The Resurrection of Christ and the Eschatological Vision of the Kingdom of God as the Platform for Evangelistic Practice: The Challenges and Possibilities of the Evangelical Commission

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UDK: 266:234
Preliminary Communication
Received: September, 2008.
Accepted: October, 2008.

Abstract

The article investigates the possibilities and challenges to Evangelical evangelistic practice in the framework of the unbroken historical continuty between the resurrection of Christ and the eschatological realization of the kingdom of God on earth. This continutiy is conceived as a dynamic conclusion of the history of salvation and relies on the theological formula of the "inaugurated kingdom" which "is but is not yet" realized. The resurrection of Christ is, in this way, recognized as the realized segment of the kingdom, i.e. it takes over the "is" part of the formula and so defines the key message of the gospel because it guarantees and fulfills the full realization of the kingdom. This future realization is recognized as Christ's return in glory and the universal resurrection, and thus absorbs the "not yet" part of the aforementioned theological formula.

This construct operates as a historical paradigm, and evangelism is conceived and actualized within this framework. Certain ahistorical elements of Evangelical identity and strategies of evangelism are investigated against this background, for example: the intuitive indentification of the message of the gospel with the manner of salvation by faith alone, or assigning primacy to the personal experience of God's immanent presence at the expense of the public, and the collective and inclusive direction of the message of the gospel. In the conclusion, the article touches on several advantages of Evangelical Christianity in the proposed paradigm and possibilities for evangelism, particularly in the Croatian context.

Key Words: *eshaton, kingdom, gospel, evangelism, Evangelical Christianity, soteriology, history, world, Croatia*

Introduction

"If I died tonight, what do you think – where would I go?" Many Evangelical Christians think that this question opens the door to the message of the gospel. The question is directed to a hypothetical individual who is suspected of trying to make him or herself worthy of God's salvation and thus unconsciously earn it. Whether or not that is the case will be clear if the reply is, for example, "I do not know," or "I try and hope." The question tends to unveil the absurdity of the speculation related to eternal fate and wishes to reveal the alienation from God whose intentions towards the individual are obviously unknown. The expected reply is followed by the soteriological exposition of Christ's death on the cross which the Evangelical interviewer will present as the message of the gospel: "All that you need before God, Christ paid for with his death and acquired through his resurrection. You only need to accept that salvation by faith as a personal gift. Subsequently you will receive the promised Holy Spirit and your life with God will commence." Evangelical Christians often presume, consciously or not, that this scenario represents the core of the gospel.

In this case, the gospel becomes contracted soteriological information, and salvation is incepted (or realized) through the act of its private acceptance by the individual who has been exposed to it. However, the message of the gospel, as it is revealed in the New Testament, does not easily lend itself to this soteriological reduction nor to the level of personal salvation and/or experience with God, but seeks a wider actualization and practice. With the possible exception of the letter to the Galatians in which, as it seems, the contents of the gospel are related to the soteriological debate about "how a human becomes justified before God" (Gal 1:6-9; 2:15f.)[1], the most direct, and thereby also exegetically committing, New Testament claims about the content of the gospel gravitate towards the notion of the kingdom of God (Mk 1:14-15; Mt 4:23; Lk 16:16) and the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-4). Therefore, it may be stated that the logic of the message of the gospel unites within itself the kingdom of God and the resurrection of Jesus, and defines them as a narrative guideline for all other Christian topics (Constantineanu, 2008:11-12). Salvation is a truly constituent part of the main concern of the gospel, namely that the kingdom of God is near and therefore the

[1] Even these explicit verses from the letter to the Galatians, which support a narrower soteriological content of the gospel, operate as a reply to the concrete challenge – as the application of the gospel - and not so much as central pillars of its meaning on which they throw light only retroactively (Erickson, 1985:1063). For the interpretation of the gospel in the letter to the Galatians as the announcement of Christ's Lordship, opposed to that of the Roman emperor, in the paradigm of the so-called New perspective on Paul, see N. T. Wright, *Gospel and Theology in Galatians*, http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Gospel_Theology_Galatians.pdf, visited on 30th June 2008.

witnesses of this nearness must repent and convert; also, Jesus has risen "for our sins." Still, the focus of the gospel is not in the soteriologically narrowed-down motive for the salvation of human beings, but in the demonstration of God's intervention in the history of the world through the ministry and destiny of Jesus Christ. This historical intervention of God does not exhaust the scope of its effect on the salvation of human beings, but includes the cosmic totality of the whole creation as the domain of God's reign (comp. Rom 8:18-24). In the cosmological paragraph of the letter to the Colossians, Paul utilizes poetic language to reveal that the gospel has been announced to all people, but also to "every creature under the heavens" (Col 1:23). How, then, should the gospel be proclaimed without being blind to that part of its audience, and what does this imply for Evangelical identity and the Evangelical outlook on the whole world?

1. The Gospel from a Vacuum into Time and Space

When Christians embrace the Reformation exclamation "sola Scriptura" as their religious heritage, and in this way opt for the biblical system of authority, they automatically inherit an inherent tension towards two mutually related issues: Christian tradition and the historical development which has nursed it. To this is also added the experience of a personal conversion to God through the intervention of the Holy Spirit which is not guaranteed merely by belonging to a certain tradition, but depends on the individual's conscious decision for Christ. In this way, the exclamation, "Scripture alone" is joined by the exclamation, "conversion alone," and the significance of the history of the world from the perspective of the Scriptures and God's work of salvation (which is not suitable for exclamations) becomes a mere pragmatic framework for that which is considered truly important.

