinden. Sie denken sich immer wieder neue Aktionen aus, um den Mitgliederrückgang aufzuhalten, sind aber manchmal müde, erschöpft und oft enttäuscht, weil der Erfolg nur teilweise eintritt.

In den meisten Orten ist ein anhaltender Rückgang der Mitgliederzahlen zu verzeichnen, der jedoch eher statistischer Natur sein dürfte. Zwar nimmt die Zahl der registrierten Mitglieder ab, gleichzeitig gibt es jedoch einen Anstieg derjenigen, die das Christentum für sich entdecken. Allerdings verlässt auch eine Generation die Kirche, für die das Gemeindeleben ganz oben auf der Werteskala stand.

Für die EKBB ist seit langem eine besondere und spezifische Balance zwischen Volks- und Bekenntniskirche, zwischen traditioneller und zugleich liberaler und konservativ-charismatischer Ausrichtung charakteristisch.

Die Kirche ist von demografischen Veränderungen und einem Rückgang der finanziellen Ressourcen betroffen. Beides führt zu einer Zusammenlegung von Gemeinden und damit zu einer höheren Belastung der Geistlichen. Die Menschen können heute viel leichter aus einem spirituellen Angebot wählen und ihre eigene Religion gestalten. Die Gesellschaft steht vor einer Reihe komplexer Herausforderungen im Zusammenhang mit den Veränderungen in den Bereichen Urbanisierung, Mobilität, Wissenskultur, Geschlechterwahrnehmung, Sicherheit, Gesundheit, Konnektivität und Globalisierung, die natürlich alle dazu beitragen, dass sich die Anforderungen an Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer und die Art und Weise, wie sie gebraucht werden, verändern.

Über Jahrhunderte hinweg haben wir mit einer relativ gefestigten Gemeinde als Gemeinschaft mit einem Pfarrer gearbeitet, doch die Gesellschaft individualisiert sich zunehmend. Die Menschen sind viel weniger auf eine feste Zugehörigkeit zu einer Institution ausgerichtet und wollen nicht, dass jemand ihr persönliches Leben beeinflusst oder bestimmt. Für die tschechische Gesellschaft ist darüber hinaus eine gewisse Ablehnung gegenüber kirchlichen Institutionen typisch, die bereits im 19. Jahrhundert ihren Ursprung hat.

Was wir heute erleben, ist sehr oft eine Gelegenheitskirche, die sich bei Hochzeiten, Beerdigungen, Gedenkfeiern, zu Weihnachten, bei verschiedenen kirchlichen und volkstümlichen Veranstaltungen, aber auch bei Gottesdiensten in größeren Städten zeigt. Die Menschen sehnen sich nach Ritualen, die jedoch auf ihr Leben zugeschnitten sind. Die Menschen verbringen oft schöne und dankbare Momente mit der Kirche oder dem Pfarrer bzw. der Pfarrerin, aber bald gehen sie weiter oder suchen mit der Zeit einen Ort, der ihren Bedürfnissen besser entspricht.

Die Menschen verlangen Beichte und geistliche Begleitung, wollen sich aber nicht zu einer Mitgliedschaft verpflichten.

Die theologische Vorstellung, dass ein vom Glauben berührter Mensch sich eigentlich nicht anders entscheiden kann, als beizutreten, dass die Antwort auf die Entstehung des Glaubens das Bekenntnis und die Taufe ist, hat teilweise ihre Gültigkeit verloren. Die Realität zeigt, dass viele Menschen gläubig sind, aber kein Bedürfnis haben, einer Institution beizutreten oder sich dauerhaft daran zu beteiligen.

Menschen können Spiritualität unabhängig von der Kirche entwickeln. Transzendente Erfahrungen können viele außerhalb der Kirche wahrscheinlich besser hervorrufen. Für Lebensrituale, die mit dem Beginn des Lebens, seinem Ende, dem Eintritt ins Erwachsenenalter und in eine Partnerschaft verbunden sind, gibt es nun neue Experten. Das Monopol auf deren qualitativ hochwertige Gestaltung entgleitet uns schnell.

Religiöse Angelegenheiten entdecken Menschen, einschließlich Kirchenmitglieder, unabhängig von Pfarrern*innen, auch weil diese mit der Loyalität zu einer wertgebundenen Religion verbunden sind, die bereits als veraltet empfunden wird. In der Evangelischen Kirche der Böhmischen Brüder sind unter den Pfarrern*innen vor allem Menschen in den Fünfzigern und Sechzigern vertreten. Im akademischen Jahr 2023/2024 absolvierte an der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Karlsuniversität nur ein einziger Student ein Seminar in Homiletik und Katechetik, der, wenn er sein Vikariat absolviert hat, wahrscheinlich aus Dutzenden von Angeboten von Gemeinden wählen kann.

Die Gemeinden werden um diesen jungen Pfarrer werben und gleichzeitig von ihm das erwarten, was sie von seinen Vorgängern bekommen haben, ja sogar noch etwas mehr. Und die Gemeinden wiederholen weiterhin das Mantra vom jungen Pfarrer, idealerweise mit Familie und einer Frau, die in der Sonntagsschule unterrichtet und Harmonium spielt. Dieses Modell entspricht jedoch nicht mehr der aktuellen Realität der beruflichen und lebenspraktischen Möglichkeiten.

Im Jahr 2004 lag der Beruf des Pfarrers/der Pfarrerin auf Platz 21 der Berufsrangliste, zwischen Polizist*in und Soldat*in, 2007, 2011 und 2016 auf Platz 22, 2019 auf Platz 24 zwischen Sekretär*in und Reinigungskraft.[6]

Die Menschen vertrauen den Kirchen etwa so sehr wie den politischen Parteien, also fast gar nicht. Schuld daran ist auch der lange und politisch missbrauchte Prozess der Trennung von Kirche und Staat und der Rückübertragung des während der kommunistischen Gewaltherrschaft beschlagnahmten Kirchenvermögens.

7. Schlussfolgerungen und Implikationen

7.1 Praktische Implikationen für die Kirchenleitung

Für den Bereich der theologischen Ausbildung deuten die Ergebnisse auf die Notwendigkeit hin, Hermeneutik, Homiletik und Seelsorge als Schlüsselkompetenzen der Pfarrerausbildung*innenausbildung zu stärken. Gleichzeitig muss mehr Wert auf die Entwicklung von Fähigkeiten für die Arbeit mit verschiedenen Altersgruppen gelegt werden, was den Erwartungen an die Pfarrer*innen als Brückenbauer*innen zwischen den Generationen in der Kirchengemeinde entspricht. Ebenso wichtig ist die Entwicklung von Kompetenzen für Teamarbeit und Delegation, da die Daten zeigen, dass Laien

6 Monika Kyselá, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, „Tisková zpráva Důvěra k vybraným institucím veřejného života a mezilidská důvěra – duben/květen 2023“, Sociologický ústav AV ČR (2023). Source: https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a5646/f9/po230609.pdf (abgerufen am 18. 12. 2023); Jan Červenka, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, „Prestiž povolání z pohledu veřejného mínění“, Sociologický ústav AV ČR (2005). Source: https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c3/a141/f28/100026s_Cervenka-prestiz.pdf (abgerufen am 18. 12. 2023); Národní pedagogický institut ČR, „Prestižní povolání – která to jsou a jak takové povolání můžete získat i vy?“ (2021). Source: https://vzdelavaniaprace.cz/prestizni-povolani-ktera-to-jsou-a-jak-takove-povolani-muzete-ziskat-i-vy/ (abgerufen am 18. 12. 2023).

bereit sind, Verantwortung für nicht-geistliche Aspekte des Gemeindelebens zu übernehmen. Die praktische liturgische Ausbildung bleibt aufgrund der hohen Priorität, die die Befragten der Leitung von Gottesdiensten beimessen, ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der Ausbildung. Es ist jedoch auch angebracht, über neue liturgische Formen nachzudenken und zu untersuchen, wie genau die Erwartungen der Laien an Gottesdienste aussehen.

Investitionen in ein Team-Modell der Gemeindeleitung scheinen ebenso wie die Förderung spezialisierter Seelsorgedienste, die von den Befragten sehr geschätzt werden, eine strategische Priorität zu sein. Diese Veränderungen erfordern eine durchdachte Umgestaltung der Organisationsstrukturen und wahrscheinlich auch eine Anpassung der kirchlichen Ordnungen.

Für die Pfarrerpraxis*innenpraxis liefern die Daten eine klare Orientierung hin zur Priorisierung der Seelsorge, der homiletischen und liturgischen Funktionen bei gleichzeitiger aktiver Delegation administrativer Aufgaben an qualifizierte Laien. Wichtig ist auch die Identifizierung der Notwendigkeit, aktiv Beziehungen zwischen den Generationen aufzubauen und eine proaktive Seelsorge zu entwickeln, die die meisten Befragten von ihren Pfarrern*innen erwarten. Die Zusammenarbeit mit qualifizierten Laien wird somit nicht nur zu einer Möglichkeit, sondern zu einer Notwendigkeit für einen effektiven Pfarrdienst.

