

The Problem of “Kingdom Now” Theology Challenge

Part 2

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Abstract

In this part two of the article the article begins by introducing positive challenges of the Kingdom Now theology, and after that it analyzes various teachings of the Kingdom now theology in areas such as soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, Christology and anthropology. Based on theological-biblical analysis, the article identifies two major problems of Kingdom Now theology: the first problem is the so-called “over-realized eschatology” wherein the blessings of salvation that belong to the future time - at the time of the coming of Christ - are claimed as present realities. The second problem is the humanization of Christ and divinization of believers. Accordingly, the article argues for the need to recognize and accept the positive things that Kingdom Now theology brings, but also there is a need for recognizing and rejecting all of the wrong and heretical doctrines and practices.

Key terms: Kingdom Now theology, Faith movement, divinization, humanized God, over-realized eschatology, apostles, transformation.

Introduction

In the first part of the article, we provided an introduction into KN theology, while we summarized its basic postulates and listed some of its problematic teachings. As we pointed out, it is obvious that KN theology has some problems in its key theological areas, such as Christology, soteriology, and anthropology. That is what makes such prevalence of this theology among Evangelical Christians so surprising. Maybe the main reason for that is that this theology comes “in segments,” so it is hard to see the whole picture without a systematic study

of the subject. And to make matters even more difficult, KN theology teaching brings in some positive challenges as well, which makes it even harder to recognize the bad aspects. For example, it emphasizes the need for carrying out the *five-fold* ministry, based on Ephesians 4:11, as opposed to the attitude that we only have three ministries today: pastors, teachers and evangelists, but not apostles and prophets. There is an emphasis on the need to teach believers to utilize the gifts of the Spirit, as opposed to the tendency to either ignore those gifts, or to shove them under the rug for fear of abuse, errors, and such. Furthermore, using the canonical Gospels as the basis, KN theology emphasizes the topic of the Kingdom of God, and the model of Jesus who declares the coming of the Kingdom of God, where the Kingdom does not just involve the salvation of the individual, but the renewal of creation as well. Following the same line of thinking, it is pointed out that the message of the Gospel must be accompanied by signs and wonders, because that is the model which Jesus Himself manifested. There is also an emphasis on the need for believers to understand their identity in Christ, instead of just being taught how they should live for Christ, or what they should or should not do. And finally, it is emphasized that all believers should be involved in the gifts, ministries, and callings in every place, as opposed to the idea that the church building is the primary place for the majority of ministry to take place, and that believers only exist to support the work of the pastor or a small number of distinguished ministers.

Therefore, KN theology sets some challenges before the church, and it rightfully calls on it to reject or accept certain teachings, emphases, and practices for which there is a basis in the Scriptures. However, these teachings, emphases, and practices often come at the expense of distorting the Scripture. That is why we have a challenge before us, as we provide a critical overview of the challenges that KN theology is placing before the church. Namely, KN theology must not be completely discarded. On the contrary, we need to accept what is good and positive from it, but then we need to apply those good and positive things in a correct way, as we will be suggesting in this article. In order to do that, we will first analyze the passage in Genesis 1:26-28, a passage which is foundational for KN theology. After this, we will be dealing with *individual teachings*, which stem from this basic premise. We will do this in order to differentiate between the positive emphases and teachings which are promoted by the proponents of KN theology, and those which are erroneous and destructive. In conclusion, we will try to summarize the positive contribution which I believe KN theology can offer to Evangelical Christianity primarily, and to Christianity in general.

A critical overview of KN theology

Genesis 1:26–28 in the Kingdom Now theology

We mentioned earlier that Genesis 1:26-28 plays an important role in Kingdom Now theology in terms of understanding soteriology and the mission of the church, as well as an indirect role in understanding ecclesiology. Because, if the main problem with the events in the Garden of Eden was the loss of authority, a similar view is also applied to Christ's work of redemption. Through His death and resurrection, Christ regained that which was given to Satan by Adam: a legal¹ right to rule the earth. Subsequently, Christians have the authority over the rest of creation (over demons and Satan, as well as the unsaved) for re-establishing the original order of creation which God intended for man, and to win over entire nations and every aspect of human creation for Christ, establishing the church of Christ by preaching the Good News about the Kingdom. In this paradigm, the church becomes a sort of military institution, whose main task is waging war and establishing the dominion of God's Kingdom before the Second Coming of Christ. I wish to point out the error of such an understanding of Genesis 1:26–28 based on my text analysis, where I will pay special attention to what it means that man was created “in God's image” and to the idea of man's reign, and I will try to establish what things man has been given authority over by God through this command.

A critical look at Genesis 1:26–28

Then God said, 'Let Us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'

In the account of the creation of man, Genesis 1:26 tells us that man was created in God's “own image” (*b^oṣālmēnū*) - resembling God (*kiḏmūtēnū*). The word “image”

1 “Legally” is an important word in KN theology. If something is “legal,” it is also “legally valid,” and if it is “legally valid,” then it does not depend on our faith, feelings, etc. Consequently, Christians are encouraged to discover and appropriate the “rights” that belong to them. Is it not a coincidence that we live in a time when the secular world emphasizes “rights”?

(*šēlēm*) is used seventeen times in the Old Testament. The phrase “image of God” is used four times in Genesis, but without a context which would help determine its meaning (Gen 1:26-27; 9:6). In 13 instances, the word “image” is used to describe idols (in the sense of a physical representation of a deity - Num 33:52; 2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chronicles 23:17; Ezek 7:20; 16:17; Amos 5:26); three times it refers to the physical representation of boils and rats (1 Sam 6:5; 11); twice it refers to passing images/shadows (Ps 39:7; 73:20); once it refers to an image (Ezek 23:14); and one time *Shet* is used as an image of Adam (Gen 5:3). So, out of 17 times the word “image” is only used figuratively twice, while in all other cases it refers to a physical force with a formed body (cf. Watke 2007, 215).

According to Bruce Watke (2007, 216-18) the phrase “image of God” has several different meanings: the first one refers to the psychosomatic unity of man, which is why it is wrong from an OT perspective to say that man consists of material and immaterial parts; second, this phrase means that people are, in their entire being, faithful and apt representatives of God, which involves our physical form (i.e. God can hear and see...), the fact that we are persons (just like us, God has an intellect, emotions, and will), and our ability to become involved in social relationships and to communicate; third, it involves having God’s life inside of us; fourth, it denotes having responsibility and possessing authority which is reflected in the fact that humans, as God’s representatives on earth, have the responsibility to govern and to rule.

However, the creation of man is also described using the word “likeness” (*d^emūt*). Adalbert Rebić (1996, 64-5) considers that the creation of man has been originally described with the word “image” alone, but in order to avoid the notion that man is like God in every aspect, the writer - or a redactor later on - added the word “likeness.” This is to say that “man is not an image of God in the sense that a picture is a reproduction of a reality, or that a son is a picture of his father, but that man bears but a distant likeness with God because he possesses spirit, soul, reason, free will, creative ability, ability to procreate...” And the fact that man *is not* like God in every aspect is seen in the fact that God is spirit, and that He transcends time and space, while man is limited by time and space; God is in heaven while humans are on earth; God is eternal while humans are temporal; God is all-powerful while humans are weak, etc. (cf. Watke 2007, 219). Eugene H. Merrill (2006, 104) holds that there is a grammatical basis to the phrase “created *in* the image of God” being understood as “created as God’s image” (as our image), which signifies that man is God’s representative on earth. The traditional understanding is that man was created *in* the image of God, which means that man possesses a lot of who God is - in a limited sense, of course (cf. Merrill 2006, 169). However, he thinks that the much better option is to understand the *image Dei* not as an ontological description, but as a functional description of who man

is. The prefix *b*, which is usually used in the locative case, can also be used as a comparative proverb, in which case it no longer means “*in* the image of God” (in our image) but “*as* an image of God” (as our image). In this way Genesis 1:26–28 no longer talks about in what ways man is *like* God, but says that man is *instead* of God, as His representative. It is therefore the understanding of man’s relationship to God based on his *role*, and not his *essence*, that is being taught in these verses, because the “image of God” is closely connected to man’s task of ruling (cf. Merrill 2006, 169-170).

In a similar way, Claus Westermann (1984, 156-58) thinks that the “image of God” does not refer to human nature and to what man is, but rather that it describes the process of creating man. This means that our understanding of the passage must not start from the way mankind is described, but from questions related to the process of creation. Since the act of creating man at the beginning of the existence of mankind is unique (the beginning of our existence is connected to the act of inception and birth), it also deals with the question of human existence, this act being something that is common to all people. God created every human being, and in spite of all the differences between people, all people have been created in God’s image. The thing that is characteristic only of man, unlike the rest of creation, is the fact that man was created as something that is fitting for God, as His substitute and replica, and is thus meant to be and live in a relationship with God. We could say that man is the creature standing between God and the world, and the only creature that was meant to be and to act between these two areas (cf. Williams 1988, 199).