Evangelical Christianity is primarily characterized by these two exclamations, ushering in the temptation to proclaim a timeless gospel which is, by its contents, de facto directed at human destiny isolated from the circumstances of history and creation, that is, from time and space. This temptation is not eliminated by cultural sensitivity with which contemporary Evangelical missions contextualize the identities of people and the message being offered to them (Kraft, 1979). The concern here is the mediation of the gospel in a trans-cultural way, not the scope of its directedness. The anthropological calibration of the gospel really saves the evangelist from a multiplicity of stereotypes and blind alleys, but in itself does not guarantee that, in the evangelist's eyes, the world which interprets human beings will also be the world which will be resurrected with them. The evangelist who is defined by the Bible which he or she has in hand, and by the trust in the direct intervention of God's Spirit still, despite all missiological provisions, runs the risk

of proclaiming the gospel exclusively to the human heart – the heart evacuated from the world and thrown in a vacuum, where it awaits a direct relationship with the divine while it closes its eyes in the fervent prayer for the exclusion of the disturbing stimuli of the world. This is not a false, but a dislocated, gospel because it seeks to bring a human being into heaven while almost saving him or her from the earth, in contradiction to the desire for them to join in the realized kingdom, as is revealed in the most famous pattern of Christian prayer (Mt 6:10) (Wright 2008:291-295).

If the content of the message of the gospel in its Synoptic trajectory explicitly connects the kingdom of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ,[2] (Christ's earthly ministry: the manifestation of the kingdom; Christ's death and resurrection: the assurance of the kingdom; Christ's return: the realization of the kingdom), then Evangelical Christianity must exert the same conviction with which it insists on Christ's bodily resurrection in time and space[3] to also insist on the kingdom of God, which is located in time and space. The pagan vision of life beyond the grave may imagine salvation independently of the material world, but the resurrection which does not accept an existence beyond the grave – but leaves the grave itself empty, robbing it of any power over the body (comp. 1 Cor 15:54-55) – needs the material world and history to manifest and realize itself. If, by his sin, the first Adam occasioned death and submitted all life to it (Gen 1:17b-18; Rom 5:12), and if the solution arrived via a parallel revolution and the "last Adam's" victory over death (1 Cor 15:45), then the world which is in time and space must be enveloped in the victory of the resurrection just as humanity is. That is why Paul's perspective on the awaiting of the final consummation of

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[2] To be sure, the content of the message of the gospel is not the only element which connects resurrection and the kingdom; the Pharisaic sect integrated these two notions totally independently of Jesus from Nazareth which, most certainly, is not exclusive to them (Wright, 1992:328). Not taking the twelfth chapter of the book of Daniel into account, the idea of the kingdom and the resurrection most probably drew its content from the Hasmonean royalist struggle for the establishment of a Jewish theocratic kingdom in opposition to the Syrian and Macedonian pagan influence. The fighters who were killed in the battle for the kingdom of God in Israel will not be excluded from it once it is realized in the future, but will be resurrected by God so that they also can inherit it (2 Macabees 7:9; 14; 21-23; 29; 33; 36-38). The echoes of this hope is also found in the letter to the Hebrews (11:35-38). For a survey of the topics related to the resurrection and the kingdom as treated in the Old Testament, and the Judaism of the ancient period, see Wright (2003:103-128), particularly 121-127.

[3] This is what Evangelical Christianity, at least its conservative wing, heartily does, but more in a denominational sense as fencing against the heritage of the 19th century liberal theology, by treating the historical resurrection of Christ almost as the identification stamp of orthodoxy and religious committment, and not as the central engine of its commission to the world (see the document "The Fundamentals" from 1910/15; and its contextualization: Jambrek, 2007:187).

salvation, in addition to God's children, also speaks of the world (creation) which awaits its redemption while groaning as in pain together with humanity (Rom 8:19-23).

This is another reminder that the soteriological perspective of the gospel can not be limited to the eternal destiny of an individual to whom Christ's righteousness will be manifested at the heavenly judgment seat based on his or her faith (or lack thereof), and which will then be consummated in an abstract relationship with God. It is not difficult to imagine that the experience of earthly suffering and transience can increase a dualistic cosmology. In this framework, the notion of an immaterial and extra-historical salvation is an alluring temptation. With this frame of mind, the reading of paragraphs such as those descibing the destruction of the old heaven and earth by fire – in order to establish all as new, as in the Second Peter (3:7,10)[4] – increases the discontinuity between the old and the new almost to mutual exclusion (Chafer/Walvoord, 1974:128,334). Irrespective of the difference between the new earth and the old, and irrespective of the magnitude of the judgment by fire which separates them, they still stand in the same historical and essential continuity which provides them with a common platform for making the distinction of old/new and gives meaning and context to the eschatological triumph.

The gospel, understood as the message of justification before God and the establishment of a personal relationship with him, creates a field of gravitational pull which will bend the history of the world to achieve that goal, even if the earth completely vanishes from the horizon. That gravitational field bends not only history but also the resurrection of Christ itself which, in Evangelical Christianity, seems only to assume the secondary role of the guarantee and confirmation of human justification and eternity with God. Once it is dislodged from the gravitational center, the resurrection can be bent out all the way to becoming unreal and leaving, not only the framework of Evangelical Christianity, but also of Orthodox Christianity. However, when the resurrection of Christ is situated in the very center of Christian identity, by way of its questions about its nature, goal and meaning, it demands a holistic consideration of salvation as a relationship between God and saved humanity in the embrace of the "new heaven and new earth" which are no longer determined by the first Adam, but by the last Adam.