7.2 Strukturelle Transformation und zukünftige Ausrichtung

Die durchgeführte Untersuchung konzentrierte sich ausschließlich auf den pastoralen Dienst. Sie zeigte somit nur die Bereitschaft von Laien, nicht-geistliche Aufgaben in den Gemeinden zu übernehmen. Ich bin jedoch in Übereinstimmung mit der westeuropäischen Literatur der Meinung, dass uns eine viel radikalere Veränderung bevorsteht. Es bedarf weiterer Untersuchungen und vor allem einer Veränderung der kirchlichen Mentalität, die zu einem neuen Verständnis der Kirche führt, das nicht so stark vom Dienst der Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer abhängig ist.[7]

7 Michael Herbst (Verfasser), *Kirche mit Mission. Beiträge zu Fragen des Gemeindeaufbaus* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2013); Michael Herbst und Hans-Hermann Pompe, *Regiolokale Kirchenentwicklung. Wie Gemeinden vom Nebeneinander zum Miteinander kommen können* (Berlin: ZMiR:klartext, 5. Auflage, 2022).

Wir sind offenbar sehr fixiert auf die historische Vorstellung von Kirche und darauf, was Pfarrer in der Vergangenheit getan haben.

Das Modell einer priesterlichen oder Pfarrer-Kirche ist im Grunde nicht reformatorisch und wurde den tschechischen Protestanten nach 1781 durch Toleranzbestimmungen aufgezwungen. In der EKBB haben wir vielleicht ein falsches Kriterium, nach dem wir Gemeinden in besetzte und unbesetzte Gemeinden unterteilen und sie zusammenlegen, damit sie sich einen Pfarrer oder eine Pfarrerin leisten können.

Eine Gemeinde wird doch nicht durch eine Pfarrerin oder einen Pfarrer gebildet. Gottesdienste und Seelsorge können auch ohne sie stattfinden.

Wir haben vielleicht auch eine ungesunde Vorstellung davon, dass immer eine umfassende Betreuung angeboten werden muss und dass sich jemand um die Gemeinde kümmern muss, dass sie betreut werden muss. Der Mensch möchte doch meist nicht ständig betreut werden, sondern ist bestrebt, unabhängig und selbstständig zu sein. Daraus resultieren manchmal auch maximalistische Erwartungen an Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer, dass sie für alles verantwortlich sind, alles verstehen, immer präsent und verfügbar sind und sich zudem durch höchste persönliche und moralische Integrität auszeichnen.

Realistische Erwartungen an Pfarrer*innen hängen mit einem Wandel der Gemeindementalität zusammen, in der die Verantwortung der einzelnen Mitglieder gestärkt wird und der Pfarrer/die Pfarrerin als Mitglied eines Teams von Menschen mit unterschiedlichen Charismen wahrgenommen wird. Damit verbunden sind Veränderungen in der Struktur der Kirche, in der Pfarrer*innen nicht mehr als gesetzliche Vertreter*innen und Verwalter*innen fungieren, sondern Gemeinden mit einem spirituellen Leben ohne Amtsträger*innen existieren, für die Laien die volle Verantwortung übernehmen. Eine Kirche ohne aktive Laien ist zum Untergang verurteilt. Die Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer sollten gemeinsam mit der Kirchenleitung ihre Kräfte bündeln, um den Übergang zu einer solchen Funktionsweise zu ermöglichen.

Wenn wir vor allem versuchen, die Kirche zu betreiben, das Programm zu erfüllen und die Institution am Laufen zu halten, bleibt nicht viel Zeit, um nach Gottes Spuren zu suchen oder auf Impulse zu warten, die von Menschen oder Gott kommen. Die Kirche sollte nicht nur als kontrollierbarer und reibungslos funktionierender Mechanismus funktionieren. Wenn wir in den Gemeinden nur das tun, wozu wir in der Lage sind, wird die Kirche nicht überleben. Bezahlte Fachkräfte und Freiwillige sind keine sich gegenseitig ausschließenden Modelle.[8]

7.3 Ansätze für weitere Forschung

Die Ansätze für weitere Forschung sollten Längsschnittstudien umfassen, die es ermöglichen, die Entwicklung der Erwartungen im Laufe der Zeit zu verfolgen, was ein tieferes Verständnis der Dynamik von Veränderungen im kirchlichen Umfeld liefern würde. Eine vergleichende Analyse mit anderen protestantischen Kirchen würde es ermöglichen, die Besonderheiten des tschechischen Kontexts im Vergleich zu internationalen Trends zu identifizieren. Qualitative Untersuchungen zur Identität und Praxis von Pfarrern*innen würden die Perspektive der Geistlichen selbst ergänzen und einen umfassenderen Blick auf die untersuchte Problematik ermöglichen. Schließlich könnte eine Analyse der Wirksamkeit verschiedener Modelle der Kirchenleitung empirische Grundlagen für strategische Entscheidungen über die künftige Organisation der kirchlichen Arbeit liefern.

Manchmal fehlt uns offenbar die konzentrierte Zeit, um zu benennen, was im Gemeindeleben wesentlich, notwendig und wichtig ist. Und dann auch der Mut, das Überflüssige aufzugeben und so die schwindenden menschlichen Kräfte und andere Ressourcen nicht zu verschwenden. Vielleicht sollten wir uns auf postparochiale Zeiten vorbereiten, in denen es vielleicht keine klassischen Gemeinden mit einer Palette traditioneller Aktivitäten mehr geben wird, sondern wechselnde Interessengruppen und einmalige Treffen, in denen wir das Evangelium verkünden.

7.4 Methodische Anmerkungen und Einschränkungen

Die vorliegende Untersuchung weist einige methodische Einschränkungen auf, die bei der Interpretation der Ergebnisse berücksichtigt werden müssen. Die erste wesentliche Einschränkung ist eine mögliche Verzerrung der Stichprobe aufgrund der gezielten Auswahl über kirchliche Kanäle, was zu einer

8 Albrecht Grözinger, *Die Kirche – ist sie noch zu retten? Anstiftungen für das Christentum in postmoderner Gesellschaft* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998); Günter Thomas, *Im Weltabenteuer Gottes leben*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021); Thomas Schaufelberger and Juliane Hartmann Stückelberger (eds.), *Perspektiven für das Pfarramt* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2016); Manfred Josuttis, *Der Pfarrer ist anders. Aspekte einer zeitgenössischen Pastoraltheologie* (München: Kaiser, 1982); Michael Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2014), 238–272.

Überrepräsentation aktiver und engagierter Kirchenmitglieder gegenüber passiveren Gläubigen führen kann. Diese Art der Verzerrung ist in kirchlichen Untersuchungen üblich, kann jedoch die Verallgemeinerbarkeit der Ergebnisse auf die gesamte Mitgliedschaft der EKBB beeinflussen.

Die zweite Einschränkung ist die begrenzte Verallgemeinerbarkeit der Ergebnisse, da sich die Untersuchung ausschließlich auf die Evangelische Kirche in Tschechien konzentrierte und unklar ist, inwieweit die Ergebnisse auf andere protestantische Konfessionen oder sogar andere christliche Traditionen übertragbar sind. Die spezifische Geschichte und Organisationsstruktur der EKBB kann die Einstellungen der Laien in einer Weise beeinflussen, die für das breitere christliche Umfeld nicht repräsentativ ist.

Der zeitliche Aspekt stellt eine dritte wesentliche Einschränkung dar, da das Querschnittsdesign der Untersuchung weder eine Analyse von Trends im Zeitverlauf noch die Erfassung der Dynamik von Veränderungen in den Einstellungen der Gläubigen ermöglicht. Für ein tieferes Verständnis der Entwicklung der Erwartungen an den Pfarrer/die Pfarrerin wäre eine longitudinale Beobachtung derselben Population zu mehreren Zeitpunkten erforderlich.

Wahrscheinlich hat jede Generation das Gefühl, Zeuge eines Paradigmenwechsels zu sein. Unsere Generation ist keine Ausnahme, was Stress, die Notwendigkeit, neue Wege zu suchen und etablierte Muster zu verändern, angeht. Vielleicht müssen wir nur immer wieder neu lernen, mit Unsicherheit, mit unseren eigenen Defiziten und mit dem Vertrauen in Gott umzugehen. Die vorgelegten empirischen Erkenntnisse bieten jedoch eine solide Grundlage für fundierte Entscheidungen über die Zukunft des Pfarramtes im tschechischen protestantischen Kontext.

Ondřej Macek
Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät der Karlsuniversität
Černá 9, 110 00 Prag 1, Tschechien
macekon@etf.cuni.cz

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVII (2025/3) 278–297

Ján Lajčiak: The Prophet Ezekiel to His Nation[1]

Sidonia Horňanová

Abstract: This biographical study presents the life and work of Slovak Lutheran biblical scholar, theologian, and pastor, Ján Lajčiak (1875–1918), whose critical thinking led to his marginalization within the church. It interprets the personal setbacks of this remarkably gifted thinker as a form of self-identification with the focus of his professional research – the life experiences of the prophet Ezekiel.

Keywords: Ján Lajčiak; Ezekiel; prophet; Slovak theology; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Slovakia

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.5

Introduction

The fate of some thinkers is to be forgotten in their own time, with their work left unappreciated by their contemporaries. This happens for a number of reasons: it might be their personality; or their high erudition; or that their claims surpassed the thinking of the time. Hence, they became misunderstood and were disregarded. This was the case with Ján Lajčiak (1875–1918), a Slovak theologian and evangelical Lutheran pastor. Lajčiak was a polyglot who studied at prestigious European universities, and was the first Slovak to receive a doctorate in the theology of the Old Testament. However, due to disputes with conservative church leaders, he ended up as a pastor in a remote village, on the periphery of the church, after failing to obtain an academic position at the university.

