

The Role and the (Lack of) Need for Silence in Worship

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UDK: 27-5:277

Review paper

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32862/k.18.1.4>

Abstract

The author of this article explores whether there should be a space for silence in the worship of God in believers' lives, church services and the part of the service in which God is praised with songs. To carry out the study, the author compared worship services of two churches in Zagreb – the Evangelical Pentecostal Church “Rock of Salvation” and the Church of Christ (on Kušlanova Street). The author analyzed the presence and role of silence, considering the non-use of musical instruments in the Church of Christ and concluded that the “empty” space in the church service between individual smaller parts is used in various ways. The author presented different definitions of silence or quietness, which nowadays for many no longer means absolute silence, by putting in dialogue the interviews with the pastors of the mentioned churches – Ratko Medan and Mislav Ilić – and the reflections of theologians and experts in the field of Christian services. The same problem is also put against the backdrop of modern times that are both unfamiliar and uncomfortable with silence.

Keywords: *silence, church service, worship, praise, music*

Introduction

As a musician who was taught the importance of pauses and silence, and as an introvert for whom silence is indispensable, I began to notice that there is less

and less space for silence in the services of various Christian churches. The space of silence is mainly filled with background music or songs of celebration that do not end but flow from one to the other. This article, therefore, wants to examine whether music and church worship leaders have become the primary “stoppers” of silence. It also seeks to understand whether services and, thus, personal worship of believers have lost something due to the loss of natural silence. Finally, it attempts to answer whether silence should be purposefully returned to church services. To explore these questions, I will observe and compare two worship services of two churches in Zagreb – one of which uses instruments in celebration and the other not. I will also analyze semi-structured conversations regarding these matters with the pastors of these two churches – Pastor Ratko Medan of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church “Rock of Salvation” and Pastor Mislav Ilić of the Church of Christ on Kušlanova Street. Through this analysis, I hope to understand the relationship between music and silence and the role of silence as one of the methods of worship. By focusing on silence in the context of a church service as liturgy, we will disregard the congregations and movements that value silence in different worship contexts. By emphasizing the observations of Western churches in dialogue with voices of similar backgrounds, we will offer a small sample of the current state of silence in church services and the musical part of the service. Different congregations will be able to observe this in their contexts and liturgies and compare it with their own experiences. Additionally, they may contribute to their own more exhaustive research on this topic. Placing side by side a survey of the biblical theology of silence, the history of music and silence in liturgy, and the opinions of theologians and worship leaders on these topics, along with reflections of two Zagreb pastors, we will compare the conclusions about the definition, methods, and purpose of worship and silence, as well as the role that silence can play in church services.

1. Defining Silence

When learning an instrument, beginners are taught about pauses in music. Although making sound is more exciting, the mastery over those parts of a composition that contain long or short breaks is what indicates a future artist. Pauses or rests in music contain pulse that the performer must match with the listener. If the performer is nervous or insecure, he or she reveals it in the shortchanged rests. However, if the performer’s pauses are correct and the listener’s foot follows the same pulse with movement, then the listener becomes a silent interlocutor in the music. However, if the performer’s skill is so great that he fully and fearlessly masters the breaks and the space of silence, and even expands them beyond the constraints of time, then he comes to a space where the listener is fully engaged and prepared to receive the intended message from the composer and performer.

During moments of silence and anticipation, there is a true, almost two-way connection between the musician and the listener.

Once one gets to know this power of silence as a cultural phenomenon (Beeman 2005, 23–34), which is necessary but not exclusive to music, which opens the senses and the possibility to hear and to be heard, the desire to find the space of such silence in other spheres of life becomes inevitable. However, while individuals naturally lean towards the need for such a quiet type of sound, which is one possible definition of silence (Beeman 2005, 23–34), the world is getting louder. From the Industrial Revolution to the present, the production of things that sound at specific frequencies has constantly increased. While typing these words, I can hear the sound of the keyboard hitting, the soft hum of the computer fan, the hum of the refrigerator, the sound of water in the pipes, and the sound of cars. However, it is necessary to say that in addition to all the mentioned sounds, there is also a simultaneous light background music from my computer speakers. According to many, the set of these sounds would fall in the category of peace and silence. Before we ask what silence is and whether silence and peace are synonymous, we must add that we live in a time that knows two terms: noise pollution and fear of silence.

Noise pollution is the excessive sound that negatively affects human health, wildlife, and the environment (Britannica, “Noise pollution”). Fear of silence is a modern-day phobia (Ferrucci 2015). In our daily life, we are always exposed to various types and levels of sounds, some technological, some natural. Natural sounds sometimes seem absent when immersed in an assortment of other sounds. Also, amidst all these sounds, there is always a constant background sound of music. According to the definition of noise pollution, excessively loud music can also be a pollutant. But it is the diagnosed fear of silence, or a learned need for background noise of television, radio, and music caused by growing up in an environment with constantly turned-on televisions or radios, because of which younger generations cannot tolerate silence (Fell 2012), that creates an atmosphere of noise pollution. Background music is ubiquitous in our daily lives, from cafes and restaurants to the sound emanating from the headphones of fellow train passengers, as well as portable speakers, workplaces, elevators, shops, and even in the silence of one’s own home. Background music has become a method of creating a peaceful atmosphere, which is an interesting concept that Pastor Medan discusses several times in the conversation. He talks about his own personal attitude towards background music and how he sees it functioning in our culture (Interview with Ratko Medan).