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[4] In this paragraph, Peter actually draws a parallel between, and contrasts the destruction of the world by flood (3:5-6) and by fire (3:7). In the second case, as in the first, the world will be radically altered, but it will still be the same world which retains its continuity by saving animal species of the antediluvian world through water judgment. Peter's strong rhetoric of discontinuity refers to the absolute triumph of cosmic righteousness over godlessness (3:7,13), and not to the rejection of this world.

2. The Eschatological Perspective of the Gospel

Evangelical Caution

Identification of the gospel with the resurrection of Christ and the kingdom of God, located in this world, reveals challenges which the private gospel and dematerialized kingdom do not face. It is one thing to proclaim salvation as a private eternity evacuated from the world, but it is something completely different to proclaim a dynamic salvation which takes place in the active participation in God's program for the overall renewal of the world. While the first variant of the message of the gospel will only touch the nerve of the immediate environment of an individual, the second option will challenge the whole world. This somewhat romanticized claim means that the sphere of God's realized kingdon subdues to itself all public spheres: politics, economy, law, ethics, philosophy, esthetics, arts, ecology and the epistemological assumptions of science which strain to achieve an overall mentorship over society, and innumerous other spheres which cannot be fully listed, but which form the fullness of the life of the world in time and space.

If we remind ourselves again that the proclamation of the kingdom is entrusted to the Christian church, it is understandable that even Christians feel uneasy in the face of such a wide scope for their mission. Christians themselves might be hardest hit by it because it is difficult to find an enterpreneurial character in the whole panorama of Christian denominations which would take up the central position in the same way that is the case in Evangelical Christianity. Nothing offends Evangelical sentiment in the same way as does inertia or passivity: the gospel is the message which is proclaimed to the world, and Christians who want to carry its name are branded not only by the content of this message, but also by the very act of its proclamation (Lindsay, 2007:3-4). The proactive proclamation of the kingdom of God which invades all spheres of human life – not only private but also public (which also includes the very sensitive sphere of politics) – looks like a renewal of the battle which was lost as long ago as the Enlightenment. Even worse is to adopt the imperialistic model of "evangelism" of the Roman Catholic Church from the period of the early Renaissance which, in a totalitarian way, rules the lives of the "converts" and the resources of the countries which belong to them according to the law set by God (Chaunu, 2002:150-4).

In his excellent article, "The Kingdom of God and Christian Unity and Fellowship," Constantineanu reflects an incipient Evangelical caution related to the study of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church which announces it in the name of Jesus Christ:

> It is significant to point out that the focus on Jesus as the manifestation and hope of the kingdom enables us to overcome the temptation and danger of conceiving the kingdom as a set of ideals or an ideal realm which we must

> proclaim and realize. Thus, to live in the kingdom and witness to its presence does not mean to implement a particular form of theocratic government, or that we should realize the kingdom in this world. Rather, to be a citizen of the kingdom of God is defined by our faithfulness to the true King, Jesus Christ and by our witness to the new life of peace that Christ has made, and is making, possible in this world (Constantineanu, 2008:15).

From the vantage point of the present article, this statement does not raise serious objections. Constantineanu directs Christians to Jesus as they carry on life on behalf of the kingdom which is not only legitimate from a biblical point of view, but also necessary. However, does this directing have to be set in opposition to the service to the kingdom in the world? Although nothing is taken away from the content and character of the kingdom, it seems that the enterpreneurship of its subjects is turned away from the risky tensions of the kingdom which penetrate the world and become protected in the faithfulness to Christ which then bears witness to the kingdom in the world only as a reflex.

The Gospel in the Eschatological Maze

It is true that western Christianity, of which Evangelical Christianity is an heir, carries a multitude of historical mistakes on its back as well as a multitude of theological quarrels which haunt modern, historically illuminated reflection about the proclamation of the gospel in the world and for the world. Every thought that the Christian Evangelical invitation echoes in all spheres of this world automatically evokes chaotic visions in the western logosphere of the theocratic tyranny of the church which, suffering from a darkened ambition, assumes royal authority and thus abuses the absence of the one and only King (Hörisch, 2007:167, cites Dostoyevski in Brothers Karamazov). The suggestion that the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (Mt 4:23) might focus on public societal spheres without being considered mere logistics for that which is truly important, is open to the suspicion that it is actually the question of a historically spent social gospel and a modernist ideology of an evolutionary progress which has been baptized into postmillenarian eschatological schemes, and whose only adherents, after the bloody 20th century, are theological adventurers (Erickson, 1985:1208-9). Therefore, the eschatological options of Evangelical Christians tend to be negative rather than affirmative, leading them to prevalent narrowmindedness and exclusivity. The eschatological scheme of classical dispensationalism, very popular in Evangelical circles (Pentecost 1964:373), has completely transported the kingdom into the eschatological future, robbing the church of any ambition to serve it. In contrast, the implicit eschatologies of the so-called "realized kingdom – now," embodied

in a special manner in the prefectionist evangelistic denominations,[5] places the immediate restriction of the kingdom in the lap of human responsibility. While it is even possible to condone the private efforts of a Christian to achieve the state of sanctification in which he or she no longer commits sin – and thus consummating the fullness of the kingdom which is "here and now" and which only awaits its realization through religious committment – the thought that it similarly controls public and societal Christian efforts in the historical perspective is completely unacceptable (Constantineanu, 2008:15). The latter is a necessary outcome if the kingdom, which has already arrived, is allowed access into the spiritual as well as the earthly sphere of operation. The easiest and most favorable solution is to dematerialize the kingdom and turn it into an ahistorical private sphere of personal spirituality in which an ambitious Christian may (impatiently) strive towards the kingdom without becoming a serious hindrance to society.