Lajčiak's greatly influential work *Slovensko a kultúra* [Slovakia and Culture], compiled posthumously from his manuscripts, has now been published

1 The article represents the scientific output of a project coming from the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and the Scientific Grant Agency No. 1/0698/23, carried out in the years 2023–2025 at the Department of the Old Testament at the Evangelical Lutheran Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava. Its topic is: "Lajčiak's dissertation on Ezekiel in the contemporary context of research on prophetic writings". The project's principal investigator is Dávid Benka. The deputy leader of the project is the author of the article.

for the fifth time (most recently in 2020).[2] The fivefold publication of this work in a century demonstrates readers' great interest in it. It is this work, whose aim was to dynamize the backward and conservative life of Slovakia, which ranks Lajčiak among the promoters, or even founders of sociology in Slovakia.[3]

The personality of Lajčiak has begun to receive more attention only in recent decades. Lajčiak's personality and work are reflected in philosophy[4], sociology[5], and evangelical theology.[6] The sociologist Borislav Petrík, who

2 Ján Lajčiak, *Slovensko a kultúra*. Z rukopisu Dr. Jána Lajčiaka ev. a. v. farára na Boci sostavil Sam. Št. Osuský, theol. prof. v Bratislave. Reprint. Ed. Ján Juráš (Liptovský Mikuláš: Spolok Martina Rázusa, [1920] 2020).

3 Ľudovít Turčan, "Ján Lajčiak a jeho dielo v súčasnosti, odkaz a ohlasy," in Ján Juráš and Daniela Kodajová (eds.), *Sláva šľachetným III. Znalci vzdialeného Orientu a strážkyne národného ohniska* (Liptovský Mikuláš: Spolok Martina Rázusa, 2015), 11.

4 Elena Várossová, "Ján Lajčiak – spurný kňaz a dvojnásobný doktor," *Filozofia* 6:30 (1975), 653–63; Elena Várossová, *Filozofia vo svete – svet filozofie u nás* (Bratislava: VEDA, Vydavateľstvo SAV, 2005), 211–28; Elena Várossová, "Ján Lajčiak and the Criticism of Cultural Conservatism," in Tibor Pichler and Jana Gašparíková (eds.), *Language, Values and The Slovak Nation: Slovak Philosophical Studies I.* (Washington: Paideia Press & The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 47–59; Elena Várossová, Kultúra a evolúcia v poňatí Jána Lajčiaka," in Karol Kollár, Andrej Kopčok and Tibor Pichler (eds.), *Dejiny filozofie na Slovensku v XX. storočí* (Bratislava: Filozofický ústav SAV, 1998), 172–79. The philosophical aspects of Ján Lajčiak were analyzed by Erika Lalíková, *Realita a filozofia na Slovensku. Ján Lajčiak, Gejza Vámoš a Svätopluk Štúr* (Bratislava: Iris, 2010).

5 Ľudovít Turčan, "Ján Lajčiak – osamelý bežec," *Sociológia* 5–6:27 (1995), 446–49; Ľudovít Turčan, "Sociologické inšpirácie Jána Lajčiaka," *Sociológia* 3:28 (1996), 271–76; Ľudovít Turčan, "Ján Lajčiak v úvahách a spomienkach," *Sociológia* 5:29 (1997), 597–99; Ľudovít Turčan, "Ján Lajčiak: Slovensko a kultúra," *Sociológia* 1:40 (2008), 82–85; Ľudovít Turčan, "Veda a sociológia v Lajčiakovom diele Slovensko a kultúra," in Lajčiak Ján, *Slovensko a kultúra* (Turany: P+M, 2020), 262–63; Rudolf Chmel, *Romantizmus v globalizme. Malé národy – veľké mýty* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009), 103–107; Branislav Choma, "Na okraj druhého vydania Slovenska a kultúry," *Sociológia* 5:29 (1997), 606–10; Adela Kvasničková, "Recepcia diela Jána Lajčiaka," *Sociológia* 4:28 (1996), 353–60; Eva Laiferová, *Problematika národa v slovenskej sociológii. Formovanie prístupov k téme národa* (Bratislava: STIMUL, 2017), 19–21; Ján Pašiak, "Problematika modernizácie slovenskej spoločnosti v diele J. Lajčiaka Slovensko a kultúra," *Sociológia* 1:28 (1996), 69–81.

6 Július Filo, "Spomienky na Dr. Jána Lajčiaka," *Sociológia* 5:29 (1997), 599–606; Samuel Štefan Osuský, "Životopis a literárne pôsobenie Dr. Jána Lajčiaka," in Ján Lajčiak, *Slovensko a kultúra*, 13–29; Juraj Bándy, "Doktorská dizertácia Jána Lajčiaka na tému Plurálne a duálne koncovky v semitských menách," in Ján Juráš (ed.), *Sláva šľachetným III*. (Liptovský Mikuláš: Spolok Martina Rázusa, 2014), 11–12; František Ábel, "Preklad evanjelií Novej zmluvy Dr. Jána Lajčiaka z gréckej pôvodiny do slovenčiny," in Anton Baláž and Rastislav Stanček (eds.), *Evanjeliá* (Liptovský Mikuláš: Spolok Martina Rázusa, 2018), 455–75; Dávid Benka, "Ján Lajčiak and His Slovak Translation of the Book of

in 2007 compiled all the available bibliography on Ján Lajčiak, greatly contributed to the popularization of Lajčiak's life and work.[7]

From the works about Lajčiak published so far, we can read many praiseworthy and exaggerated assessments. For example, that he was "clearly the most educated Slovak"[8], "few members of the Slovak nation in the past had such intellectual prerequisites, professional education and a modern worldview for successful work in the field of science and culture"[9], that he was an "outstanding" and "brilliant man"[10], etc. There are also attempts to popularize Lajčiak through art – in literature,[11] film,[12] and radio. One recent novel by Anton Baláž, *Prehovor, Ezekiel* [Talk, Ezekiel], fictionalizes Lajčiak's life story. It is particularly significant due to its form, as well as new coming from Lajčiak's previously unknown archive sources, including his private correspondence.[13]

Biographical remarks on Lajčiak

Ján Lajčiak was born on 25 July 1875 in Pribylina. After gymnasium studies in Banská Bystrica and Prešov, he continued his theological studies in Prešov at the Theological Academy. From there, after three years, Lajčiak moved on to study theology in Erlangen. After returning from Germany and passing the closing exams at the Theological Academy in Prešov, he worked as

Psalms (1904)," in Maroš Nicák and M. Martin Tamcke (eds.), *Theologie – Dienst und Notwendigkeit* (Münster: LIT, 2021), 49–56; Sidonia Horňanová, "Osobnosť a vedecký prínos Jána Lajčiaka – slovenského intelektuála európskeho formátu," in György Juhász (ed.), *Inovácia a kreativita vo vzdelávaní a vede: zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Univerzity J. Selyeho – 2015* (Komárno: Univerzita J. Selyeho, 2015), 49–60; Sidonia Horňanová, "Lajčiakova dizertácia o Ezechielovi," in *Sláva šľachetným III. Znalci vzdialeného Orientu a strážkyne národného ohniska* (Liptovský Mikuláš: Spolok Martina Rázusa, 2015), 41–50; Rastislav Stanček, "Päť slov zrozumiteľných… alebo Lajčiakov slovenský preklad evanjelií," in *Sláva šľachetným III. Znalci vzdialeného Orientu a strážkyne národného ohniska* (Liptovský Mikuláš: Spolok Martina Rázusa, 2015), 29–40.

7 Borislav Petrík, "Bibliografia Jána Lajčiaka," in Lajčiak Ján, *Slovensko a kultúra* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Q111, 2007), 167–73.

8 Petrík, "Bibliografia Jána Lajčiaka," *Úvod*.

9 Filo, "Spomienky na Dr. Jána Lajčiaka," 601.

10 Várossová, "Ján Lajčiak – spurný kňaz a dvojnásobný doktor," 211.

11 Anton Baláž, *Prehovor Ezechiel: Príbeh Jána Lajčiaka* (Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, 2020).

12 A documentary film about Ján Lajčiak was directed by Fedor Bartko.

13 Baláž, *Prehovor Ezechiel*, 358.

a chaplain in Pešť, still driven by the desire to work and learn scientifically. He first studied at the philosophical faculty in Leipzig, where he devoted himself to oriental philology from 1900 to 1902 and defended his dissertation on *Die Plural- und Dualendungen am semitischen Nomen* [The plural and dual endings in Semitic nouns] (1902).[14] In his printed dissertation, he thanks his professors H. Zimmern and W. Geiger for their support throughout his studies.[15] In his autobiography, he further states that he listened to Hauck's lectures on theology, Wundt's on philosophy, and Zimmern's on Semitic languages (Assyrian, Syrian, and Ethiopian), he also names other professors and the specific languages he studied with them.[16] One can only assume that Lajčiak's doctoral advisor for the dissertation was Heinrich Zimmern, professor of Oriental languages at the Faculty of Philosophy in Leipzig. The fact is, however, that Lajčiak does not explicitly mention his doctoral advisor in either of his two dissertations.

Ján Goláň, a friend from the time of his studies in Leipzig, recalls that Lajčiak set out to obtain a doctorate in the most difficult subjects (Oriental languages, Hebrew, and Arabic) and chose an unusually difficult topic, which required him to learn French and English.[17] In addition to Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, Lajčiak "knew Slovak, Hungarian, German, French, English, Italian, and learned many Oriental languages old and new, and is known to have written a Gypsy grammar, so that one marvels at how richly he was endowed by God."[18] In the biographical appendix to his first dissertation, Lajčiak himself stated that he had studied Hebrew, Sanskrit, Italian, and, of the Semitic languages, Assyrian, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic, as well as Egyptian, Old Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese, the Old Church Slavonic language, and Russian.[19]

Goláň also recalls that Lajčiak dressed modestly, ate in cheap, mainly vegetarian inns, and gave every spare penny to purchase books. He mentions

14 Johann Lajčiak, *Die Plural- und Dualendungen am semitischen Nomen*, *Ezechiel* (Leipzig: Druck von August Priest, 1902).