Through this delineation, we are trying to highlight a paradox about the modern world and its relationship with sound and silence. Namely, despite the increasing noise levels around us, we also tend to raise the level of “loudness” of our silence, creating a construct of peace that is not truly silent. Hence, silence is not

necessarily synonymous with peace. Pastor Medan agrees with this and believes that some people might find silence to be synonymous with restlessness, providing the example of shock and alarm that arises when electricity goes out, eliminating the source of most of background noise (Interview with Ratko Medan). Both pastors, although having different attitudes towards silence, use similar expressions to describe how it makes some people uncomfortable during services (Interview with Ratko Medan, Interview with Mislav Ilić). Interestingly, the concept of peace and rest in the word *shalom* is not equivalent to silence in Tanakh. In fact, the integrity and general prosperity of man, along with the “rest” that comes after entering the Promised Land, which describes the idea of *shalom*, includes everyday activities and especially liturgical ones (MacCulloch 2013, 16).

Therefore, silence is not the absence of sound but a cultural phenomenon that is defined as a contrast to some other sound (Beeman 2005, 24). By this definition, each individual can have their own definition of silence as something that contributes to their personal peace. While the example of *shalom* can lead us to conclude that silence and peace were never synonymous, it is important to restate that the level of sounds and noise has changed significantly from the Old Testament enjoyment of *shalom*. Today, this peace, defined as silence, can represent music in earphones which is for someone else – noise. In a world full of other people’s silences and noises, there are still some who seek to hear God’s voice in the peace of their own silence, however loud it may be.

2. Defining Worship, Service and Praise

Listed terms represent only a fraction of terms used in the context of a Sunday service, singing of praise songs and life lived in the worship of God. This is confirmed by pastor Ilić (Interview with Mislav Ilić). The terms are so confusing that many books that deal with this subject start with a chapter dedicated to defining them. While the Croatian language has several practically synonymous terms, the English language uses “worship” to refer to everything from Sunday service to prayer, song praising, and a life fully dedicated to God. This can create confusion when it’s unclear what is meant by the term, for instance, if one narrows worship to exclusively glorifying God with song (Kauflin 2008, 206). To define these terms and their connection to the space of silence we’re exploring and its place in mentioned concepts, we’ll review them through the biblical theology and several modern definitions. This is important for grasping the relationship between an individual’s worship of God and the role of the church in this context.

Worship in the Old Testament included adoration of God as king. It was possible to express this through silence or simple gestures of sacrifice or thanksgiving, and it also included serving in obedience, faithfulness and humility, which manifested in one’s whole life. Christ’s life in the Gospels shows a godly life of a Jew

who actively participated in the religious life of the temple and the synagogues, but whose whole life was an example of “sacrificial service to God and his people,” which he pointed out through symbols of bread and wine. Epistles emphasize that at the time of fellowship we simultaneously worship God with psalms, songs and hymns, that also serve for mutual correction and instruction, with the gospel and the strengthening of believers being a priority for those who worship. The Book of Revelation also highlights the importance of giving thanks and acknowledgment as a way of worshipping God. The Epistle to the Hebrews stresses the importance of mutual encouragement among Christians during meetings where they are focused on Christ’s finished work and the hope of the world to come. To sum up this short overview, the worshippers are gathered into a “worshipping relationship” with the Risen One, and, through his work, Christ enabled a new relationship with the Father and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Using the biblical theology of worship, Peterson (1992, 73, 129–130, 188, 221, 279, 254, 258, 287) recognizes the symbiosis of individual and joint worship as an element of connection, i.e., mutual encouragement of believers gathered at a service to live in obedience in their everyday lives.

However, if we are looking at the period when temple sacrificial system was not possible due to there being no temple or the period when it was completed in Christ, the Bible does not describe worship as a specific program. This opens various possibilities for Christians. It also raises questions of limits to what is allowed in the context of a service but also in understanding the wider term of worship (Allan 1987, 63). Vineyard, one of the most influential churches of the 20th century in the area of music and ways of worship, defining worship as a way of realizing the relationship with God, to which God himself calls and commands us, and in which we willingly and lovingly acknowledge his authority and honor, separates the musical part of the service, calling it “worship,” from the next part of the service which it calls “teaching” (Webber 3:1993, 81, 83). The Presbyterian Church organist, Dwight Steere (1960, 13), classifies worship in four levels: personal, family, informal group and public Church worship. Analyzing the word “worship,” the professor of Christian Worship, James F. White (2000, 27, 29), defines worship as “valuing or honoring someone” and, giving an overview of New Testament terms related to worship, emphasizes the physical and sacrificial aspect of worship and wants to differentiate common worship which is most visible in the gathered church, from the equally important, individual godly activities.