In other words, being created in the image of God includes, among other things, ruling and subduing. John S. Hammett (2007, 362) offers this interpretation of these two words:

The word for ‘rule’ or to ‘have dominion’ (*radah*) appears in Genesis 1:26,28. It is a fairly strong word, found sometimes in contexts of harsh or ruthless ruling (Lev 25:43,46; Ezek 34:4) but also at times in contexts of a just and proper rule (1 Kings 4:24; Ps. 110:2; 49:14) and even, in some places, of foremen (1 Kings 5:16). Even stronger, strikingly so, is the word for ‘subdue’ (*kabash*). It is used once to refer to attempted rape (Esther 7:8), occasionally for subjecting to slavery (Jer 34:11, 16), and most often in military contexts (2 Sam 8:11), where land is often described as ‘subdued’ (Num 32:22; Josh 18:1).

Watke (2007, 220) claims that the words *radah* and *kabash* contain the idea of repression and subduing someone or something who is an enemy that opposes one’s authority. Theodore Hiebert (1996) states that they denote a hierarchical relationship in which mankind - as the pinnacle of creation - is placed in the position of authority over the earth, having received the power and control over it. These words can imply ruling that is aimed both towards good or evil (vio-

lent reign). However, when we point out the fact that the culture back then was primarily agricultural, it is not hard to imagine that the relationship between man and land could easily be understood as a relationship between rivals, due to the efforts that were put into farming without the help of modern machinery. If that is the case, the balance of power is inevitably leaning towards nature, and it speaks about human powerlessness. However, the idea of human domination should also be viewed in the context of the creation account in Genesis 2. In this passage man's role is described with the verb *avad*, which means "to serve," and it denotes man's service to his masters, or man's service to God (Gen 12:16; Ex 4:23). Hiebert calls this theology the "theology of dependence," which is found in Psalm 104 and in Job. The value of both theologies (domination-predominance, and dependence) is in the fact that they both express the paradox of human existence. On the one hand, mankind has achieved enormous accomplishments in mastering the forces of nature during our time, while on the other hand we have no control over many other things, and we are often left confused. In other words, inasmuch as man is the pinnacle of creation and he has power over it, he is also very dependent on it. But what does human domination actually refer to and what is it that man is supposed to subdue to himself?

In reviewing Genesis 1 and 2, John Rodman Williams (1988, 202) notes that the scope of man's domination encompasses three aspects. First, it encompasses the inorganic aspect of the earth, which involves rivers, gold, and all the mineral resources which have been given to man to use, discover, and enjoy. Second, it encompasses the organic aspect of the world, including all vegetation, plants, and trees. Although vegetation was given to animals and humans for food, and although both groups depend on it for their life, only man was commanded to guard it and to farm the land. Thirdly, man also has dominance over the animal world. When speaking about the verb *radah* in 1:26, Westermann (1984, 161) notes that man's domination described in this verse only refers to animals. The reason for this is that, in the language of priestly tradition and the Old Testament, domination can only be exercised over living things. The relationship with plants is different (1:29–30), while the relationship of man towards metal and chemical substances cannot be considered as domination. However, this does not mean that the rest of the earth is not at man's disposal, because the suffix for the verb *kabash* in 1:28 shows that the earth is subjected to man.

Conclusion

Merrill's (2006, 17) review of the book of Genesis is indicative. He claims that, in spite of all the problems caused by man's fall and sin, the commandment given in Genesis 1:26–28 is valid until that moment when the purposes of God's Kingdom are fulfilled at the end of time. God's purpose for creation was for ev-

everything to reflect His glory and majesty in this world. By creating man, God shared with him the task and privilege of ruling, but man, who was dissatisfied with his position, rebelled against God, making it harder for him to rule over creation. However, God “devised a plan” by which he would overcome the curse, and which would result in renewing His dominion, if not during history, at least in the eschaton (cf. Merrill 2006, 162). I think that Merrill hit the nail on the head, because it is because of the durability and timeliness of this commandment that this portion of the Scripture has been a source of controversy regarding what is included in man’s domination, how is it supposed to be enforced, and finally, how it should be achieved. However, based on reviewing these verses, I think it is justified to conclude that KN theology is making two mistakes in its understanding of enforcing the commandment given in Genesis 1:26–28. First, the simple commandment given to Adam about ruling the animal world, as the one who was created in God’s image, was amended with the thought about domination over demons and heavenly realms. Second, it claims that the authority for domination as expressed in this commandment only belongs to born-again people, and as such they have the right to dominate the rest of human race. However, such conclusions are flawed for several reasons.

First, the commandment given to Adam includes all of mankind, and no human is exempt. If Rebić (1996, 63) is right in saying that the Hebrew word *adam* represents a collective singular and does not have a plural form, and it can be translated as “mankind,” “humans,” and not just like “man,” it is then reasonable to conclude that the commandment includes the entire human race. Furthermore, this commandment is not repeated again after the fall, except in the case of Noah (Genesis 9).

Second, the commandment about man’s ruling over and subduing the earth has a clearly defined scope of human action, which does not include one portion of mankind ruling over the other portion nor over demons, because the text clearly ties man’s rule to *the earth*, while mankind remains an image of God even after the fall. The passage in Genesis 1:26-28 says, “... and let them rule over the *fish* of the sea and over the *birds* of the sky and over the *cattle* and over all the earth, and over *every creeping thing* that creeps on the earth... Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the *fish* of the sea and over the *birds* of the sky and over *every living thing* that moves on the earth.” The word “earth” (*erets*), which can mean “land (country), earth, field, ground, nations, way, wilderness, world” (H 776 *erets*) as used in these lines probably means the earth as a whole, as an *abode* for all living creatures (vs. 26 and 28), or earth in the sense of *ground*, which needs to be adapted/subdued by man (v. 28). Therefore, we are not talking about man ruling over heavenly realms nor over the beings that reside there.

Also, after the fall man remained an image of God. Wayne Grudem (1995,

444) notes correctly that the image of God in man becomes twisted, but not lost, after the fall. We find the confirmation of this in Genesis 9:6, where God forbids murdering another human being, “for in the image of God He made man.” James 3:9 is the only NT reference where the Bible talks explicitly about people who were created (τοὺς καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας) in the image of God, and who remain to be such because *gegonotas*, since the active perfect participle implies a finished action or a condition something is in. In this case, that means that man was created in God’s image and that he *continues to be* God’s image. Therefore, there is no mention that one part of the human race (even if they are Christians who, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, reflect the glory of the Lord) should rule over the rest of the human race.

I conclude that it is impossible to use Genesis 1:26-28 as a basis for claiming that God gave Adam authority over demons, or that one part of the human race that was created in the image of God (even if they were renewed in the image of God in Christ) has the right to dominate the rest of the human race. Domination belongs to the human race which, as the pinnacle of God’s creation, has the authority over plant life and animal life, as well as over the earth, to work on it and subdue it in order to ensure his existence. Back then, just as today, the entire human race, which was created in God’s image, both believers in Christ and unbelievers, possesses this authority. This conclusion definitely changes the generally accepted idea of spiritual warfare, evangelism, and mission as taught by the proponents of KN theology.

Spiritual warfare

Proponents of KN theology believe that their idea of spiritual warfare is based on the Bible. Yes, but it is based on overstepping the biblical text. In part one of this discussion we saw how KN theology holds that Satan and his evil spirits rule over certain areas and in certain ways (in other words, there is a geographic-hierarchical structure of demonic forces that Christians should be fighting against). This means that if Christians want to proclaim the Gospel to the unsaved, they first need to defeat demonic forces which have authority over a certain geographical area (this is called “aerial warfare”) and then proclaim the Gospel. Ephesians and Paul’s talk about “rulers, powers, authorities, the aeon of this world, and principalities” are used as confirmation of this, as well as Daniel 10 from the Old Testament.

Peter Wagner (2010, 100-01), who is considered by some to be a leading authority in the field of spiritual warfare, outlines his view on the topic:

The process began at the historic *Congress on World Evangelization* in Manila in 1989, which was also known as *Lausanne II, Lausanne Committee for*

World Evangelization... gathered around 4500 leaders from all over the world. At that time at least five speakers covered the topic of territorial spirits, which was never even mentioned before this. I happened to be among those five speakers. We suggested that the church should start actively working on what Paul described as a [struggle] “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). We feel that these “aerial wars” are necessary in order to pave the way for troupes of evangelists, church builders, and pastors to reach those in the world who’ve never heard the Gospel before. Some of these speakers used the existence of demonic principalities, which have been assigned by Satan to keep certain areas on earth in spiritual darkness as a starting point in the discussion. The spirits were listed according to their names in Daniel as princes of Persia and Greece... as a prototype of similar satanic activity today. If this is the case, such evil principalities could turn into main threats to the effectiveness of the Gospel in certain areas. Many have asked the question: “Has God given us the authority and a mandate to confront and tackle these obstacles to spreading the Gospel?”