15 Ibid., 56.

16 Ibid., 55–56.

17 Ján Goláň, "Rozpomienka na dr. Jána Lajčiaka," *Slovenský denník* 3:143 (1920), 2.

18 Emil Janotka, "20 rokov od smrti Dr. J. Lajčiaka," *Tranovský evanjelický kalendár* (1938), 151.

19 Lajčiak, *Die Plural- und Dualendungen am semitischen Nomen*, 55–56. Source: https://opendata.uni-halle.de/explore?bitstream_id=6efc8a61-356f-4ef5-bac0-b2e746790acf&handle=1981185920/100043&provider=iiif-image (accessed 23. 11. 2025).

Lajčiak's strictness with himself and his strong-mindedness. He adds that he felt no such respect for any of his classmates as he did for his ingenious friend.

From 1902 to 1905 Lajčiak studied at the Protestant Independent School of Theology of Paris where he received another doctorate – this time in theology, after defending his dissertation *Ézéchiel: Sa Personne et son Enseignement* [Ezekiel: His Person and Teachings] (1905).

The French manuscript of the dissertation is located in the Central Archive of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Slovakia in Bratislava. The manuscript states the names of the members of the examination committee: M. Lods as its chairman, and J. Ménégoz and J. Ehrhardt as examiners, but there is no mention of the doctoral advisor. The aim of the dissertation is stated as "to penetrate the soul of the prophet and understand the characteristic ideas of his teaching."[20] He seeks to "provide a more accurate portrait of Ezekiel than those we have of his person and his teaching so far".[21] In the bibliography, Lajčiak lists 32 commentaries and monographs, most of which refer to Alfred Bertholet.[22] He notes that, apart from Lucien Gautier's monograph, the work of "Ezekiel as a whole has not yet been the subject of research". According to Lajčiak, Gautier also failed to understand the prophet's teachings because he examined the prophet's ideas separately, without their interconnections. Lajčiak attempts to prove that Ezekiel is "the first systematic theologian" who created a comprehensive theological system.[23] The unifying idea of Ezekiel's teachings is the fall of Israel and its restoration. Lajčiak further analyzes other sub-themes such as the sin of Israel, punishment and the manner of punishment, a new nation, a new cult, and a new land. In the third, last part of the book, he critically discusses Ezekiel's character and teachings.

Lajčiak's second dissertation was published in French the same year.[24] After his return home, however, he came into conflict with the Hungarian

20 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 282.

21 Ibid., 282.

22 Alfred Bertholet, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Hesekiel in seiner religionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung* (Freiburg und Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1896). The bibliography includes references to the commentaries of Kraetzschmar, Orelli, and Smend. Surprisingly, Lajčiak refers only once to Bernard Duhm, namely to his work *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Bonn: Marcus, 1875).

23 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 281–85.

24 As far I know, as Samuel Štefan Osuský states, there were two reviews of this work in France. One of them was presented by the faculty where the dissertation was defended, and the second by Charles Piepenbring in *Revue de Théologie et des Questions religieuse*s.

authorities and, because of his liberal attitudes, also with the Slovak conservative national and church leaders.

Lajčiak's correspondence shows that during his studies abroad, he was in constant financial struggles and therefore repeatedly appealed to all parties for financial support. To become a Doctor of Philosophy, his first dissertation, *Die Plural- und Dualendungen am semitischen Nomen*, had to be published. He therefore appealed for help to the administrator of the student scholarship fund in Martin, but with no success. His friends from Budapest finally helped him financially. He also had financial problems during his studies at the Sorbonne University in Paris, and he again asked for support from the administrator of the Student Scholarship Fund in Martin.

Lajčiak's intense focus and the strain accompanying his studies took a toll on his health, as evidenced by his private correspondence, specifically a letter dated October 6, 1904, from Miloš Ruppeldt, Lajčiak's classmate from his studies in Leipzig. Before Lajčiak departed for Paris, Ruppeldt expressed concern for Lajčiak's health because of his physical strain:

> You are of weak physical constitution. Mentally, you are a titan, but a great spirit also needs a healthy body. You must now have peace, healthy, countryside or village air, rest from work, but no more studying in the stifling, almost foul air of the big city while yearning incessantly, continually after that beautiful – oh, beautiful! – science, you will be gobbling in yourself even the seed of temporal destruction![25]

As for Lajčiak's priestly vocation, he was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1899. He first worked as a chaplain, under the supervision of Priest Daniel Bachát at the so-called "Luther's Court", an important center of the national, cultural, and religious life of Slovak Evangelical Lutherans in Budapest. At that time, Lajčiak began translating the Hebrew Book of Psalms into Slovak. Bachát accepted Lajčiak's decision to study in Leipzig with understanding and, after receiving his doctorate, took him back as chaplain. Having obtained a second doctorate at Sorbonne University, his place in "Luther's Court" was filled by someone else. Since he was not successful in filling either the associate

---

The former was a rather positive review, while the latter was a long and harsh critique of Lajčiak's view of Ezekiel as a brilliant man and of this assumed brilliancy as concluded even in times of Ezekiel's mental tension – catalepsy. Samuel Štefan Osuský, "Životopis a literárne pôsobenie Dr. Jána Lajčiaka," in Ján Lajčiak, *Slovensko a kultúra*, 23–24.

25 Baláž, *Prehovor Ezechiel*, 288–89.

professorship at the University of Jurjev[26] (in what is now Estonia), where he would have lectured on Semitic languages, or the post at the Theological Academy in Bratislava, he applied for the vacant post of pastor in the remote village of Vyšná Boca.[27] He was appointed, and transferred his whole library from Budapest, in order to continue his scientific work. Around this time, he was also preparing a new journal, *Viera a veda* [Faith and Science], which he was due to edit. He never became its editor-in-chief, however. Lajčiak was active in Boca for more than 13 years, until his death on 28 October 1918.

Lajčiak as a pioneer of Bible translation into Slovak

The question of translating liturgical forms of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Slovakia was raised at the end of the 19th century. Slovak became a language of worship among Lutherans only gradually. The liturgical books used in Lutheran worship were originally published in the Biblical Czech Language, under the influence of the *Bible of Kralice,* which was published in three editions (1579–1594, 1596, 1613). As far as the use of the Biblical Czech Language, linguistic expressions from the Slovak dialects were incorporated into it. Requests for translating the Bible into Slovak and for preaching in Slovak were increasing, but Slovak Evangelical Lutherans were not united on this fundamental issue. In the journal *Cirkevné listy* [Church Letters], an extensive debate on the translation of the Bible into Slovak developed, arguing both for and against the Slovak translation of the Bible.[28] The Slovak translation of the Bible was justified both by the tradition of the Biblical Czech Language, regarded as one of the most important symbols of Slovak Lutheran

---

26 The university was founded in 1632 by King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden and is now known as the University of Tartu.

27 To better illustrate Lajčiak's exile in his relocation to the village of Vyšná Boca, one can look at how professor Samuel Štefan Osuský characterized this village: "the most remote, forgotten, pitiful Slovak Tatra village". Osuský, "Životopis a literárne pôsobenie Dr. Jána Lajčiaka," 8.

28 Igor Branko Štefánik, "Ako ďaleko siahajú práva materčiny v cirkvi?" *Cirkevné listy* 14:1 (1900), 17–19; Igor Branko Štefánik, "Ako ďaleko siahajú práva materčiny v cirkvi?" *Cirkevné listy* 14:2 (1900), 51–52; Igor Branko Štefánik, "Ako ďaleko siahajú práva materčiny v cirkvi?" *Cirkevné listy* 14:3 (1900), 79–80; Igor Branko Štefánik, "Ako ďaleko siahajú práva materčiny v cirkvi?" *Cirkevné listy* 14:4 (1900), 118–20; V. "Ešte niečo o právach materčiny v cirkvi," *Cirkevné listy* 14:6 (1900), 173–174; S. Daxner, "Slovo k slovenskému prekladu Biblie," *Cirkevné listy* 15:4 (1901), 98–102; "Ako preddunajský dištrikt maďarskú literatúru napomáha," *Cirkevné listy* 15:6 (1901), 162–165.

identity, and by the principle of the so-called ”Czech-Slovak mutuality”. New attempts to translate the Bible into Slovak were questioned and criticized. Although some pastors were preaching in Slovak, supporters of the *Bible of Kralice* insisted that Scripture should be quoted from that text. Another argument against the Slovak Bible was that codified Slovak was considered insufficiently rich, lacking adequate verbal expressions, and that its use in the church should not be forced. On the other hand, the argument against Biblical Czech Language was that people no longer understood this "dead" language, as well as that every cultured nation should have its own national language. The use of the Slovak language in the Church was also impeded by persecution, particularly Hungarianization pressures in schools.[29] Among the first brave pioneers to undertake the translation of the Bible into Slovak was the scholar Ján Lajčiak. But he never participated in the discussion on that issue in *Cirkevné listy* [Church Letters].