The proclamation of the gospel to the world and for the world, in time and space, can not avoid the complications of eschatological mazes which Evangelical Christianity has inherited from its forefathers. The question of the resolution of this problem is not merely academic, but first and foremost practical: What will God do with this world and its history, and what is the role of the church; how does its evangelistic activity fit into God's salvation project? Avoiding these questions by retreating into one form or another of a dualistic, ahistorical and anti material division is both biblically and historically unacceptable and self-deluding.

Ways to Resolution

Following the ridicule of Christian eschatology by the Enlightenment, it took considerable exegetical and hermeneutical wrangling between futuristic and realized eschatological models to eventually locate the academic consensus of the relative majority in the eschatological model known as the "inaugurated kingdom" (McGrath, 2006:534-5). It is an integrating eschatological paradigm which most elegantly unites biblical material, historical sensibility, theological directions and the experience of Christian practice, and at the same time has the fewest blind spots in its systematization. Its multiple usability is secured by its ability to consistently present the kingdom of God as one which has already arrived (is already inaugurated) into the world through the resurrection of Christ, but which has

[5] The identification of the perfectionist theology of sanctification with the eschatological realization of the kingdom may seem a stupendous mistake. For mutual overlaps and connections between these two notions in the dynamics of the operation of the Holy Spirit, by way of comparing the pietistically motivated eschatological notions of John Wesley and Jürgen Moltmann, see the favorable treatment by O'Malley, 1993.

not yet been fully realized and awaits its full realization in Christ's glorious return – the universal resurrection of humanity and the whole world. Since this model sees the beginning and the completion of the kingdom as marked by resurrection, it thus recognizes the church and its commission in the period between the two resurrections. Anchored in the resurrection of Christ in the past, the church announces, and in a certain sense serves, the inheritance of resurrection looking towards its future triumph. In this way, the burdensome baggage of the previously mentioned problems related to the theory and practice of Christian evangelism is lifted off in several ways, although it still does not become any less demanding.

First, the Christian awareness of the inaugurated kingdom lives in the creative tension unfavored by futuristic and realized eschatologies. An Evangelical eschatological futurist makes a radical break from meddling with complex socio-political relationships, and concentrates on the salvation of individual human souls. Conscious that a Christian lives in a fallen world in which the socio-political relationships disfigured by sin make it impossible to spread his or her wings, this Christian focuses on the conservation, i.e. the protection of the Church against the world, for the day of the kingdom. Such an evangelist operates as a paranoid, as some would put it, door-keeper of a Christian ghetto who envisions the church as threatened from all sides and who keeps watch in the struggle against perilous influences of all kinds. On the other hand, an Evangelical supporter of the realized kingdom, in the same way, dispenses with meddling with the complex implications of the absence of the kingdom and blames the human factor for all shortcomings of Christian living: "The Glory of the kingdom is here; only your sin separates you from it; repentance is the key which opens the door to spiritual awakening; faith is the key to bodily healing; committment and unity are the keys to social renewal." By refusing to recognize that those promises normatively belong to the future realized kingdom, while speaking of them now only as of an exceptional foretaste which serves as a pointer, the evangelist is susceptible to the radically negativistic view of Christianity which is embodied in the so-called worm theology. By incessant insistence on human failure and the need for repentance, the evangelist looks like a worker who possesses only a hammer, of all tools, so that everything resembles a nail to him.

In both cases, a radical break from one of the historical poles of the kingdom lead to the luxury of bold and uncompromised evangelistic activity, and these two factors will determine the value system of the evangelist. In contrast to these two models, an evangelist whose message stands in the eschatological tension of the inaugurated kingdom can not set up camp in either of these two bunkers. If the evangelist wants to proclaim the vulnerability of the church in the unrenewed world, the bodily resurrection of Christ within that world and in the background of the church would render this proclamation untenable. If, however, the

evangelist made an uncritical charge at the world in the name of Jesus Christ, the ineffable groaning of the Holy Spirit for the return of Christ (Rom 8:18-24; Rev 21:17,20) would wake in him or her a doubt about the justification of his or her action. To the great joy of enterpreneurial Evangelical Christians, the fact that the evangelist finds him or herself in an eschatological tension, implies that resignation or defeatism will not be a viable option; instead of favoring resolve and an uncompromising spirit, the evangelist will more likely be characterized by creativity (Wright, 2008:225f.). In this way, instead of embarking on a discreet quest for societal inopportunities – which would enable the evangelist to practice and defend his or her faithfulness to the gospel and the resolve for its proclamation – the evangelist will be occupied with finding and implementing creative solutions which will announce and present, and sometimes also literally mediate[6], the content of the past resurrection of Christ and of the new creation which grows out of it, as challenges to the world at large.