There is no doubt that for Wagner and other proponents of this practice Daniel 10 represents a key part of Scripture which proves their claims. Thus Wagner claims: “The Bible teaches that the things we today call ‘territorial spirits’ do exist. A key passage is found in Daniel 10 where the ‘prince of Persia’ and the ‘prince of Greece’ are mentioned specifically.” George Otis (Stevens 2000, 411) has a similar opinion: “Here we have a well-defined case of an evil spiritual being ruling over an area with explicitly defined boundaries”.² Dean Sherman (2001, 92) follows in Wagner’s trail when he claims that “Satan has special military plans for every geographic area and for every group of people... There are special dark forces in charge for specific areas and for specific people groups.” Using the book of Daniel, Sherman (2001, 94) notes:

The forces of darkness know about this and they have a strategy for every group of people. The Church is the only thing in Satan’s way. Spiritual warfare on a global scale means learning according to geography. Daniel 10 mentions a “prince of Persia”; i.e. the principality over Persia. This principality has not died of old age, nor is it retired. He is probably still there, working in a very similar way. The Book of Daniel also mentions a prince of Greece. If there are princes of Persia and Greece, there are also princes of Scotland, Hawaii, London, Dallas, and even north Dallas.

2 For a further analysis of the importance of Daniel 10 in regards to the claim about the existence of territorial spirits in Wagner, see Erwin van der Meer. 2008. *The Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare Theology of C. Peter Wagner and its Implications for Christian Mission in Malawi*. PhD diss., University of South Africa, 104-05.

A critical look at spiritual warfare – Daniel 10

When we talk about spiritual warfare, of course we cannot ignore the fact that demonic forces exist and that they are in conflict with the Kingdom of God. It is also impossible to deny the fact that demonic forces have an influence on people, societies, and this world. However, do we have a biblical basis for speaking about territorial spirits and the methodology of spiritual warfare as proposed by Wagner and the likes of him? Clearly, the answer is no, because there are several factors that need to be considered.

First of all, it is incorrect to talk about the connection between demonic activity and a certain territory in the way that would imply that the demonic activity is tied *to* a certain territory. Rather, the demonic activity is connected to political and religious structures, and ideologies. This is how Melvin Tinker (2000, 75-76) explains this view:

In 1 Corinthians 10:20 Paul tells us that when people worship idols (as did all these world powers), it is not statues which they worship but demons. Behind the national gods of Persia therefore, there were supernatural and evil personalities, feeding and directing malice towards God's people. For this reason, we cannot deny that there is a demonic influence in the political/religious/ideological spheres of life. But this is not the same thing as tying demons to specific areas. (If the territorial view is correct then every time there is a boundary reorganization or the breakup of a country – like Yugoslavia – there would presumably have to be a political reshuffling of the demonic cabinet!).

A similar opinion is held by Daniel Stevens (2000, 427-28), who also points out that activity in the spiritual realm (i.e. a struggle between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom) does indeed affect geo-political happenings, but this does not mean that we can speak of demons which are connected to a certain region. Rather, we need to speak about the demonic influence over people and socio-political structures:

The archangel Michael, for example, is described as *'the great prince who protects your people'* (12:1, NIV, italics added). This emphasizes the protective role of Michael in relation to the people of God rather than with respect to a given territory. Michael remained the guardian angel of the people of God, whether Israel was in the Promised Land or was dispersed in exile among the nations. And in view of the parallel between Michael and the angelic princes of Persia and Greece, one can conclude that the same correspondence exists for the latter, that is, the 'princes' are over the people of Persia and Greece and their sociopolitical structure rather than their respective geographical boundaries.... The princes of Daniel 10 rule not over . . . fixed geographical regions, but over imperialistic empires whose boundaries expand and contract. ... So the respective princes may be tutelary powers, but if so, then they are expansionistic - not geographical - spirits.

Secondly, Stevens points out that Daniel 10 gives us no basis for the contemporary practices of spiritual warfare, which include naming territorial spirits and aggressive prayer against them, in order to weaken their influence over a certain territory and to open up the way to evangelism. Therefore Stevens (2000, 429-30) points out:

Daniel never sought the names of these cosmic powers nor did he employ their names in his intercession—a practice more in keeping with occultic arts. In fact there is no indication that Daniel was aware of what was taking place in the heavenlies during his three - week period of prayer and fasting. It is not until after this period that Daniel received revelation about the identity of the angels engaged in this heavenly struggle. And even then, the only angel who was named was Michael (10:13), who fought on behalf of Israel.... Also Daniel did not engage in aggressive prayer against such powers with the expectation of 'binding' or 'evicting' them. The prophet did not pray against cosmic powers but for the people of God and the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes (cf. Eph 6:18-20). Apparently Daniel's focus in prayer was not on the celestial warfare in the heavenlies, but on the promises of God (Dan 10:12; cf. Jer 25:11; 29:10) and their fulfillment on the terrestrial scene.

Thirdly, we need to consider what the New Testament says about spiritual warfare. The New Testament is familiar with the idea of Christians fighting demonic forces, because Jesus Himself had numerous conflicts and encounters with demonic forces, but this kind of spiritual warfare where it is claimed that the Church first needs to identify demonic forces over a territory before evangelizing, and to defeat them in prayer first, has no basis in the Bible. Apart from mentioning spiritual struggle in Ephesians, and apart from some terms that refer to the spiritual world ("principalities, powers," etc.), nowhere else in the NT do we read that the apostles were trying to find out which demon acted in a place or a city and in what way, nor do we see them rebuking pagan strongholds and such, as is done in modern spiritual warfare. In his article, Don Fanning (2009, 14) cites Clinton Arnold, who compared Paul's approach to demonology and the non-canonical Jewish literature about magic from the time, and he found six things which Paul never spoke about: a) Paul never speaks about the origin of demons; b) Paul does not reconstruct the demonic hierarchy; c) Paul does not confirm the jurisdiction of spirits over a certain territory; d) Paul does not name demonic forces; e) Paul does not list the activities of demonic forces; f) Paul does not teach about the techniques of overthrowing demons. And this is the inevitable conclusion: "Strikingly, at each point where Paul is silent, SLSW speaks. In short, SLSW has more in common with intertestamental Judaism than with New Testament Christianity" (Fanning 2009, 14).

Conclusion

The Scriptures are unfamiliar with the notion of spiritual warfare as proposed by KN theology, but we do have examples of people in the NT who are filled with the Spirit and preach the Gospel, which sometimes leads to the conversion of a few or even many people, and sometimes to persecution. And as Bill Randles said: “We wage war against Satan most effectively when we allow God’s anointed Word to go forth to touch unbelievers’ hearts and souls, convicting them, converting them, and opening them up to God” (Steinkamp). The problem with Kingdom Now theology is not that spiritual warfare and struggling against the kingdom of darkness are not true and real for believers and the church, but that these terms are used to promote ideas, practices, and concepts which have no basis in Scripture. I believe that the church needs to abandon this type of “spiritual warfare” completely, because neither does Genesis 1:26–28 talk about man’s domination over demons, nor does Matthew 28:18–20 emphasize fighting against demons and spiritual warfare. Instead of Christians tying up demons in heavenly realms over towns, villages, and cities, they should be using Christ’s authority to destroy the Devil’s work in *people’s lives*. The shackles of sin, addiction, possession, sickness, and all other things that trap people in their lives are the matters which the church and believers should be dealing with.

Ecclesiology: the Body of Christ, apostolic ministry, and the city church

Following the view that man was created as a warrior, and understanding Christ’s sacrifice as a way for God to reclaim power over the earth from Satan’s hands, KN theology considers that, since the church is not only the Body of Christ but also the second Christ, based on Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11 the ministry of *today’s* apostles and prophets represent the foundation of the church, because the apostles of today are no different in their authority from the apostles mentioned in Ephesians, and the apostles are a God-given structure of power to whom the rest of the church must submit through abolishing denominations and creating *city churches*.

The Church as the second Christ: a critical overview and conclusion

Croatian readers have had the opportunity to read John Bevere’s (2013, 27–31) book, *Relentless*, where Bevere says the church is Christ, by saying “we are Christ,” or “we are Christ on earth.” This teaching is characteristic of KN theology, because it contributes to the idea that the church was elected to establish God’s rule in this world before the second coming of Christ. But what is the problem with this teaching?