During the period when the debate on the Slovak Bible was taking place, Dr. Lajčiak was noticed by the British and Foreign Bible Society. He was approached as an expert in Semitic languages to translate the Book of Psalms into Slovak. This most likely occurred in June 1903.[30] The Slovak translation of the Book of Psalms was published in Budapest in December 1904.[31] Lajčiak's new translation is a remarkably literal, modern, poetic, and linguistically innovative attempt to convey the biblical psalms into the living Slovak language at the expense of traditional expressions established in people's minds from the *Bible of Kralice.* Lajčiak did not merely superficially Slovakize the *Bible of Kralice*. He argued relentlessly for the necessity of using the original text when translating. He followed the so-called *Textus Receptus,* which is the result of a text-critical comparison of various biblical manuscripts: "[…] where criticism has proven: here, or there is an error, the critically corrected text has priority."[32] Lajčiak's approach was presented by the translator himself in *Cirkevné listy* [Church Letters]:

29 There was a case of students being expelled from the Evangelical Lutheran College in Prešov for signing their private photographs with Slovak names (in 1900). Baláž, "*Evanjeliá*," 469; *Cirkevné listy* 15:6 (1901), 162.

30 Ján Lajčiak, "Niekoľko slov o slovenskom preklade žalmov," *Cirkevné listy* 18:12 (1904), 373.

31 Ján Lajčiak, *Kniha žalmov* (Budapešť: Kníhtlačiareň Samuela Markusa, 1904).

32 Ján Lajčiak, "Niekoľko slov o slovenskom preklade žalmov," *Cirkevné listy* 18:12 (1904), 373.

> The translation aims to be a faithful translation of the original Hebrew outline and not a completely Slovak transcription of the Czech translation. That is why anyone who wants to judge this translation must compare it with the original. Therefore, anyone who would like to judge the accuracy of the translation based on whether or to what extent it compares with the Czech translation is on the wrong path […]. I treated the translation conservatively, with restraint, as much as possible […].[33]

Lajčiak was also open to criticism of his translation:

> I further note that with the translation of the Psalms, a test is to be made of how the people will behave towards the Slovak text of the Bible, and after that, one should proceed to translate other books, or the whole matter should be postponed […]. For my part, I only ask for a reasoned, fair opinion, and criticism, and I ask everyone who has and wants to say something about the translation to do so now.[34]

In addition to outlining his approach to the issue of translation, he also included examples of the translation of several biblical Psalms (Ps 1, Ps 2, Ps 8, Ps 90, and Ps 100). Even before its publication, he sought an assessment of the translation of the Psalms and the blessings of socially prominent individuals (Juraj Janoška and Jozef Škultéty) to ensure general recognition of the translation. However, he never received their approval.

Reactions to Lajčiak's translation of The Psalms published in the magazines *Cirkevné listy* [Church Letters] or *Stráž na Sione* [Guard on Zion] were negative. Either they advocated Czechoslovak unity and considered the translation into Slovak to be useless, or they accused Lajčiak of liberalism. For example, he was reproached for translating the so-called messianic psalms in such a way that no one would look for or find prophecies about Christ as the Messiah in them: "The biggest mistake we consider the submitter's overly liberal negative attitude, which was directed towards messianic references and other concepts and expressions of Christian doctrine, such as hell. Lajčiak is apparently not sufficiently aware of the messianic texts in the Psalms."[35]

33 Ján Lajčiak, "Niekoľko slov o slovenskom preklade žalmov," *Cirkevne listy* 18:12 (1904), 373.

34 Ibid.

35 V. Č., "Slovenský preklad Biblie," *Cirkevné listy* 19:5 (1905), 153. The author of the article signed only with his initials V. Č. He can be identified with Dr. Vladimír Čobrda, a later bishop and also a translator of the Book of Psalms. His extensive critique of Lajčiak's translation of the biblical psalms was published in serial form in *Cirkevné listy* [Church Letters]: "Slovenský preklad Biblie," *Cirkevné listy* 19:5 (1905), 150–54; *Cirkevné listy* 19:6 (1905), 180–83; *Cirkevné listy* 19:7 (1905), 210–13; *Cirkevné listy* 19:8 (1905), 246–49; *Cirkevné listy* 19:9 (1905), 266–71; *Cirkevné listy* 19:10 (1905), 297–300; *Cirkevné listy* 19:11 (1905), 343–46; *Cirkevné listy* 19:12 (1905), 376–78; V. Č., *Cirkevné listy* 20:1

He was criticized for translating the Psalms in a way that prevents readers from seeking and finding the prophecies concerning Christ in them.[36] For example, in verse 17 of Psalm 22, which has been understood in the church tradition as a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion, Lajčiak translates *ka'arí* without reference to piercing – apparently influenced by Duhm – "my hands and feet are disfigured"[37] ("entstellt sind meine Hände und Füsse"[38]).

Also, the Hebrew term *sh'eol* was not translated by Lajčiak in a traditional way of the *Bible of Kralice* as "hell," but as "the otherworld." E.g.: "Let the wicked return to the otherworld […]" (Ps 9:18). "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the otherworld […] (Ps 49:16). "For you will not abandon my soul to the otherworld […]" (Ps 16:10) etc.[39] Lajčiak sought to avoid the word "hell". The term "otherworld" is a neutral word in Slovak language in the sense that it does not evoke the idea of hell, as it is in the case of the alternative translations such as "underworld" or "netherworld" etc. Lajčiak sought to avoid the word "hell" because this word was invented by medieval scholasticism.[40] He also fought against superstitions and folk beliefs within the Slovak nation, especially in the church.[41] Lajčiak rejected the idea of hell as a physical place of eternal torment and believed that a person's moral behavior should not be out of fear of punishment.

The fact that Lajčiak translated the biblical psalms into Slovak was widely known. The existence of Lajčiak's manuscript translation of the Gospels into Slovak was only recently revealed by Anton Baláž in his book *Prehovor, Ezekiel* [Talk, Ezekiel]. The manuscript contains complete translations of the three Synoptic Gospels and an incomplete translation of the fourth Gospel according to John, which is deposited in the Central Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia. The first in-depth

(1906), 14–18. Anton Baláž incorrectly names Jozef Maliak, biblical scholar and teacher, as the author of the critique of the translation. Baláž, *Prehovor Ezechiel*, 295–96.

36 V. Č., "Slovenský preklad Biblie," *Cirkevné listy* 19:5 (1905), 153.

37 Lajčiak, *Kniha žalmov*, 22.

38 Bernhard Duhm, *Die Psalmen* (Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1899), 70.

39 Slovak expression for "otherworld" is "druhý svet" or "záhrobie," which is close to the meaning of "realm of the dead" (*she'ol*) but without connotation of hell.

40 "Slovenský preklad Biblie," *Cirkevné listy* 19:5 (1905), 153.

41 "The mayor threatens with a stick and the priest with hell." Ján Lajčiak, *Slovensko a kultúra*, 180.

scholarly evaluations of Lajčiak's translation of the Gospels were carried out by Rastislav Stanček and František Ábel.[42]

Lajčiak was not aware of the criticism of his translation of the Psalms in *Cirkevné listy* in 1905, as he was abroad preparing to obtain a doctorate in theology on the Book of Ezekiel at the time.

Lajčiak's dissertation on the prophet Ezekiel

The interpretation of the Book of Ezekiel is extremely challenging, even nowadays. It remains one of the most debated texts in biblical scholarship, as has been evidenced recently by a collection of 27 essays[43] from two international symposia in St. Andrews (2013) and Vienna (2014), as well as by the current Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel, which highlights ongoing issues in the redaction of the book, its legal language, Mesopotamian resonances, and gender imagery.[44] The introductory chapter of the Oxford Handbook, written by the editor, provides an overview of major trends in scholarly engagement with the book of Ezekiel in the past fifty years.[45]

As has already been shown, Lajčiak, as a polyglot, had an excellent linguistic background to be successful with this work. He was aware of the difficulty of the topic of the dissertation, stating Ezekiel is "one of the most peculiar personalities in the whole Old Testament."[46]

Lajčiak's dissertation was published in French.[47] It was also published in parts between 1908 and 1910 in the magazine *Cirkevné listy* [Church

42 Ábel, "Preklad evanjelií Novej zmluvy Dr. Jána Lajčiaka z gréckej pôvodiny do slovenčiny," 455–75.

43 William A. Tooman and Penelope Barter (eds.), *Ezekiel: Current Debates and Future Directions*, FZAT 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

44 Corrine Carvalho (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023).

45 Corrine Carvalho, "Ezekiel Scholarship in the Twenty-first Century," in Corrine Carvalho (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), 1–17.

46 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 284.

47 Ján Lajčiak, *Ezékiel, sa personne et son enseignement* (Paris et Cahors: A Coueslant, 1905).

Letters].[48] The published text was translated literally from the French original into Slovak by Lajčiak himself.[49]

Lajčiak's dissertation on Ezekiel is divided into three main sections. 1. The person of Ezekiel. 2. The teachings of Ezekiel. 3. The critical assessment of the person and teachings of the prophet.