3. Evangelical Christianity and Evangelism in Croatia Today

Three Social Factors as Challenges

However inopportune it might be in an article of this format to try to present a cross-section of the Croatian social reality within which one might discern the realm of public evangelism, the "this-worldly" character of the gospel promoted above, must still, albeit in the broadest strokes, outline those social factors which create the stage on which Evangelical Christians practice their commission. It is true that those factors may be chosen according to different criteria and nuanced in several ways. Therefore, the three factors singled out must not be understood as the pillars of Croatian society which form the *conditio sine qua non* of successful evangelism, rather they are suggestions of a possible understanding of the Croatian public in which the gospel must breathe and grow.

Judging by the topics of the most frequent daily concerns of the public, including the country's foreign policy, contemporary Croatian social awareness exists in the narrative space delineated by the following factors: 1) Roman Catholic

[6] The main characteristic of kingdom evangelism which is inaugurated in the eschaton is the understanding that before the glorious return of Christ, "we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully..." (1 Cor 13:12a). This demands and enables a creative evangelistic effort which inspires in "faith, hope and love" (1 Cor 13:13). Although the resurrection of Christ marked the breakthrough of the kingdom into the world, whereby it leaves all scenarios of the manifestation of the new creation in the present time hypothetically possible, evangelism neither can nor must guarantee them in a normative sense ahead of time if it does not wish to nullify the notion of Christian hope.

identity, 2) pro-European political/cultural perspective, and 3) national identity construed from unresolved historical traumas (Kale, 1999). Using the Evangelical perspective as the starting point, let us briefly consider each of these factors, bearing in mind that they are mutually interrelated and that they must be enveloped by one thought and not defined separately.

By its Reformation tradition and religious experience, Evangelical Christianity stands, and will always stand, in critical tension with the Roman Catholic Church as a religious institution. That is a part of the identity of Evangelical Christianity, and perhaps a segment of its calling. However, there are two issues which demand consideration. The first is the character and content of the message of the gospel which is not an essentially soteriological bit of information, but a proclamation of the resurrection of Christ on behalf of the whole world. From that perspective, evangelism is the mediation of the message of life triumphant over death on all levels, and precisely that segment of evangelism cannot be denied by contemporary Roman Catholic activity. We may debate about how good or bad Roman Catholic institutions are at mediating the gospel, how accurately they have thought it through and how useful it is, but the Roman Catholic Church has declaratively identified its enemy as the so-called "culture of death"[7] and has focused on the battle against this culture in the name of the resurrection of Christ. That means that Evangelical Christians, in their efforts to evangelize Croatia, should not be hyper-sensitive to the Roman Catholic semi-pelagian soteriology and its sacramental-ecclesiastical mediatorial method which certainly offends the Evangelical quest for God's direct presence. Instead of yielding to the temptation to proclaim to the inhabitants of Croatia the exclusive message that "salvation is not by (Catholic) works but by (Evangelical) faith," they should recognize where and how to supplement this mediation of the resurrection in Croatia. With regard to its position in Croatian society, the Roman Catholic Church has legal and institutional means for its work of evangelism at its disposal with which Evangelicals can not compete. Therefore, its influence is mainly in the area of education and training, in contrast to the Evangelical Christians who, determined by their position in society, occupy the space of public involvement characteristic of NGO's. Consequently, Evangelicals do not primarily function in providing training, rather advocacy. For that reason, Evangelical Christians, in addition to their dynamic character, also possess societal predispositions for vital

[7] The phrase was coined by Pope John Paul II in opposition to the phrase, "the culture of life" in the 1996 encyclical Evangelium Vitae. While the narrower definition of the syntagm implied the battle against abortion, there also exists a wider definition which is in keeping with the logic of the resurrection in history (see the book *Arhitekti kulture smrti* by Donald de Marco and Benjamin Wiker, Verbum, 2007).

activism (evangelism) which enables them to operate in a way in which the Roman Catholic Church does not operate. In searching for a good illustration, the first that comes to mind is the race between the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church and the ideologically self-abnegating anti-Fascist lobby which surfaces twice a year at the commemorations for the victims of Bleiburg and Jasenovac. Both commemorations have become metaphors for mutual recriminations for the unrepented sins of the past. By emphasizing their own victims, the two sides paralyze each other in their efforts to reach forgiveness and reconciliation. If the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia feels forced – through historical determination or perhaps by its own lack of orientation – to appeal to Abel's death which cries for retribution from the earth, in order to combat the same demands from Jasenovac, Evangelical Christians should proclaim to both sides that the blood of Christ speaks louder than Abel's (Heb 12:24).

The model of evangelism which supplements the initiatives of the Roman Catholic Church does not mean giving up the battle for the soteriological correctness of the gospel and its consequences for spiritual experience, but rather it means that the battle in Croatia should be transformed into a matter of Christian "internal affairs."[8] This is primarily due to the second reason which alerts against the Evangelical tendency towards anti-Catholicism, and which is connected with the Croatian pro-European orientation. Despite overall Roman Catholic domination, Croatian public opinion is largely formed within the space influenced by media which de facto serves pro-European cultural politics, and which is in tension with the Roman-Catholic position (Weigel, 2004). Although it is too early to give a full assessment of the identity of the so-called New Europe, especially regarding its position relating to its Christian heritage, this cluster of issues raises questions whose answers to the world await with more than neutral detachment (Bogešić, 2008:122-123). The crisis related to the debunked European Constitution which sought to marginalize the European Christian heritage (although it was not abandoned for that reason) is not the only reason for restraining Christian optimism. Contemporary European identity assumes a radical deconstruction of Christian eschatology which determined the past, and which was already realized in the 19th century (Gadamer, 1997:53), so that Europe would experience its return as its own loss. In this light, it is neither irrelevant nor alarming to consider the future of Croatia in Europe which incorporates significant curbs