At first, it seems to make sense because of such a close relationship between

Christ and His body the church - all Christ's attributes are ascribed to the church. Bevere uses the analogy of the human body, where every part (whether it is a leg, head, hand, finger) is equally part of a person, and he says, "Are you a part of a different body? No, you're part of Christ! We're all in Christ. We are Christ. We are His Body!" This leads us into the following statement: "Jesus Christ ruled during His life. He ruled over opposition and over troubles. He brought heaven to earth. He set a standard for us to follow. Furthermore, He expects us to do greater things than He did: '... he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do...' (John 14:12)".

However, the fallacy that is made by Bevere and by KN theology is the following: We cannot take an analogy from our world and state that it corresponds to God's realities in *every aspect* and in *every detail*. Besides, the Bible provides a different testimony, as Williams (1992, 66) points out:

...we should note that there are New Testament references to the body of Christ that are not directly related to the church. They relate to Christ Himself, both physically and figuratively. Physical reference is found in such words as 'she saw ... where the body of Jesus had lain' (John 20:12) and 'you have died to the law through the body of Christ' (Rom 7:4). Figurative usage is to be recognized in the words of Jesus Himself about the bread in the Last Supper, 'This is my body' (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19). The body of Christ, as a description for the church, needs to be viewed separately.

Furthermore, Williams (1992, 66) points out that we should beware of two extremes: one of which is the view that considers the church to be a real body of Christ that replaces Christ's *physical* body. However, Christ has His own *physical* body, and it is as such at the Father's right hand, bearing the wounds from Calvary (Jn 20:27), and the Bible witnesses that Christ will return to earth in His resurrected and glorified body (Acts 1:11). It is therefore wrong to say that we are "Christ on earth" for the sake of analogy with the "body." I dare say that this teaching has the marking of the spirit of Antichrist, because the term "Antichrist" does not only refer to someone who is "against" Christ, but also someone who is "instead" of Christ. And this is exactly what Bevere is teaching, whether he realizes it or not, that there is a Christ in heaven, and that there is a Christ here on earth, which is us, the church. However, there cannot be *two* Christs, but only *one*, and His name is Yeshua or Jesus, or *Yeshua HaMashiach* in Hebrew, with the note that "ha" is a definite article in Hebrew. There is only one Messiah - Christ - and His name is Yeshua/Jesus.

Apostolic ministry: a critical overview and conclusion

The passages in Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11-12 for understanding the apostolic ministry. And while the proponents of KN theology believe that the apostles of

today are a foundation of the church and that they have authority equal to the Twelve, analyzing these passages reveals that there is hardly any basis for such a claim. It is especially important in Ephesians 2:20 to understand the passive aorist participle, ἐποικοδομηθέντες, “to build up,” “to build,” “to incorporate,” and the meaning of the genitive τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν “of the apostles and prophets” as relating to the phrase “the foundation,” θεμελίω.

When speaking about including pagans, as well as Jews, into the church on the same foundation of the apostles and prophets, Paul describes this act using the participle, ἐποικοδομηθέντες, emphasizing that the Ephesian believers are part of the church, but are different from the foundation of the church, since the aorist shows that a foundation was already there at the moment of their inclusion in the church. Therefore, there is no more need for any additional foundations (i.e. apostles who would come later on) because the apostolic work has been finished and the church has its foundation and its corner stone (cf. Edgar 1996, 60). Ernest Best (2006, 280) thinks that it is intended to describe the act of including believers in the church which has happened in the past, and it probably refers to their conversion/baptism, while the passive speaks of God as the builder of this building. The aorist also says that the building (i.e. the church) began even before the Ephesian believers were included in it, but it says nothing about when the church originally began. The inevitable conclusion is that the role of setting a foundation belonged to the apostles and prophets who were a part of the first generation of believers. (Sullivan 2001, 57).

Furthermore, the key question regarding Ephesians 2:20 is this: In what sense are the apostles and prophets a foundation of the church? There are two possible and partially opposing, but not mutually exclusive views. According to one view, the apostles and prophets are a foundation, while according to the other view the foundation is the teaching which was revealed to the apostles and prophets. If we accept the first view as correct, it is then possible to claim that the ministry of today’s apostles is *necessary* for the church to have a foundation. If we accept the second view as correct, it is then possible to claim that the apostolic ministry today either does not exist, or that it does exist but it does not have the same foundational purpose as the ministry of the first apostles. So it all depends on how we understand the genitives “of the apostles and prophets” in relation to the term “foundation.”

Harold W. Hoehner (2002, 399) points out that the genitives in the phrase “of the apostles and prophets” can be understood as: a) *possessive genitives* in the sense that this foundation belongs to the apostles and prophets (i.e. apostles’ and prophets’ foundation). However, if this were the case, it would mean that Christ Himself, as the cornerstone which is the key part of the foundation, belongs to the apostles and prophets; b) *subjective genitives*, which would mean that the apostles and prophets are causative agents of the action: a foundation which was laid by

the apostles and prophets. In this case, the foundation refers to the content of the message that was proclaimed - the revelation that was received and proclaimed. But this would mean that Christ is both the “foundation” and the “cornerstone”. But if the “foundation” is the apostolic doctrine about Christ, which is the content of the teaching referring to the “cornerstone”; c) *apositional genitives* in the sense of “the foundation consisting of the apostles and prophets.” Hoehner thinks that this interpretation is the best one, because firstly, it presents Jesus Christ, who is the cornerstone, as a person, and not an impersonal thing in the sense of “His teaching”, or “the teaching about Christ”; secondly, Jesus is the “cornerstone”, the apostles and prophets as persons are the “foundation”, and the saints, who are also represented as persons, are the building; thirdly, the fact that the aorist participle was used in the passage indicates that the building up refers to the past tense. Had Paul been talking about the teaching upon which the church was built, it would have been more appropriate to use the present tense or maybe the perfect tense, which would indicate that teaching believers is an ongoing lifetime process, and in every new generation of believers. But if Paul is talking about the apostles and prophets as the *persons* who comprise the foundation, it is then more appropriate to use the aorist in order to indicate the past tense, when the first generation of the apostles and prophets had the role of the foundation. This is why Hoehner (2002, 399) concludes: “In the end, it seems best to view these genitives as appositional, indicating that the apostles and prophets are historic persons who first formed the universal church.”

In Ephesians 4:11-12 the subject in the sentence is *αὐτὸς* - “he” - and the context makes it clear that it is referring to Christ. So, Christ who ascended into the heavens from His exalted position (v. 10) is portrayed as the one who gave the church its apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The act of giving - “he gave” (NASB) - is presented in the aorist tense, *ἔδωκεν*, which implies an action that has been finished in the past. Wayne Grudem (1995, 911) understands this act of giving as an event which happened once in the past, and he claims that this verse alone cannot be used to say if Christ would allow others to perform these functions later on. This *one-time event* that this verse talks about refers to Christ’s ascension into heaven, and to the outpouring of the gifts on the day of Pentecost, when God gave the church the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors-teachers. Unlike Grudem, Williams (1992, 169) understands the act of “giving” the five-fold ministry as a lasting gift to the church, and the ministries which need to be present in the life of the church even today, with the difference that these apostles are not equal to those in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, whose role was connected with providing a foundation. This act of ascension and giving “*goes beyond the original apostles and reaches out to encompass others,*” which includes Paul, Barnabas, James, Silvanus, etc. The fact that Christ “gave” (aorist) cannot refer to past alone, because these gifts were given in order to *permanently*

prepare the saints for ministry (cf. Williams 1992, 164). This is why Williams (1992, 165-5) sees this act of giving in aorist as a permanent thing, which God gave to the church at one moment so it would be permanently present in the life of the church. Furthermore, 4:11 says that the apostles, prophets, and evangelists are different persons, because each word has been separated with a definite article, unlike pastors and teachers, who are connected with only one definite article. In this way, Paul probably wants to say that the ministries of pastors and teachers are in fact one ministry, but the fact that Paul lists both pastors and teachers indicates that this ministry consists of two closely connected functions.