The author examines Ezekiel's prophetic writings as a compact whole. He seeks to prove that Ezekiel was the one who developed a coherent theological system.[50] Ezekiel's message is organized around the following themes: Israel's sin, punishment, and the method and goal of punishment. In the third section, in which Lajčiak subjects the prophet and his teachings to criticism, he praises him not only as a prophet but also as a "shepherd, priest, philosopher, and apocalyptic writer."[51]

An attempt at psychoanalysis of the prophet

In the introduction of the dissertation, Lajčiak characterizes the prophet Ezekiel:

> He is kind, sympathetic, even when he appears extravagant. There is something enigmatic (mysterious) and mystical in his person that will perhaps never be sufficiently deciphered. He lived during the most critical period in the history of the nation of Israel, during a time that required a man endowed with all the qualities necessary to overcome the challenges he faced.[52]

48 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 281–85; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:10 (1908), 302–06; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:11 (1908), 339–43; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:12 (1908), 372–77; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:1 (1909), 18–21; Lajčiak "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:5 (1909), 143–48; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:7 (1909), 190–94; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:8 (1909), 223–30; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:9 (1909), 277–79; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:11 (1909), 332–40; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Kritika učenia Ezechielovho," *Cirkevné listy* 24:3 (1910), 80–86; Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Kritika učenia Ezechielovho," *Cirkevné listy* 24:5 (1910), 146–52.

49 The quotations from Lajčiak's dissertation in this study are taken from his Slovak translation. The French version is available online on the website of Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University. Source: https://fevth.uniba.sk/fileadmin/ebf/Kniznica_EBF_UK/e-kniznica/Lajciak.pdf (accessed 30. 10. 2025).

50 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 282–83.

51 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:8 (1909), 227.

52 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:1 (1909), 19.

Lajčiak guides the reader through the complexities of the rather enigmatic prophet, who behaved and acted like a mentally ill individual. One can think of the prophet's staggering imagination, temporary dumbness (Ezek 3:25–27; 33:21–22), or the symbolic actions of the prophet, e. g. the poses he struck as he represented the siege of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Ezek 4:1–4), or when he lay on his left side for 390 days (Ezek 4:5–8), followed by 40 days of lying on his right side. In addition to Ezekiel's bodily paralysis, Lajčiak also considered groaning, stamping, or handclapping to be features of the prophet's mental illness (Ezek 6:11; 21:19). Referring to Klostermann, Lajčiak states: "It is generally accepted that he was not a completely normal person […]. The reasons Klostermann provides to support his claim are so evident that we can unequivocally regard Ezekiel as being ill, suffering from catalepsy[53]."[54]

Decades after Klostermann and Lajčiak, Broome referred to Ezekiel's mental illness, could not sufficiently be described as catalepsy. According to Broome, reflecting Freudian categories, Ezekiel was "a true psychotic, capable of great religious insight but exhibiting a series of diagnostic characteristics: catatonia, narcissistic-masochistic conflict, schizophrenic withdrawal, delusions of grandeur, and persecution. In short, he suffered from a paranoid condition common in many great spiritual leaders."[55]

Even more than half a century after Lajčiak's death, there was still an ongoing debate about whether Ezekiel's peculiarities could be seen as symptoms of pathology or not. While Walter Zimmerli and Ellen F. Davis distance themselves from the psychoanalytic approach, it is supported by David J. Halperin.

Both Zimmerli and Davis avoided applying modern psychoanalytic categories (schizophrenia or neurosis) to the prophet. To interpret the personality of the prophet and his mental structure, Zimmerli takes into consideration

53 Catalepsy is a nonuniform disorder characterized by immobility, muscle stiffness, and reduced sensitivity to pain.

54 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 284–85. August Klostermann, "Ezechiel: Ein Beitrag zu besserer Würdigung seiner Person und seiner Schrift," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 50 (1877), 391–439. Klostermann identified the prophet's catalepsia based on three medical reports from the years 1850 to 1875 that described a nervous illness with two prominent symptoms: paralysis and loss of speech. The symptoms set in mysteriously and, after some hours, weeks, or months, just as mysteriously went away. Klostermann, "Ezechiel," 424–31.

55 Edwin C. Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65:3 (1946), 291–92.

a long process of transmission and redaction of the book: "the book of Ezekiel has undergone considerable editing and, in its present form, cannot simply be derived from the figure of the prophet himself."[56] "[…] the basic text of the visions and symbolic actions shows a strongly stylized form. It is certainly not appropriate to regard and read it as a description of a biographical situation […]. Ezekiel's personality is hidden by stylized forms and traditions more deeply than any other of the great prophetic figures."[57] Davis, on the other hand, sees the prophet as a literary innovator, as "the creator of a new idiom of prophecy, one in which the text itself becomes the primary medium of divine discourse."[58] His act of "swallowing the scroll" symbolizes the shift from oral proclamation to textual mediation of prophecy. She refuses the "case study" by Broom and is sarcastic about his "confidence in the exegetical power of medical science,"[59] but she offers no argument why Broome is wrong in using medical science.

Halperin's psychoanalytic approach attributes the extraordinary features of Ezekiel's prophecy to an unconscious but overwhelming rage against female persons, whom he perceives as cruel and powerful, seductive and treacherous, and a more deeply buried rage against male figures because of some abuse experienced as a child.[60] He maintains that Ezekiel "was surely unique in the severity of his sickness, and in the power of the images he found to express it. But his sickness must have been rooted in a more general cultural pathology" that affected the elders of the exiles as well.[61]

Recently, Daniel L. Smith-Cristopher has been treating Ezekiel's peculiarities as the post-traumatic reactions of an exile, a refugee.[62]

In addressing the issue of the prophet's unusual behavior, one must consider the rhetorical function of prophecy and the control that God took over

---

56 Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 18. Translated from the German (1969) by Ronald E. Clements.

57 Ibid.

58 Ellen F. Davies, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy* (Sheffield, U.K.: Almond Press, 1989), 83.

59 Davies, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 66.

60 David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel. Text and psychology* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 207–09, et passim.

61 Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 135.

62 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer Stone, 1989), 49–92.

the prophet, namely, over his thoughts and actions. Israel's prophets often acted and spoke erratically for rhetorical reasons.[63]

As it has already been mentioned, Lajčiak adopted Klostermann's interpretation that Ezekiel suffered from a mental illness, specifically catalepsy of the highest degree. According to Lajčiak, it may have been to some extent conditioned by the attitudes of the Israelites who rejected Ezekiel because of his harsh words and mocked him, even when his prophecies were fulfilled. The prophet was confronted with the loss of kingship and national independence, the threat of assimilation of Israeli captives in Babylon, as well as with the defiance and indifference of the exiles to the prophet's message, visible in their apparent unbelief and mockery. Trust in God was a strength for the prophet, as indicated by the prophet's name, which means "God will strengthen or confirm".

Lajčiak highlighted the close relationship between Ezekiel's psychology and the prophet's theology – between imagery and reason. An enigmatic aspect of Ezekiel's character – his complex state of mind – seems to have attracted Lajčiak's attention. He returns to it repeatedly, analyzing it to the point that the reader thinks that the work, in its scope, extends beyond theology into psychology.

According to Lajčiak, Ezekiel's personality was affected not only by mental illness but also by pessimism. Ezekiel categorically condemns Israel. He inclines to anger, which is manifested in the harshest expressions. The prophet was affected not only by external historical circumstances, but his soul was also predisposed to pathological phenomena.[64]

To sum up, the way Lajčiak grasped Ezekiel's personality is not merely a description of the biographical events of the prophet's life, but an attempt at psychoanalysis. From Lajčiak's perspective, one can at least partially understand Ezekiel's complex personality only if one accepts that the prophet was somewhat mentally ill.[65]

63 Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24. New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 10.

64 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:11 (1908), 342–43.

65 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:9 (1908), 284.

Emphasis on individual conversion

Lajčiak presents Ezekiel as speaking of Israel's fall, which is caused by Israel's sins. He classified them as (1) religious sins and (2) the moral (or ethical) sins of the people, especially social sins – violence and bloodshed, oppression of the poor, fornication, incest, theft, etc. They stretch like an unbroken chain since the time of God's election of Israel and the exodus from Egypt.

Ezekiel does not spare the highest classes in society – oppression and selfish exploitation by kings. He compares the dignitaries to wolves that scatter the flock of Israel and criticizes the unfaithful prophets and priests.

Lajčiak sees the contribution of Ezekiel as "the first who formulated a systematic conception of the history of his nation."[66] The prophet presents history as a drama in which two principles struggle: human ingratitude and God's benevolence. In this struggle, God's justice triumphs over human wickedness.

Lajčiak not only superficially describes Israel's sins but also analyzes the relationship of guilt and punishment and reflects on the end goal or purpose of God's punishment of Israel. "Captivity is the trial in which the nation comes to understand the full gravity of the punishments with which it is afflicted."[67] Through punishment, the captive nation is to realize the seriousness of sin and to awaken from its moral stupor and be born to new life (cf. Ezek 6:9–10).

Lajčiak highlighted an innovative idea in Ezekiel's teaching on individual responsibility, namely personal guilt and personal punishment for sins. If Ezekiel had not developed the doctrine of responsibility, he would have driven the remnants of the nation in captivity to moral ruin. Ezekiel proclaimed that "the object of God's love is the individual"[68] – an argument of Lajčiak's dissertation is specifically highlighted by the different typeface (italics). An individual can avoid or reverse God's punishment by acting responsibly and morally. In this respect, the prophet was called by God to be the "watchman" of the nation (Ezek 3:17), to warn the people of their wrongdoing and to call out to them to turn from their wicked ways and return to God (cf. Ezek 33).