[8] By "internal" I do not imply any ecumenical pattern. I use the notion "internal" in contrast to the orientation of a super-soteriological vision of the gospel directed to the dying world – outwordly. Regarding the argument of the present article, intra-Christian "internal" relationships also have enough room for proselytizing. What is important is to unburden the message of the gospel in Croatia of anti-Catholicism.

on Christian influence. The fluctuations of values espoused by a united Europe and the multiconfessional character of a united Europe point to a certain loss of platform for the pastoral and training activity of the Roman Catholic Church in the public sphere, and of its subsequent move to the advocacy role of religious engagement in civil society. Although it seems almost certain that the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia will not be relegated to the position of just one of many religious communities which operate within Croatia, it should not come as too great of a surprise if Evangelical Christians discover that their evangelistic challenges increasingly set them side by side, and less and less face to face, with the Roman Catholic Church. To insist that the two can not pull in the same yoke of evangelistic interest in individual cases until soteriological issues are resolved – as well as the questions of authentic religious experience, often in the confrontational language of a public debate – might mean the loss of relevance for Evangelical Christianity, its elimination from public life and a return to an exclusively individualistic strategy of evangelism.

The third factor in which Croatian Evangelical Christians can play a distinct evangelistic role in the context of the eschatological model of the inaugurated kingdom is the announcement of the resurrection of the Croatian national spirit. This aspect of the application of the gospel will have particular difficulty in carving out space for itself among Croatian Evangelical Christians. In addition to the high degree of individualism among Evangelicals and the express disinterest among them in the question of national identity, the largely negative experience of Croatian nationalism aggravates the issue. For this reason, the proclamation of the gospel has infrequently assumed the form of a clash along the particular-universal axis whereby the response to the Evangelical invitation assumed the decision for the universal and the marginalization of the patriotic sentiment of the convert. Taking the extremely problematic founding of the Croatian national identity into account, this is not an utterly unjustified reaction, but it takes away from the riches of the promises of the gospel and raises artificial hindrances for evangelism where it should actually receive an additional boost.

The Croatian national identity attempts to lay anchor in several historical points and in several ways, from the genetical heritage which reaches back into the national pre-history, to the less exotic arguments which seek the beginning of the national edifice in the formative national movements of the 19th century. However, all historically ascertainable points which might aspire to figure as milestones of Croatian national individuality carry within themselves the seed of conflict and the awareness of a threat (Pavlićević, 2000:28). Whether it is the case of the Croatian Prince Trpimir against the Francs and Byzantium, of Croatian nobility facing the Osman empire, of the national renewal and the original pravaštvo of the 19th century versus Vienna and Pest, of the Radić brothers within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, of Maček's Banovina dividing between Tito

and Pavelić, or of modern Croatia between the Homeland War and Europe, the Croatian national body has experienced threat and humiliation and tends to express itself through bitterness and contempt.

As in the case of the fallen created world, so also for a national identity forged in trauma, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not bring salvation through evacuation and rejection but through resurrection. In their pioneering work, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock demonstrate that God's plan of redemption for the world also includes the redemption of humanity in its separate national groupings (2000:283). If the worthiness of the Lamb to officiate universal judgment is derived from the fact that it, by its own blood, redeemed the people from every "tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9), will not then the worthiness of the Lamb in the kingdom also be acclaimed in the Croatian language? If Evangelical Christians respond with a "Yes", then they open the possibility for a completely new foundation for Croatian national identity which is neither other-worldly nor transcendental, but is the same Croatian national identity which will die in its squallor in order to resurrect in Christ's glory. It is not a national identity growing out of historical frustrations which give birth to a defensive fever which, in turn, counts its own victims in order to achieve a sense of righteousness in its own bitterness and unwillingness to forgive. It is not a national identity which protects its own against the Serbs, Communists or Europe. It is an identity which keeps its national body for Christ's glory and which already, in this present life, senses the life of the resurrection which it proclaims (louder than the voices of threat and danger) the reason why "Croatianness" exists and what its destiny is in Christ. This is the position which rids Evangelical Croatian Christians of anti-national suspicion and enables them to freely warn fellow Croats that the national identity which feeds on an unwillingness to forgive, fear and self-righteousness will not find its way into the kingdom of God – where forgiveness and God's righteousness make the air that is breathed – but will be discarded in the dumping ground of the universe on the day when the kingdom of God completely expells the kingdom of darkness from the world. The Croatian national identity which, redeemed from its historical wounds, becomes re-constructed on the basis of its eschatological destiny in the kingdom, integrates all that is potentially good in it and liberates it in the present, in this world, relative to its positioning vis-a-vis the resurrecton of Christ.