If 4:11 describes the ministries which Christ established in His church, 4:12 reveals their purpose in the life of the church. There is a certain level of disagreement in regards to the threefold description of the functioning of the five-fold ministry. A literal translation of 4:12 from Greek can be: a) “and for the purpose or for equipping/perfecting the,” b) “for the work of service/ministering,” c) “for building the Body of Christ.” The question is whether there should be a comma after the word “saints” or not. If there is no comma, we get a construction according to which the purpose of the five listed ministries is “equipping the saints for the work of service.” This means that the saints (i.e. believers who are not involved in any of the five listed ministries) are being equipped by those five ministries in order to perform their ministry, whatever it is. By performing their ministry, the saints are doing their part in being built up in the body. If we put in a comma, it would mean that the three-fold description refers only to the five ministries: *they* are equipping the saints, *they* are doing the work of ministry, *they* are building up the body, which excludes other believers from serving and can lead to a certain exclusiveness. This is why John Stott (1979, 166-68) and Williams (1992, 159) propose that the comma be removed, in order to get the meaning that the “work of service” includes not just the five-fold ministry, but all the other believers as well. But even if we left the comma, as is suggested by Stefan Sos (2006, 7), who claims that the immediate context indicates that verse 12 refers to the activity and role of special gifts given to the church by God and not to the ministry of all the saints, this does not exclude the idea that the saints are involved in the work of service, because the active role of believers in building the body is really present in verses 4:7 and 4:16.

Based on Ephesians 2:20, I think it is reasonable to conclude that the apostles and prophets of the first generation are the foundation of the church. Not only did they set a foundation in the form of teaching about Christ, but even the very existence of their ministries is an important element in laying the foundation of the church. As bearers and proclaimers of divine revelation, their ministries were extremely important for the building of the church. Christ is the foundation of the church, but their ministries are also part of the foundation, so there

is no conflict between Christ as the foundation, and the apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church (cf. Saucy 1972, 34, 62, 138; Williams 1992, 61). Furthermore, when Paul speaks about the foundation in Ephesians 2:20, he holds that the foundation had already been laid. That is why the ministries of the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church, but only inasmuch as both the apostles and prophets were receivers, bearers, and proclaimers of the divine revelation in Christ (as is claimed by Saucy). If there is a need for a further and newer revelation of Jesus Christ, and if God had not fully revealed the Mystery - Christ - to His church through the apostles and prophets in the last two thousand years, (Ephesians 3:5), KN theology then has a basis for claiming that the ministry of modern-day apostles and prophets does indeed provide a foundation to the church in our day. However, if the Mystery was revealed to the original generation of the apostles and prophets, and they passed it on and kept proclaiming it, then the KN claims have no basis.

Several things are evident from Ephesians 4:11–12: a) the ministries described in 4:11, are not just the charismata which people have been equipped with, (cf. Sullivan 2001, 57). In other words, the gifts which were mentioned here are *people* whom God gave to the church in order to equip it (cf. Williams 1992, 164); b) only certain believers, and not all of them, can take part in these ministries; c) these ministries are vital for the life of the church. The fact that Christ *gave* (aorist) does not mean that the giving only refers to the past, because these gifts keep helping the church in equipping the saints (cf. Williams 1992, 164); d) the main purpose of the described ministries is serving others, and not ruling, managing, or having power over others; e) there is no gradation of importance, necessity, hierarchy, and authority among the five ministries. Schnackenburg's claim (2001, 182) that all five ministries mentioned by Paul in verse 11 are included in achieving all three goals that are described in v. 12 confirm what we have just said. Consequently, the claim of KN theology about the apostles having a higher authority than other ministries finds no confirmation in these passages.

The Contemporary Church and the idea of a city church: a critical overview and conclusion

The idea of “city churches,” which is sometimes used by the proponents of KN theology, is a mixture of correct and incorrect notions: Correct inasmuch as this idea is much closer to the New Testament idea of church than is the idea of a denomination, and incorrect because it exalts the five-fold ministry above the authority of the local congregation. In order to understand in what ways the idea of the “city church” corresponds to NT teaching, we need to consider the idea of *ekklesia*, which is used for church in the New Testament. What stems from the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament is the following: Every local church congre-

gation in a city is considered a complete church; all local churches in a city comprise the church in that city; the New Testament supports the idea of autonomy in the local church.

The term *ekklesia* is used 114 times in the New Testament, and it refers to the New Testament church 109 times. Basically, the term refers to a local congregation of believers. In that sense, the singular *ekklesia* refers to a specific church, such as the church in Thessaloniki (1 Thess 1:1), or to an unnamed local congregation (“in every church” 1 Cor 4:17). The plural *ekklesiai* refers to a group of churches in a certain region (“churches in Judea” Gal 1:22), to an undefined number of churches (“other churches” 2 Cor 11:8), or to all churches together (“in all churches” 1 Cor 7:17) (cf. Saucy 1972, 16).

When the New Testament describes the locality of an individual church, the church is then named after its members (1 Thess 1:1 - “To the church of the Thessalonians” NASB), or the city (1 Cor 1:2 - “To the church of God which is at Corinth” NASB). Churches in a certain area are described as churches that are “in” the area (“churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” 1 Thess 2:14, NASB) or with a genitive (“To the churches of Galatia” NASB). However, Saucy (1972, 18) remarks: “Titles such as the Church of Ephesus or Galatia are never found. Even such theological concepts as militant or triumphant are never attached to the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament.” In this way Saucy emphasizes that when the New Testament speaks about a church in a place or a region, the local churches are named according to the place and region they are in, but are not hierarchically structured according to the region they are in.

Analyzing how the New Testament describes the term *ekklesia*, Williams (1992, 216) talks about how the term *ekklesia* can refer to a home church, or a church in a city. Mentioning church in the singular, such as “the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1), “the church in Antioch” (Acts 13:1), or “the church in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2), indicates the existence of the church in various locations. This can be a local church, but is still the church in the full sense of the word, and not just a part of the church. A gathering of believers in a house or home is as much *ekklesia* as when the term refers to a church in a city or a region, or to the church in general: “There is no suggestion that the house church is somehow less a church, or only a part of the large church” (Williams 1992, 39). When talking about the urban *ekklesia*, Williams (1992, 40) concludes: “All believers in a given city were viewed as the church in that locality... a house church (possibly house churches), as well as a larger gathering, may also have been in a certain city, but all made up the urban church”. When believers gathered in a city, when they were all together in one place or in smaller groups, they were the church in that city. Williams (1992, 216) also notes that the plural in the phrases “churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor 8:1, NASB), or “the churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:2, NASB) inevitably indicates

that the church is comprised of local churches. Also, Revelation 1:4 speaks about “churches that are in Asia,” and not an “Asian church.” From this follows that it is justified to speak about the autonomy of the local church, because every local *ekklesia* is a complete and real church, and not just a part of a larger church. Furthermore, according to Williams (1992, 217), the autonomy of the local church is seen in the fact that the New Testament is not familiar with the notion of one local congregation overseeing one or several other local congregations, or of one minister having authority over a number of local congregations. All of this speaks on behalf of the autonomy of the local congregation.

Based on the above, it seems justified to speak about a “city church.” If we take the Book of Romans as an example, Rome was the largest city of the Mediterranean world at the time of writing, which means there were probably many local home churches. And yet, when Paul writes to this church or churches, he addresses everyone in Rome (1:7) as members of one church. When Paul writes that we are members to each other (12:4–5), he does not just write to one specific local congregation, saying that they should view each other as members to one another (although that is also true), but he says that the local churches in Rome should view each other like that! Therefore, a “city church” is not made up of all congregations in a place or a city, which meet locally, and sometimes maybe even together, and are under the management of the apostles and prophets. On the contrary, in my understanding, a “city church” should include all those churches which find their identity in their place of residence (not in their denominational affiliation); which cooperate voluntarily (despite their differences); which are lead and inspired by the Holy Spirit and not a form of organization (because they realize they’re responsible to be witnesses in the place where they live); and which consider each other to be “members” to one another: partakers in one body, and not rivals.

Since every local *ekklesia* is a complete and real church, and not just a part of a larger church, and every local congregation is under the authority of Jesus Christ, we can speak about the autonomy of the local congregation. But this very fact is being violated by KN theology, which claims that the apostles are the ultimate authority in the church, claiming that the fivefold ministry lead by the apostles needs to govern all local congregations that make up the church in a place or a city. Although the term “city church” is meant to encourage all churches in a certain place that they are all one city church, placing this same city church under the authority of the apostles creates a hierarchical structure, which is opposed to New Testament teaching. In other words, the New Testament talks about a church *in* a certain place, but we do not find the idea that a certain number of local churches are structured according to their place of residence. So it is one thing to talk about the “church in Zagreb,” and it is another thing to speak about the “Zagreb church.” The first phrase

indicates a certain number of local churches which collectively make up the church that is in Zagreb, while the latter indicates a potential organization, a structure, and a hierarchy which includes all the local churches in Zagreb. This latter understanding is the basis of the “city church” idea in KN theology, while the former is the basis for my understanding of the idea.