Even though Israel fell under God's wrath and punishment because of their iniquities, God did not cease to love His people. If they repented, they

66 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 22:12 (1908), 377.
67 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:7 (1909), 193.
68 Ibid., 191.

could be restored. Lajčiak sought the answer to the question: What happens to a nation that has either perished after a catastrophe or been scattered?[69]

Despite Ezekiel's strictness toward Israel, he harbors a great love for his nation. "The thought of seeing his nation devastated was dreadful to Ezekiel."[70] God will not destroy His nation. There will be a remnant of the nation that will survive the calamity (cf. Ezek 5:3). The vision of a restored nation – in Lajčiak's poetic language – "[…] bursts like a seed in verses 34–44 ch. 20: the gathering of the nation, the separation of the rebels, the new alliance, the new cult, the new land."[71]

The final part of Lajčiak's dissertation is a critical evaluation of the person and teachings of Ezekiel as a prophet, shepherd, priest, philosopher, and apocalyptic writer. Because Ezekiel emphasized the responsibility of the individual, pastoral care of the prophet came to the fore; as a pastor, he was interested not only in the nation as a whole (*unitas*) but in individuals. Ezekiel's pastoral activity was focused on turning the sinner from his wicked ways. "In his person, we do not find the slightest trace of egotism. He does not seek his glory but the glory of Yahweh God […]. He was indeed the spiritual father of his exiled countrymen in Babylon."[72]

Lajčiak concludes his dissertation with a critical assessment of Ezekiel and his teachings, whose influence was "enormous not only on the development of Judaism but also on the development of Christianity."[73] He addresses the relationship between Ezekiel and Christ. Ezekiel had an influence on Jesus, as can be seen in Jesus' imagery of the sheep and the shepherd, which represents the relationship between humanity and God (Ezek 33; cf. John 10; Matt 18:12–14; 25:32–33; Luke 25:4–6). Other parallels can also be drawn between the relationship of Ezekiel and Christ – images which Jesus may have adopted in form, but to which he gave an entirely new dimension.

69 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:8 (1909), 223.
70 Ibid., 226.
71 Ibid.
72 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:11 (1909), 334–35.
73 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 24:5 (1910), 150.

Lajčiak's spiritual closeness with Ezekiel

The reader of Lajčiak's dissertation naturally compares Lajčiak with the literary portrayal of the prophet Ezekiel. There are some affinities between Lajčiak and Ezekiel in terms of their careers.

The beginning of the prophetic vocation of the biblical Ezekiel and his particular prophecies could be precisely dated thanks to the detailed chronology in his writings. Ezekiel began his ministry at the age of 30 (cf. Ezek 1:1),[74] the age of initiation to the priesthood (cf. Lev 4:3; Chr 23:3). Ezekiel's calling to be a prophet was a form of compensation for the impossibility of serving as a priest during the exile.[75] Ján Lajčiak defended his dissertation on Ezekiel on November 7, 1905, at the age of thirty.

The prophet Ezekiel has at times been regarded by some as an extravagant and abnormal person. Lajčiak was also considered by some of his contemporaries as a "weirdo" because of his single-minded immersion in scientific research and less concern about physical health.

Ezekiel's message was characterized by strong pessimism. As Lajčiak mentions, none of the Israelite prophets fought against iniquity as resolutely as Ezekiel, who did not spare even religious leaders from criticism. Also, Lajčiak uncompromisingly revealed the mental and material miseries of the Slovak nation, which had been romanticised in Slovak literature. He called for disclosure of the nation's wounds, namely alcoholism, which he describes as "the hereditary wound of the nation," and pointed out other sins, such as theft, etc. Lajčiak's contemporaries reproached him for his pessimism and his critique of the cultural environment of the nation he sought to elevate to European standards. Moreover, Lajčiak advocated for honest scientific research. Through his criticism, he targeted the church, specifically its "petrified conservatism," which he viewed as the cause of the hindrance of free theological thought, and the insufficient theological and scientific training of priests. Because of Lajčiak's critical views of the clergy and traditional church structures, he found himself in opposition to the church authorities. His criticism of clericalism, formalism, and national conservatism brought him into conflict with influential church leaders and national representatives, who accused him of liberalism.

74 Some interpreters refer to the thirtieth year of the exile as the year of the compilation of the book or apply it to the thirtieth year of the exile.

75 Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (New York; London: T&T Clark, 2007, 2009), 65.

When Lajčiak criticized, he was seeking solutions for what needed to be done to effect change. He offered the prospect of a spiritual renewal of the nation. On the one hand, he felt a sense of inadequacy in fulfilling the prophetic mission. On the other hand, God's inspiration endowed him with boldness in confronting stiff-necked contemporaries, perseverance in the face of difficulties, and the strength to carry out the mission: "And you, son of man, fear them not…" (cf. Ezek 2:6; 3:8–9).

Lajčiak found himself as "a watchman" after the pattern of Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 3:17). He saw his prophetic role as being called by God to call people to become aware of their sins and to change their lives. Ezekiel's critique of the nation's wrongdoings, along with the prophet's moral stance and strictness – which greatly impressed the scholar Lajčiak – corresponds with the scholar's uncompromising moral attitude. In our view, the identification with Ezekiel was an important hermeneutical framework of Lajčiak's theological reasoning: "He struggled as every great man struggles before he would undertake any difficult task."[76]

Lajčiak also embraced Ezekiel's teachings on personal responsibility, holding each individual responsible for the state of society. Lajčiak's follower, Hamaliar, after the scholar's death, said: "For every misery and imperfection, I am chiefly to blame myself, and no one else but me, neither fate nor misfortune."[77]

References to the similarity between Ezekiel and Lajčiak can also be found in other works. The author of a fictional novel about Lajčiak's life story wrote in connection with his dissertation on Ezekiel:

> It is as if Janko projected something of his own life struggles onto the character of Ezekiel […]. When describing the tragic fate of Israel in his Ezekiel, he also had in mind the cruel fate of the Slovak nation. The Israelites suffered by the willows of Babylon, the Slovaks by the spruces of the Tatras.[78]

Július Filo, Lutheran pastor in Vyšná Boca, recalled in his memoirs that Lajčiak "'touch somebody on the raw.' He was apparently accompanied by the prophetic pathos of the prophet Ezekiel, to whom he devoted attention in his dissertation […]. His sermons had a profound socio-ethical impact; their

76 Lajčiak, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:11 (1909), 339.
77 Igor Hamaliar, "Zabudnutý slovenský učenec a jeho životná a vedecká tragika," 7 (1928), 366.
78 Baláž, *Prehovor Ezechiel*, 276.

ultimate goal was the correction and spiritual renewal of individuals, families, the church, society, and the nation."[79] Another Lutheran pastor, Lantaj noted that Lajčiak "'prophetically perceived, judged, reflected, and sought a path to correction,' more precisely, he expressed 'an effort to correct the conditions in the church at that time.'"[80] Sociologist Choma stated that the prophet Ezekiel "was so close to the dissatisfied Lajčiak."[81] However, none of the authors mentioned above developed this similarity further than the author of this study.

Osuský describes Lajčiak's transition from Paris to Vyšná Boca in a negative way:

> So. Here comes our Lajčiak. From Paris to Boca! How to characterize it? A two-time doctor who should have shone like a scientific star for the nation at a university in some big city has to close himself off to the world in a hole in Boca! Such a tragedy. […] One of our highly educated ladies characterized it this way: a palm tree among potatoes.[82]

Did Lajčiak himself perceive his stay in Boca so negatively? We believe not. Lajčiak did not resign himself, but steadfastly continued his scholarly work in Boca, collecting books for its library and preparing a journal, *Viera a veda* [Faith and Science] (though he never became its editor).

The controversial figure of Ján Lajčiak challenged society by confronting entrenched norms and traditions. His bold endeavor to reinterpret religious thought through the prisms of science, philosophy, and cultural development continues to inspire contemporary discourse. Lajčiak's enduring legacy demonstrates that theology, when deprived of its prophetic dimension, risks stagnation and the loss of its transformative potential.

Sidonia Horňanová
Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University Bratislava
Bartókova 8, 811 02 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
hornanova@fevth.uniba.sk

79 Filo, "Spomienky," 604–05.
80 Michal Lantaj, "Ezechiel. Jeho osoba a jeho učenie," *Cirkevné listy* 23:7 (1909), 193.
81 Choma, "Na okraj druhého vydania," 610.
82 Quotation from a lecture that Osuský gave on June 6, 1920, and subsequently published as an introduction to Lajčiak's book Slovakia and Culture: Samuel Štefan Osuský, "Životopis a literárne pôsobenie Dr. Jána Lajčiaka," in Ján Lajčiak, *Slovensko a kultúra*, 8–9.

Book Review

Beatrice Bonanno, **The Septuagint of Ruth: Translation Technique, Textual History, and Theological Issues**, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024, 293 p.

Beatrice Bonanno has recently published a study, as a revised version of her doctoral thesis, focusing on the Septuagint of Ruth. The research was issued by the publishing company Brepols in the series concerning "The Septuagint in its Ancient Context". The author aims to answer a complex question, regarding whether the Greek translation of the Hebrew text is only a literal one (as has been claimed for several years), or whether it may deviate from its Hebrew *Vorlage*. This question frames the whole study, and the author tries to ascertain it in nine chapters.

In the first chapter, Beatrice Bonanno poses the method of her examination and offers a short introduction to the Septuagint. She then identifies textual witnesses in general, such as the Masoretic text (serving as the reference point, since it is the textus receptus, p. 23), Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls fragments. Her study uses the "content-and context-related" approach, which means that the focus is going to be on "specific elements of the content of the biblical text and these are considered within the framework of their context" (p. 22). Those specific elements are personal names, toponyms or *hapax legomena*, since they "oblige [… the translator] to make important translational choices" (p. 23). The author takes also the Greek literary and linguistic background into consideration, such as non-biblical Greek literature, documentary papyri or epigraphs.