The Gospel for Human Beings

While the all-embracing eschatological perspective of the gospel is the essential awareness of Evangelical Christianity, its real position within Croatian society points to the conclusion that, for some time to come, its most significant Evan-

gelical influence will remain on the level of individual invitations to the conversion to Christ. This is in no way a depressing concession which implies a return to the individualistic proclamation of the gospel, rather an encouragement to continue with individual evangelism in Croatia without losing sight of the bigger picture of redemption. For that purpose, we must first recognize the evangelistic strategies within the Evangelical practice which create obstacles to this widened vision. At the root of these strategies again lies either a dualistic notion of salvation (an individual gets saved in heaven) or a complete break with the continuity between the old and new creation. The wish which ignites evangelism in an appropriate search for the union of lost humanity to God is indubitably commendable. Yet the self-imposed divisions between heaven and earth, or between the old and new creation, slavishly narrow down the space for a potential encounter of the sinful human being with the holy God, and thus suffocate vitally needed evangelistic creativity. If this world is to pass away completely, and if it will not carry anything of itself over into the kingdom, then even the unconverted human being who stands within the same destiny has no reference to God in his or her own lost universe. All that an unconverted human being experiences as beautiful, good or just in the unconverted world is, in the final analysis, useless for the knowledge of God and his kingdom. In that case, there exists only one lever which might bring him or her closer to God's reality, and that is the awareness of one's own lost state, the awareness of sin. This is the only reality in his or her own unconverted life which, to some degree, connects the lost human being with God's salvation. An evangelistic approach to the lost human being within that theological arrangement becomes an exclusive quest for the rhetorical (and psychological) strategies which can provoke the sinners first, and only, to make a step towards God. The implementation of that strategy infrequently relies on the augmentation of moral pressure (often the Sermon on the Mount), emphasising personal moral failure and the proclamation of the solution which is found in forgiveness and redemption through Christ. The second evangelistic variant of that perspective, which is found more naturally in the tradition of Reformed theology, is the presentation of one's own inability to achieve justification before God and providing the impetus to put trust in God's righteousness by faith in Christ alone. Biblical verses crucial for this strategy are mined from the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans which emphasize that "there is no one righteous,... no one who understands, no one who searched for God,...no one who does good" (Rom 3:10-12), often in conjunction with Isaiah's proclamation that all our good deeds are as dirty robes (Is 64:6). Millard J. Erickson, however, warns that despite popular notions, the theological system which has most utilized these verses in the doctrine of total depravity does not claim that a human being has no relation with, or knowledge of, the divine, but that he or she is to-

tally incapable of meeting the criteria of God's righteousness and therefore incapable of contributing to his or her own salvation (1985:628)[9]. In any case, in this perspective marked by discontinuity, evangelism means only one thing: human beings are sinful and incapable of helping themselves. They need repentance, decision and commitment by faith in Christ. However true this proclamation may be, it remains impoverished and crippled in comparison with innumerable possibilities which are offered by the gospel of the integrated history of the salvation of heaven and earth.

What, then, would be the dynamics of preaching the gospel as a message of salvation for people in the eschatological model of the inaugurated kingdom? The models outlined above are clearly directed to the listener from whom repentance, conversion and faith are expected. But is that evangelistic direction the natural extension of the message which proclaims the resurrection of Christ as the introduction of the kingdom of God into history? N. T. Wright has made famous the hitherto ignored dimension of the word euangelion dating from the Classical period and referring to the solemn announcement of a new ruler, that is the emperor of the Roman empire. The solemn announcement is dispatched throughout the territory and fueled by the new emperor who has not yet personally appeared. It commands all subjects to recognize and show respect to the new emperor now, and the emperor will, in the future, personally visit his dominion accompanied by his mighty army to confirm his authority as the ruler. That will bring joy to those who already recognize him now, and horror to those who currently actively or passively oppose him.[10] By absorbing the terminology and practice of the ancient rulers, the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a direct challenge to the emperor's rule and his right to the lord over all that is good and civilized in the world. The challenge is neither reactionary nor whimsical; Rome demonstrated its authority over the Jewish kingdom by nailing the "King of the Jews" on the cross, and the early church retroactively pronounced the king's resurrection as victory simply because of the elevation of the sign of the cross. Instead of the ruler of the world who comes from Rome to establish the earthly reign to which he is entitled, the church used the solemn proclamation – the gospel – to announce the coming of the true ruler who will establish his reign on earth – not

[9] A more historically sensitive interpretation of these verses is found within the so-called "New perspective on Paul" according to which the intensity of Paul's insistance on the extent of human sinfulness does not aim at the universal exclusion of the divine in unreformed people, but at the identification of the Jews and pagans as equally guilty before God in constrast to the presumed superiority of the Jews over pagans (Wright, 2003:242-8).

[10] Wright, N. T. *Gospel and Theology in Galatians*. http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Gospel_Theology_Galatians.pdf (accessed June 30, 2008).

from Rome, but from heaven.[11]

How, then, is this historical gospel of the proclamation of the true king of heaven and earth who comes to vindicate his authority to be preached? While the search for the "emperor" of today could be of great benefit to the formation of an evangelistic sermon, only an outline will be provided here pointing out its differences from sermons directed at the consciences of the listeners. The dynamics of preaching the gospel of the kingdom is focused on the historical project of the establishment of God's reign (of heaven) on earth which is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ in the past. It is implemented today and spreads through the dynamics of sacrifice and the cross (and not by the emperor's sword and conquest) in view of the future eschatological triumph which will not be the fruit of Christian work, but will happen through Christ's return. With that in mind, the evangelist, in his or her sermon, invites, or even commands, the listeners in the name of God (comp. Acts 17:30), to take an active part in this historical program of the resurrection of humanity and the world. This participation in the historical work of resurrection is presented to the listener as salvation which, just like the kingodm, "is already and not yet" realized. In doing this, the evangelist is not limited to the narrow domain of the listener's conscience, directing the kingdom's trajectory straight into the listener's lap, but first and foremost focusing on God's work of saving the world, directing the kingdom towards the eschaton. The listener's knowledge of his or her own corruption is not usually where he or she meets with God (although this can certainly also be the case), so the evangelist appeals to all of the listener's experiences of truth, justice, cleanliness, kindness, virtuousness, praiseworthiness and beauty in the world, and invites him or her to take that side of life and destiny and to choose to follow Christ's work on earth which redeems and vindicates all.