Christology and anthropology

The last two theological areas of KN theology that require a critical review are Christology and anthropology. In regards to Christology, it was pointed out that KN theology advocates the idea of kenosis and promotes the teaching that Jesus died twice, and in regards to anthropology we encounter the divinization of believers.

Christology: a critical overview and conclusion

The theory of kenosis is based on Philipians 2:7, where Ljudevit Rupčić (KS) (and NASB) say “he emptied himself,” while the Duda-Fučak (and Aramaic Bible in plain English) says “he stripped himself”/“he robbed himself.” As we can see, Rupčić gives the interpretation where it is referring to the previous verse, which talks about “equality with God,” while Duda-Fučak is more literal and does not say what Jesus “stripped” himself of. G. F. Hawthorne (2004, 117) claims that it is possible to understand that Christ deprived Himself of His glory, the independent use of His own authority, the prerogative of divinity, the insignia of His majesty, the relative divine attributes - omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, equality with God, etc. However, Hawthorne eventually concludes: “But there is no basis for any of these speculative answers in the text of the hymn, simply because it gives no clue as to the object of Christ’s self-emptying.” But even though the verse ἐκένωσεν - “deprived himself” - has no object to reveal what exactly is it that Jesus emptied Himself of, R. R. Melick (1991, 103) makes the following excellent observation:

Two ideas modify the verb ‘made himself nothing.’ They are: taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. These statements explain both how this took place and what it means. Paradoxically, being ‘made nothing’ means adding humanity to deity rather than subtracting deity from his person. The language has a vagueness to it; that vagueness allows for theology which cannot be expressed easily, a theology of the relationships between the divine and human in Christ.

We need to add to this the understanding that God’s *form* and God’s *nature* are not synonymous:

The form of God in this passage is not the nature of God. God-form certainly presupposes a God-nature, but is not essential to it. Verse 7 draws a similar distinction on the human side of the kenosis; there is here a servant-form and also a human-nature. The nature is a necessary condition of the form, but the form is not essential to the nature. A man may cease to be a servant, but he cannot cease to be a man. Likewise, Deity may change form, but not nature (McClain 1967, 9).

As for the teaching that Jesus died twice, we do not have enough space to analyze this teaching, but let us just briefly consider Jesus' words from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?," and the idea that Jesus was born again in the resurrection. The statement "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is often understood among Christians as the moment when the Father turned His head away from His Son and abandoned Him. I am sure that many of us have heard sermons in our churches about how painful it was for the Father to have to abandon His Son. However, a more adequate interpretation, the one that considers the context of the times, would be that the Old Testament had not yet been divided into chapters and verses. So, if someone wanted to point out a passage in the Scripture, they would only cite the first verse of the passage. The quoted verse comes from the beginning of Psalm 22, which speaks prophetically about the passion of Jesus (cf. Stelter 2011, 193-94). In other words, Jesus quotes Scripture in order to clarify to those who hear Him that it was the moment of the fulfillment of the words written in Psalm 22. If Jesus did indeed die on the cross spiritually prior to His physical death, which would imply separation from God in order to be born again in resurrection, it remains unclear why Jesus would say to the criminal on the cross, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43), nor why would He say "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit" at the moment of His death (Lk 23:46).

As for the idea that Jesus' resurrection is actually His new birth, Acts 13,33-34 does indeed quote Psalm 2:7, "You are my Son, Today I have begotten you," and relates this to Jesus' resurrection. However, a proper understanding of these passages requires an understanding of the historical and literal contexts. Psalm 2 speaks about David's covenant, at the center of which is the concept of sonship:

The Davidic covenant was eternal, but all covenants were renewed from time to time; the principal form of renewal in the royal covenant took place in the coronation, when a new descendant of the Davidic dynasty ascended to the throne. Thus, the divine words 'you are my son' mark a renewal of the relationship between God and David's house in the person of the newly crowned king. 'Today' points to the fact that the words were announced on the coronation day, the day on which the divine decree became effective... 'I have begotten you' is metaphorical language; it means more than simply adoption,

which has legal overtones, and implies that a ‘new birth’ of a divine nature took place during the coronation. It is important to stress, nevertheless, that the Davidic king, as son of God, was a human being, not a divine being, as was held in certain Near Eastern concepts of kingship (Craigie 1998, 67).

John Goldingay (2006, 100) makes a similar claim in his commentary on Psalm 2:7:

Yhwh did not bring him into being then but did enter into a fatherly commitment to him in adopting him as son. The words uttered on that occasion made him heir to his father’s wealth and authority and are the undergirding of his position now. To judge from practice elsewhere in the Middle East, ‘You are my son’ is a performative declaration of adoption.

In line with this, the “birth” from Acts 13:32-33 is connected to Jesus’ resurrection, because in this way God fulfilled the promise given to David about his descendant sitting on the throne forever. And just like the “birth” of kings from David’s line did not refer to the alteration of their being, but to the act of the public manifestation of their status, so Jesus’ “birth” that is connected to the resurrection does not refer to the *man* Jesus becoming *divine* again, but to the act of the public manifestation of His status and identity:

To what does ‘today’ refer? In the context Paul seems to have been implying the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus was indeed the Son of God from all eternity and recognized as such throughout his earthly life (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 9:35). But it was through the resurrection that he was exalted to God’s right hand, enthroned as Son of God, and recognized as such by believing humans. It was through the resurrection that he was declared Son of God with power (Rom 1:4) (Polhill 1992, 304).

Anthropology: a critical overview and conclusion

The key problem in the anthropology of KN theology is the divinization of man, which largely shows their over-realized eschatology, which does not only include anthropology, but some of their other theological areas as well. What follows is the consideration of the question of the believer’s true identity, sinful nature, forgiveness of sins, and the teaching that realities are created through faith.

The question of identity

KN theology places a strong emphasis on the believer’s identity, and a part of it is the teaching according to which Christians already are “kings” now. Some of the key passages are found in Revelation 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6, where we find two terms: “kingdom” and “priests.” In Rev 1:6 we find the construction βασιλείαν,

ἱερεῖς - “a kingdom, priests”; in Rev 5:10 there is *ἐποίησας... βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς; καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* - “you have made them a kingdom and priests... and they will reign upon the earth,” while in Rev 20:6 we read: *ἔσονται ἱερεῖς... καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν* - “they will be priests... and will reign.”

In 1:6 and 5:10 we find the phrase, *βασιλείαν* - “kingdom” – in the singular, and *ἱερεῖς* - “priests”, in the plural. But what is the relationship between these two nouns in the accusative case? In Rev 1:6 they can be literally translated as “kingdom, priests,” but other possible meanings include “kingdom of priests” (Rupčić), and “kings and priests” (King James Version). In 5:10 the literal translation is “kingdom and priests,” but if we understand the conjunction “and” as a hendiadys,³ the passage can then be understood as “priestly kingdom,” and this phrase is similar to the phrase “kingdom of priests” in 1 Pet 2:9 (cf. Ellis 2002, 231). As for the idea of kingship, Rev 5:10 says that the believers have *now* already been made a kingdom and priests, while their kingship relates to a future time, and pertains to the earth.

In Rev 20:6 the idea of kingship and priesthood is connected to the “first resurrection.” Depending on various eschatological understandings, this phrase can refer to the physical resurrection at the beginning of Christ millennial reign on earth (premillennialism), the moment of salvation, when a person is spiritually revived/born again (postmillennialism, amillennialism), or the condition of the soul that is now in heaven with Christ (amillennialism).

Gordon Fee (2013, 9) thinks that the passage in Rev 1:6 is somewhat unclear, but the passage uses the language of Exodus 19:6. The purpose of the passage is to emphasize that “God’s newly formed people are kingdom, replacing the former Davidic kingdom... At the same time they/we are to serve as his ‘priests’ on behalf of others, especially those who constitute to be slaves to sin and thus to the power of Satan.” In other words, Fee emphasizes the meaning of *βασιλείαν* as “kingdom,” and not “kings,” as is done in the KJV translation. This seems to be justified, because the word *βασιλείαν* appears 61 times in the NT. And with the exception of Rev 1:6 and 5:10, the word always denotes the abstract term “kingdom,” and not “kings.” It is then best to understand this passage in a way suggested by R. G. Bratcher and H. Hatton (1993, 21-22): “The literal rendition of RSV⁴ [And made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father] makes for an unnatural sentence in English. The meaning is better brought out by TEV⁵ “a kingdom of priests,” the kingdom established by God and Christ, in which the followers of Christ serve as priests.” However, there are different interpretations as well.