The other important element of her study lies in focusing on the textual material of the book of Ruth, which is the main theme of the second chapter. This means Hebrew texts (MT and Dead Sea), LXX and other versions of this book, such as Vetus Latina, Vulgate, Targum, Peshitta and Syro-Hexapla. The Dead Sea Scrolls attest several fragments of four manuscripts – 2QRuth^{a}, 2QRuth^{b} (the author herself has already written an article focusing on the composition and identification of this fragment), 4QRuth^{b} and MS 5441. The Dead Sea Scrolls are emphasized as important for the study of LXX-Ruth (as relevant witnesses concerning the text of the Hebrew Bible). Furthermore, all of these versions serve as external evidence relevant for the textual variants of the Septuagint of Ruth (p. 36).

Narrowing the focus down to the Septuagint of Ruth, the author in the third chapter concentrates on existing studies on this ancient version with the aim of adding new insights. She presents different theories about the place of origin or the genesis of LXX-Ruth. Even though her study does not focus on its textual history, her analysis may still provide evidence for any of those theories. Bonanno recognizes two main streams when referring to the LXX-Ruth characteristic. The first underlines the similarity of LXX-Ruth in relation to MT and in the second it is to "recognize a certain literalism, but also describe and analyse the LXX text" (p. 54). This second stream proceeds a bit further by focusing on specific features of the Septuagint of Ruth, which is also the author's aim.

The fourth chapter deals with textual variants, which binds the author to explain certain elements that are fundamental when working with them. These are, for instance, the pluses, minuses, or another alteration, such as the usage of a different number, difference at the grammatical level, words order, and others. The chapter itself contains a case study concerning the Greek renderings of the verb *šûb* ("to turn, to return"), which aims to "reveal whether it is simply an unconscious translation of the Hebrew verb" (p. 62). She points out that this verb is rendered by the Greek *strephō*, nevertheless, it is frequently used with three prefixes that slightly change its meaning – *epistrephō*, *apostrephō* and *anastrephō*. For instance, the verb *epistrephō*, meaning "turning towards", may be used also within the theme of conversion. In 1:10, Noemin's daughters-in-law reply that they "are returning" with Noemin to her people, which is not only meant in the physical sense but also to the community. Bonanno refers to Targum 1:16, in which Ruth "explicitly says she wants to become a proselyte" (p. 70). By the detailed analysis of these Greek terms as translational equivalents of the Hebrew term *šûb*, the author concludes that the translator is on one hand faithful to the Hebrew text but on the other also "introduces specific nuances to his text, by sensitively accommodating the lexemes to the resources of the target language" (p. 71).

The study in chapter 5 follows by bringing a wide analysis of the Greek renderings of the Hebrew personal names and toponyms, as they represent specific elements, which should shed more light on the LXX translator's translation technique. The author clearly demonstrates that these specific elements are relevant for the narrative as a whole. For instance, the Hebrew term *mārā'* (connected to the "sense of bitterness felt by Noemin", p. 83) is translated as *Pikra* in 1:20. In the Greek, the root *pikr-* was, except for its general meaning "bitter", used specifically for the names of plants, or the term *Pikros* may be "the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian name *Petsesi*, meaning 'the one who is bitter'" (p. 84). There is also a noteworthy point concerning the personal name *'Elîmelek* ("my God is king"), which happens to be the only theophoric name in Ruth. This Hebrew name is, nonetheless, rendered as *Abeimelech* ("my father is king") in the LXX (p. 75), thus there is no theophoric element as in the MT. God is absent in the beginning of the narrative in the LXX and appears in 1:6 when visiting his people and giving them bread. Within this narrative, God appears for the first time with a more positive move than in the MT where God emerges in the name of the person who dies. From the study of these and other ways of translations, the author concludes the chapter by describing the translator to be both faithful (when translating personal names and toponyms) and free when translating some of the personal names, trying to "accentuate certain features of the Hebrew *Vorlage*" (p. 97).

The last of the specific nuances, which the author analyzes in chapter 6, are the Greek renderings of the Hebrew *hapax legomena*, since no scholars have focused on this element in Ruth (p. 100). She lists all of the *hapax legomena* in MT-Ruth, outlines them in a synoptical table, and moves on to their analysis. For instance, the Hebrew *mōda'tānû* "our relative" in 3:2, is rendered as *gnōrimos*, meaning "known person", which creates a shift in meaning. There is an excursus made on the text in Ruth 2:7b, which remains enigmatic, and, therefore, it obliges the Greek translator to make choices in his translation. The author elaborately demonstrates how the translator departs from his *Vorlage*, emphasizing the context (p. 121).

Apart from analyzing specific names, the focus is also put on the Greek rendering of Hebrew legal aspects in chapter 7. These are complicated to render in a language different than Hebrew, which creates space that also obliges the translator to make translational choices (p. 123). One legal aspect is attested in 4:4 when Boos invites the "Hidden One" at the gate and in front of the elders of the city not only to acquire the field but also Ruth. The author examines the people involved in legal actions, place, legal custom, elements of the acquisition and legal actions. The legal character of the place is expressed by the term *ša'ar* ("gate") used in this context for the people who gathered, albeit also having other nuances. This term is interestingly rendered once by the noun *pylē* in 4:1.11 and by *phylē* in 3:11; 4:10 (the reason behind it, as the author shows, must be the different *Vorlage*). In the narrative, there is a description of the custom in Israel when a man removes his sandal and gives it to the neighbor (p. 140). The translator attempts "to produce not only a clearer text, but also a clearer understanding of the Jewish culture for a Greek-speaking society" (p. 146), which is indicated by certain pluses in 4:5. The author indicates how the legal action is rendered differently in LXX-Ruth than in the Masoretic text where Boos and the Hidden One will redeem Ruth, in contrast to the LXX where one of them will act as the next-of-kin in her regard (p. 149). She tries to expose that "legal aspects in MT-Ruth revolve around the topic of 'redemption' […], LXX-Ruth highlights the dynamics of 'close kinship'" (p. 152). The chapter is concluded by highlighting the importance of examining legal aspects, which offers us a characterization of the translation technique as well as showing innovations of the LXX text (p. 151).

Lastly, in chapter 8, Bonanno focuses on the theme attracting interest recently (p. 155) – the theological accents in LXX-Ruth. She deals with the question as to whether it is propriate to speak of "theology" of LXX. She claims that even though the Septuagint surely includes theological affirmations, it "may not represent the specific theology of the LXX" (p. 156). And therefore, she weakens her statement and speaks of "theological accents" rather than "theology" of the Septuagint. Her focus is put on the Greek renderings of the Hebrew divine names, the physical representation of God or His absence from the first scene of the narrative. For instance, the author points at two remarkable renderings of the term *'elohîm*, which is usually rendered by the Greek *theos* ("God"). In 1:15, the term *theos* is used in the plural form when addressing Orpha's return "to her people and to her θεοί [*theoi*]" (p. 162). The Greek translator in this sense respects the plural aspect of the religion of Moab (p. 163), since they "may have been polytheistic" (p. 163). Another remarkable finding is in 1:16 where it is stated that Ruth will follow Noemin's people and God! The English translation, however, does not properly render the nuance of *ho theos su theos mu*. The first *theos* is preceded by an article, but the second is not. It may, therefore, be literally translated as "'the' God of Noemin is 'a' God of Ruth, and not necessarily 'the' God of Ruth" (p. 164). The author concludes this chapter by accenting the difficult nature of ascertaining the theological aspects of LXX Ruth, however, characterizes the translator to be faithful when depicting God.

The author, after her precise analysis, concludes (chapter 9) that one finds both a literal and faithful translator but free and unfaithful as well, bringing new meaning to the narrative. She considers the translator to be also skillful by showing knowledge of the Greek language and the Greek social and legislative structures, nevertheless, she stresses caution when connecting LXX-Ruth to the Kaige-Th group. It would also be necessary to compare the translation technique of LXX-Ruth with other LXX books. The research is equipped with two appendixes – a synopsis of the textual material and a focus on 2QRuth[b] (Ruth 3:13–18) and its identification. New routes for the author's future research are going to be focused on textual history of LXX-Ruth: "from its origin to Origen's Hexapla" (p. 181).

Beatrice Bonanno's study was successful in bringing more light on the question of the origin of the Greek text of Ruth and demonstrated that working with the Greek text goes hand in hand with working with the Hebrew text. The question which has been posed in the beginning of author's monography regarding the literality of the Greek translation of the Hebrew text was clearly answered and examined into depth throughout the whole study. The author has definitely enriched the studies of the Septuagint of Ruth – especially in her focus on elements which have not been even dealt with in the past by other scholars or by taking into consideration other versions of the book of Ruth and thereby expanding the knowledge regarding LXX-Ruth. She has also proved to have a broad scope by taking into account the Greek non-biblical literature. Her ability to dive deep into the analysis has been clearly demonstrated, as well as the capability to emerge from particularities back into a more general level. Many noteworthy examples of how the Greek translator manipulated with the Hebrew text have been presented in the study. Nevertheless, it is not a task for the review to relate this for one must immerse oneself in the book to ascertain it.

Barbora Landová
Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice
Kněžská 8, 370 01 České Budějovice, Czech Republic
landob01@tf.jcu.cz

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.6

PROTESTANT
THEOLOGICAL
FACULTY
Charles University

STUDY THEOLOGY IN PRAGUE!

Study Protestant theology in its systematic, historical, and cultural dimension in an ecumenical context – study for your bachelor's, master's and doctorate at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University!