The alternative to God's resurrection project for the renewal of creation's goodness is to remain connected with the destiny of the world in which the listener has experienced the victory of evil over good, ugliness over beauty, folly over wisdom, injustice over justice, and haughtiness over love. This is the world which does not find its way into the kingdom of Christ's resurrection, but at his arrival is expelled from the resurrected land and thrown on the cosmic dumping ground – the incinerator (gehenna) where unusable and useless raw material is discarded. This world actually follows the people who rule it and shares their destiny and character. Bodily death is not their savior – how can they hope that it will remove them in time from the path of the coming kingdom – because all people will be caught up

[11] This kind of historical reconstruction best explains the sporadic persecution of the church in the first centuries of its existence by the Roman empire, and, contrary to dualistic objections, legitimizes the early Christian contention that the empire presecuted them explicitly because of their faith in Christ (Bruce, 1995(1958):173).

in the resurrection, not only unto life but also unto judgment (Jn 5:29).[12] Outside of humanity as defined by "the last Adam," outside of the new resurrected humanity, identified with a fruitless world with which they end up in the same dumping ground, devoid of all hope and desire, they become dehumanized beings who have exited the horizon of compassion, pity and humanness (Wright, 2008:175-183).

4. Conclusion

Dualistic divisions of the universe, history, the world, humanity and their destiny represent an alluring temptation to everyone who seeks a supernatural meaning in, and purpose for, creation. Christians of all colors, Evangelicals included, clearly fall in this category of seekers and thus into the category of tempted ones. To abandon earth for heaven, or vice versa, means to climb down from the cross and unite into a one-sided peace which excludes painful tensions. It is no wonder, then, that Christian history is a sinuous movement of the popularity of dualistic confrontations between heaven and earth, soul and body, man and woman, the Son of Man and the Son of God, the individual and the collective, Israel and the church, private and public, national and universal, church and state, Jesus and Paul, etc.

These dualistic divisions invest into the content and character of the message of the gospel so that Christians – who are characterized by the gospel itself – find unexpected relief when they discover that it is "spiritual" to keep away from the painful questions of politics, society and public life, and proclaim the establishment of a personal relationship with God. In the act of personal evangelism, it seems that spiritual courage means a direct transitioning towards the "essential" – personal repentance – as opposed to wasting time on meditations about the value of life and humanness versus death and dehumanization, and about how Jesus Christ who, by his resurrection, establishes the first and defeats the second. Moses taught Israel (and the nations who peeked in from the outside) that the Creator God created a good world, even if that goodness is temporarily compromised together with the good name of God. Following up on the instruction of Moses, Paul taught the nations that the world was created to reveal the manifold wisdom of God and that this purpose will be realized through Jesus Christ and the church (Ef 3:9-11). Evangelism which seeks to fulfill God's plan of salvation and self-revelation – to confirm that He is worthy of all glory against Satan's denunciations – can not exclude the world from its own perspective and that part of the human being which is inseparably connected

[12] The tension between Paul's notion of resurrection as the inheritance reserved only for those who are in Christ, and the notion of John the Evangelist who announces resurrection for the righteous and the unrighteous is here acknowledged without any ambition or space for further elabortation.

with him. Christians who want to proclaim the gospel must accept the unpleasant resurrection, the cross of Christ with which Christ connected heaven and earth, universal and individual, past, present and future, holiness and love. This will mean a constant demonstration of death and resurrection in the life of each individual, while personal and ecclesiastical identities tremble and incessantly re-form as a result of evangelistic communication with an unfathomable and unpredictable world which is, historically speaking, saved, but not yet.

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Translated by Davorin Peterlin

Sažetak *Članak istražuje mogućnosti i izazove evanđeoske evangelizacijske prakse u sklopu neprekinutog povijesnog kontinuiteta između Kristovog uskrsnuća i eshatološke realizacije Božjeg kraljevstva na zemlji. Ovaj kontinuitet je zamišljen kao dinamično dokončavanje povijesti spasenja i oslanja se na teološku formulu 'uvedenog Kraljevstva' koje 'jest, i još nije' realizirano. Time je Kristovo uskrsnuće prepoznato kao realizirani dio Kraljevstva tj. preuzima 'jest' dio formule tvoreći glavnu poruku evanđelja jer jamči i ostvaruje punu realizaciju Kraljevstva. Ova buduća realizacija prepoznata je kao Kristov povratak u slavi kada dolazi do općeg uskrsnuća te preuzima 'još nije' dio spomenute teološke formule.*

Predstavljena konstrukcija djeluje kao povijesna paradigma unutar koje se evangelizacija osmišljava i provodi. U tom se svjetlu propituju neki a(nti)historijski elementi evanđeoskog identiteta i evangelizacijskih strategija kao što su intuitivno poistovjećivanje poruke evanđelja s metodom spasenja samo po vjeri ili pak davanje prednosti osobnom iskustvu imanentne Božje prisutnosti na račun javne, kolektivne i sveobuhvatne upućenosti poruke evanđelja. Na koncu se članak dotiče nekih prednosti evanđeoskog kršćanstva u danoj paradigmi te evangelizacijskih mogućnosti, posebice u hrvatskom kontekstu.