3 Expressing one idea using two words and the conjunction “and”.

4 Revised Standard Version.

5 Today’s English Version.

In commenting on Rev 1:6, K. G. Beale (1999, 192-93) proposes an interpretation according to which John calls believers kings:

Christ's death and resurrection (v. 5) established a twofold office, not only for himself (cf. also vv. 13-18) but also for believers. Their identification with his resurrection and kingship (v. 5a) means that they too are considered to be resurrected and exercising rule with him as a result of his exaltation: he is "the ruler of the kings of the earth ... [so that] he made them a kingdom." They not only have been made part of his kingdom and his subjects, but they have also been constituted kings together with him and share his priestly office by virtue of their identification with his death and resurrection. Some maintain, however, that the saints exercise priesthood but are only citizens in the kingdom and do not yet exercise kingship, since that will come only at the final coming of Christ (cf. 20:6 and 22:5). One response to this contention is that, since the two words are conjoined so closely, the burden of proof is on those who affirm that the one function begins now while the other does not.

Grant R. Osborne (2002, 65-66) holds a similar opinion to Beale's, but unlike Beale, he calls for the necessity of applying the inaugurated eschatology.

They are a 'kingdom' in the sense not only of inhabiting God's kingdom (i.e. the realm within which God reigns) but also of ruling with Christ in it (i.e. royalty); in other words, the abstract 'kingdom' (taking the singular noun in a corporate sense) stands also for the concrete 'king'. The concept of the saints participating in God's rule occurs frequently (2:26 'authority over the nations'; 3:21, 'sit with me on my throne'; 5:10, 'reign on earth'; 20:4, 'authority to judge'; 20:6, 'reign with him')... The 'kingship' is active and means to 'rule in his name'. It should be understood that in an inaugurated sense, referring to Christ's rule now as an anticipation of the future.

Later on, Osborne (2002, 67) emphasizes again: "Here the inaugurated eschatology [my emphasis] of the book must be applied. That reign has begun (note the past tenses in 1:5-6), but the thesis of the book is that it has not yet been finally culminated (although that culmination is imminent). In the present the believers are to persevere in their service to God and thus to participate anew in Jesus' priestly work."

Sinful nature

The teaching that believers do not have a sinful nature is yet another attempt at divinizing believers, which is made possible by the "over-realized eschatology" which we have mentioned earlier. However, I want to point out that not all proponents of KN theology necessarily teach this. I am primarily referring to the teaching propagated by the Bethel Church in Redding (Bill Johnson, Kris Vallotton), which is one of the leading churches of the movement. According to them,

it seems that our Christian bodies have already experienced the final redemption and the overall transformation. Although this article does not permit us to go into depth with this subject, it is enough to point out chapter 8 of Romans, where Paul says in v. 20 that the creation was “subjected to futility,” and in v. 21 that this creation is now in “slavery to corruption.” But the ultimate goal is that the creation would also take part in the “glory of the children of God.” However, neither has the creation nor have those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit yet attained this, because the creation “groans and suffers the pains of childbirth” (v. 22), just like believers sigh, “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (v. 23). From v. 23 forward Paul expounds on the terms “hope” and “salvation,” which means that he is dealing with soteriology here. We hope for the ultimate redemption of our bodies and the glory of children of God, but until that happens, we have the Spirit who helps us in our “weakness.” It is interesting that the term “weakness” - ἀσθένεια - can mean physical weakness (sickness, weakness caused by circumstances), but also the weakness of human nature - the flesh. We can add to this Paul’s teaching in Galatians 5:16-17, where there is a clear emphasis on the antithesis between the Spirit and the flesh. In 5:16 Paul gives the command of “walking in the Spirit” by using the imperative present tense περιπατεῖτε, which is important because it is used to express the necessity of permanently walking in the Spirit. Furthermore, in 5:17 Paul uses the present tense verbs ἐπιθυμῶ - “yearns” - and ἀντίκειται - “opposes” in order to emphasize the continuity of the desire of the flesh against the Spirit, and vice versa, as a condition where those two continually *oppose* one another.

Forgiveness of sins

As far as forgiveness of sins is concerned, this teaching is also typical of the Bethel church, although I have no doubt that it has been spread in other Evangelical churches as well. As we have seen, Vallotton thinks that reconciliation, which was achieved by God through Christ, implies that believers also have the right to forgive people their sins, since we have the *same* ministry of reconciliation. But what is Paul really teaching in 2 Cor 5? Again, we do not have enough space to discuss this subject in depth, but it is important to emphasize the following: reconciliation implies that forgiveness and justification have been given, because in the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*), being in peace with somebody implies the forgiveness of transgressions, and justification. So how shall we interpret Paul’s claim that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them”?

The reconciliation which was achieved by God is an objective fact, which took place at a certain time in history, and as far as God is concerned, it is a matter that is finished and done. But does that mean that God has forgiven (in the

past) people their sins, and that we *can receive* this forgiveness if we repent, or is it more accurate to say that we *can receive* forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice if we repent? What is the difference between these two views? The first view emphasizes that God has already given us forgiveness, and repentance enables us to receive that which was already given to us (i.e. repentance is not here for God to *give* us forgiveness, but enables us to receive that which we have already been given), while the other view emphasizes the fact that Christ's sacrifice allows us to receive forgiveness if we forgive (i.e. repentance is a *prerequisite* for receiving forgiveness). Without getting into a discussion and the implications of both views, I think that it is more accurate to focus on the fact that reconciliation has been achieved *in Christ*. When Paul says that God has reconciled the world to Himself, he is not claiming that God has given the whole world forgiveness and a justified status *a priori* in advance, nor is he saying that God is no longer counting people's transgressions against them. Rather, the focus of Paul's ministry is bringing people "into Christ," because that is where the forgiveness, which was given, is. Note that v. 18 states that the world *already is reconciled* with God, but v. 20 says that people *need to be reconciled* with God. It is because of this tension that I think it is wrong to interpret that God has given forgiveness to people in advance and brought them to reconciliation, or that our ministry involves forgiving people's sins, as is suggested by Vallotton.

Creating through faith

And finally, we need to say something about the teaching according to which believers have the ability to use their speech in faith to create visible realities from the invisible dimension of their faith. This teaching comes from the *Faith movement*, but it also found fertile ground in KN theology as well. According to the *Faith movement*, the concept of faith is not so much about trusting in God as the object of our faith, as much it is a power and/or substance which is transferred through words, as an active principle. And if believers understand their *rights* in Christ, and if they become aware of these realities, they will be able to master this "force" and use it to their advantage in order to change circumstances. So, it is not so much about faith as "trusting God," as it is about believers using the power of their faith ("faith of God") creating realities (cf. Hanegraaff 2012, 96-99). This teaching is based on a twisted understanding of the act of creation, where God uttered words, believed in what He was saying, and everything came into being.⁶

6 In accordance with this, the *Faith movement*, as well as KN theology, promotes a teaching in which man is defined as "spirit with a soul, who lives in a body." This is an important definition, because it means that man is primarily spirit, just like God. However, this is an erroneous definition, because man is equally spirit, soul, and body.

This in turn implies the absurd understanding that the all-knowing and omnipresent God needs *faith* (see definition of faith in Heb 11:1). Furthermore, in Mark 11:22 Jesus says, *Ἐχετε πίστιν θεοῦ*, which literally means, “have the faith of God” (Duda-Fučák), in the sense of “have the kind of faith God has.” This translation reflects the understanding that the genitive “of God” should be interpreted as the *subjective genitive*. However, the Greek language allows for understanding this construction as an *objective genitive*, in which case it is translated as, “have faith in God.” The translation implies that God is the *object* of our faith. In addition, Jesus said to His disciples that if they tell “*this* [my emphasis] mountain” to get up and throw itself into the sea and if they believe that what they say will come true, so it shall be. But then, Jesus goes on to talk about “praying” and “asking” (Mk. 11:24), where the emphasis is no longer on what I am saying in faith, but on what I am asking from God in faith and through faith. In regards to the meaning of “this mountain,” based on Matthew 21:21, Ralph Bass (2004, 223) claims the following in his commentary on Revelation:

This is a passage that has made little sense to many Christians, for certainly none of us have ever known a believer who prayed such a prayer. But notice the context in which it was spoken: first we have the Triumphal Entry, next we see the Cleansing of the Temple, and last we have the story of the Barren Fig Tree. In this context, Christ is presenting Himself to Israel as their Messiah. In that capacity He is cleansing his own temple. He then illustrates Israel’s rejection of His rule in the story of the barren fig tree. It is at this point that He mentions prayer and casting this mountain (8:8), not mountains in general, but this mountain (8:8), as He looked at Jerusalem, into the sea, the Gentile world. And so we see it here fulfilled in A.D. 70.

Similar to Bass, Warren Carter (2000, 422) claims:

What mountain does Jesus refer to? In the context of 21:12-17, it is the temple mount. To throw it into the sea recalls the judgment on the demons/pigs as representatives of Roman military power in 8:28-34. The temple system with its exploitation of the poor and advancement of the elites’ interests goes the same way. Faith, then, is the means of encountering God’s empire, and of anticipating, imagining, living for, and praying for a new world under God’s just and merciful reign.

Add to this the idea that the picture of throwing the mountain into the sea is a picture of the judgment in which the pagans will “swallow the city” (cf. Barber 2006, 125).

Instead of the conclusion: summary of KN theology and its potentially positive contribution to Evangelical Christianity

KN theology has two crucial problems: the first problem is the “over-realized eschatology” wherein the blessings of salvation which belong to the future and the time of Christ’s coming are ascribed to the present time, and the second problem is humanizing Jesus, who is the Christ, and the divinization of believers. The first problem can be viewed as one which arises either from the exaggerated eagerness to see the blessings of God’s reign, or from a theological misunderstanding of the Scriptures. But which Christian would not like to see and experience God’s activity, His power and the manifestation of His authority here and now? The apostle Paul faced a similar situation in the church in Corinth, where some believed they were already reigning as kings (1 Cor. 4:8). One such matter is the Bethel teaching about erasing the sinful nature. However, only when our bodies are ultimately redeemed in resurrection will we be able to say that sin no longer dwells in our bodies. Teaching that this is already a reality is incorrect. It is equally incorrect that we are now already “kings.” Only when Christ comes again will our reign with Him begin, but even then it will not mean that every believer becomes a “king.” Because if that were the case, who would be the subjects of all these “kings” in God’s Kingdom? There would not be any, if everyone were a king.

The second problem is not at all harmless, because it interferes with the foundational truths of Christian orthodoxy. Elevating man to God’s level and lowering God to man’s level reflects the very temptation from the Garden of Eden, when Satan promised to Adam and Eve that they would “be like gods.” And while classical orthodox theology sees God as Creator, Master, and Savior of all that was created, in KN theology it is man who reigns, it is man who replaces God, and it is man who is attributed with attributes that belong only to God. Belonging in the same category is the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28, which says that man is the ruler of earth and of heavenly beings; the teaching about spiritual warfare which steps out of the bounds of biblical teaching; the teaching that the church is the “second Christ”; teachings from the area of Christology which promote kenosis and the idea that Jesus died twice, as well as the idea of anthropology when promoting the power of creating through, and the right to forgive people’s sins. Implicitly, it also includes the teaching that believers no longer have a sinful nature, which serves to equalize believers with God. The idea that the apostles should rule over local churches is not necessarily connected to the over-realized eschatology and with equalizing believers with God, but is rather an expression of the fallen human nature which wants to rule, instead of being subjected to God.

In spite of all this, we need to take a closer look at the positive things that KN theology brings. That is why in the end I want to emphasize the positive

challenges that Kingdom Now is bringing to Christianity. Of course, I am being subjective here, because what I consider a positive challenge can seem completely wrong or futile to others. However, these things reflect my theological understanding, which I am basing on my understanding of what the Scripture teaches about what the church should be and how it should operate. In line with this, I would like to point out five challenges brought by Kingdom Now theology which, I believe, point in the right direction for the church, but not necessarily in the way KN theology suggests.

The first challenge is emphasizing the claim that the church today should recognize and practice the five-fold ministry, based on Ephesians 4:11-16. This is a huge challenge, because for centuries Protestant churches acknowledged the ministries of pastors, teachers, and evangelists, but not those of apostles and prophets. This was a basis for building and developing an entire structure of relationships and church government in which there was no room for apostles and prophets. I believe that the New Testament teaches that the ministry of the apostles and prophets did not end with the death of the Twelve, but it does not offer a very clear teaching as to what the ministry of the apostles, who are not at the same level as the Twelve, should look like. It would be easiest to say that missionaries are today's apostles, but is that really the case?

Second, I think a positive teaching, which KN theology inherited from Pentecostalism, emphasizes the need and necessity for believers to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Charismaticism (the so-called "second wave of the Spirit"), unlike classic Pentecostalism, often does not differentiate between baptism in the Spirit as a separate experience from being born again (and even if it does, it does not emphasize tongues as a sign of baptism of the Spirit) (cf. Menzies & Menzies 2000, 31), and it is the same with neocharismatics, or the "third wave of the Spirit" charismatics (cf. Synan 2001, 396). Emphasizing the necessity for believers to have the experience and to utilize the gifts of the Spirit is surely a step in the right direction when compared to church traditions which have neglected the necessity of gifts of the Spirit, or have categorized these supernatural manifestations as "spiritual gifts," reducing them to ordinary human activity. The gifts of the Spirit that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are a necessary and integral part of Christianity and Christian worship, and they should not be neglected for the sake of some kind of order or due to fear of abuse.

Third, KN theology emphasizes talking about the believer's identity as the basis for their action. And while the rule of thumb in life is usually that we need to *make an effort* and *work* if we want to *be* something, in Christianity God already made believers into what they need to *be*, so now it is up to them to live what they *are*. It is crucial to understand that our identity in Christ gives us a basis for what we need to do. Unfortunately, the Sunday sermons sometimes boil down to talk-

ing about what believers should and should not do, or what they should do more, and what they should do less. Although this kind of rhetoric does have a place in the pulpit, unless believers have been properly instructed about who they are in Christ, their doing and living for God will be flawed, and their actions will often be aimed at becoming something that they already are in Christ.

Fourth, I think that KN theology correctly emphasizes the need for signs and wonders to follow the proclamation of the Gospel even today. Jesus was proclaiming the message of the Kingdom, and the coming of the Kingdom is a visible thing, as described in the Old Testament. This is a message both for the ears and for the eyes. Jesus was sending His disciples to proclaim the message of the coming Kingdom that was visibly accompanied by signs and wonders (Mt 10; Lk 9 and 10), and He promised that those who believe will be accompanied by signs and wonders (Mk 16). We see pattern of operation in Acts, as well. Jesus and His Kingdom are proclaimed with words, but they are also accompanied by wonders.

Fifth, emphasizing that all believers should use their gifts and use them to serve not only in the church, but wherever they are, is commendable. This is a welcome change that is opposed to a system where church members are used in the service of supporting the ministry of one person (i.e. a pastor) or a group of distinguished ministers. Also, this makes any place where believers meet, and not just church, a primary place of ministry. This is important, because it is sometimes considered that church is the only place where believers can serve using their gifts, and if they are unable to do that, they feel neglected. In larger churches, not everybody can have a position or get their turn to serve, so there is always the danger of discontent, as well as of developing the “audience mentality.” This happens when believers, for whatever reason, fail to understand that the field is the world, and not the local church, and that they have been called to serve people in the world. Since they are not doing that, and they are unable to serve in the church, they become dissatisfied and they start viewing their life and their church attendance as just another activity they practice, which turns them into spectators.

In conclusion, if we hear what KN theology proponents are saying, they are correctly calling the church to abandon a ghetto mentality, or the “little flock” mentality, to become practical in its teaching and life, and to reject those aspects of theological education which do not contribute to being prepared for the work of service. They are calling for a renewal and the recognition of the fivefold ministry from Ephesians 4:11 as God’s lasting gift to His church; they are calling for rejecting the church’s identity based on denomination, and for finding common ground in mutual activities of all born-again believers in a certain town. They are also helping the church see the power and the force of God’s message, which not

only changes the individual from within, but can also touch and transform every area of human existence. However, these emphases can come at the expense of twisting the Scriptures, as we have pointed out in this article. And all these positive emphases and teachings go down the drain the moment they are applied and realized in a wrong way. So the hope remains that the church of Jesus Christ will not “exceed what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6), but at the same time will not neglect, lose, and ignore all those things which are written in the Scriptures.

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Problematika izazova teologije „kraljevstvo sada“ – II. dio

Sažetak

U drugome dijelu članka uvodno se navode pozitivni izazovi teologije „kraljevstvo sada“, a nakon toga se analiziraju njezina učenja u području soteriologije, eshatologije, ekleziologije, kristologije i antropologije. Na temelju teološko-biblijske analize, zaključuje se kako teologija „kraljevstvo sada“ sadrži dva osnovna problema: prvi je problem „pretjerano ostvarena eshatologija“, gdje se blagoslovi spasenja koji se odnose na buduće vrijeme – na vrijeme Kristova

dolaska, pripisuju sadašnjem vremenu, a drugi je problem počovječivanje Krista i divinizacija vjernika. U skladu s tim izražava se potreba da se prepozna i prihvati ono pozitivno što teologija „kraljevstvo sada“ donosi kršćanstvu, ali jednako tako da se prepozna i odbaci sva ona loša i heretička učenja i prakse.