The church that comes together on Sundays to worship God through various means such as listening to the preached Word, singing, reading the Scriptures, praying, taking the Lord’s Supper, and sharing testimonies, listens to God’s voice, learning how to continue their worship in their daily lives. These practices are common among both observed churches, as indicated by their pastors. Pastor Medan differentiates between the term “church service,” that refers to an event

with a certain form, and the concept of worship as a broader concept of glorifying God with one's life. In the rest of this article, we will use the latter terminology. However, using the holistic approach in which God is worshipped, i.e., glorified with one's whole life, and which eliminates the dualistic approach to life in and outside the church, Medan points out that those two terms are interconnected in practice and that everything is worship (Interview with Ratko Medan). In the same holistic vein, Bob Kauflin (2008, 206–209), a long-time worship leader, emphasizes two types of worship: private and with the gathered church. He connects these two aspects into one and encourages us to continuously worship God with our entire lives. The change of the phrase “call to worship” to “continuation of worship” by worship leaders perfectly describes this connection. This is because the life of worshipping God begins with conversion and the first response to God's call.

In the context of the topic of this paper and the idea of silence and peace as a method of worship during services, but also in believers' lives, every modern church community implies a gathering of different people who come with established needs for certain decibels of noise they are comfortable with, at “peace” with, which is a prerequisite for them to enter a space where they can worship God in the company of others. Medan shows that he understands this when he describes the diversity of people and their methods of preparing for worship, their own ways of “calming down.” Some prefer to sit, read in peace, close their eyes, sing softly, pray, or even draw (Interview with Ratko Medan). Therefore, these learned needs and definitions of peace vary from person to person and from pastor to pastor, as testified by pastors Medan and Ilić. Their personal attitudes towards the interdependence of silence and peace are also different. While Ilić says: “I love silence,” Medan finds complete silence uncomfortable and prefers to have background music for achieving peace (Interview with Mislav Ilić, Interview with Ratko Medan). It is therefore necessary for everyone to define their own peace and silence in which they can communicate with God, observing how others achieve peace so that in communal worship everyone can achieve a common communication with God. In this honest self-analysis it is also essential to recognize the influence every person is exposed to, and which defines our understanding of peace. Failing to recognize this influence shows a lack of critical reflection about one's personal preferences. The influence might come from tradition or novel ideas, but it affects all of us, including Christian music composers (Steinberg 1992, 268), pastors, or even the most senior members of a community. Therefore, discussing the concept of silence, however individual it may be, is crucial during the Sunday service, as it is a common continuation of worshipping God, to whom all human life is dedicated.

3. Through Methods of Worship to the Purpose of Worship: Movement, Music and Silence

Throughout history, services have been changing – from the Tabernacle, the Temple, then synagogues, all the way to the first Christian communities. Defining Greek New Testament words used for worship, *proskyneō*, *leitourgeo*, *latreuo*, John Allan (1987, 66–67) suggests that purpose of worship is threefold: “release of the emotions, *recognition* with the mind, and *resolve* of the will in gearing itself for fresh acts of service.” According to him, it is possible to reach these three purposes through the use of three worship methods: music, movement and silence. We will put aside the method of words and focus instead on these three methods that were historically used during services. We will encompass things ranging from singing of songs and hymns in early Christianity, the use of ritual movements in Catholic and Orthodox traditions and dance in black or Latin American denominations, to the use of silence in mystical traditions (Allan 1987, 66–67). Allan’s idea of three methods gives us an opportunity to think about our own methods of worship and the reason why we emphasize certain methods. We will do this through a brief historical overview of their use.

The method of movement is related to the philosophy of the body. The Hebrew view of the body invites us to see that the body, as a “physical expression of personality in a physical universe,” has its place in worship. It is “not a channel of sacredness” and, although movement can help in understanding, it is not a replacement for “rational appreciation of God.” However, the Platonic philosophy and the view of the body as the “prison of the pure and valuable spirit” has left a lasting mark on the Christian view. It implies two attitudes toward worship: loathing of all things physical and a desire to free the spirit from the body (Allan 1987, 73–74). By calling music the art of the body because it invites movement, an instinct that is inhibited as we grow up, White (2000, 115–116) lists many examples of dancing as an inherent part of worship. Dance and movement were part of the Old Testament worship. However, in the early church, dancing was not part of worship, because it used to be associated with pagan religious rituals (Allan 1987, 74–75). In the 2nd century, Clement of Alexandria spoke about the use of hands and legs. 19th century Shakers made dance an important part of their services. African Christians introduced clapping and stomping which was until recently a part of the church service in American Protestant Churches. More frequently than dancing, we find numerous other examples of movements in various symbolic gestures used differently in different church communities, including kneeling and standing up, hugging, making the sign of the cross, raising of hands, gathering, offering, processions, raising of bread and wine, etc. (White 2000, 115–116). This presents a challenge for today’s church, as movement and dance do not come naturally in

the Western culture, especially in the liturgical environment (Allan 1987, 74–75). When asked about movement as a method of worship, pastor Medan confirms this, saying that he sees small symbolic elements, such as raising of hands, raising of bread and wine as a part of the method of movement, but also shares that people do this unconsciously, without thinking (Interview with Ratko Medan). In a similar reflection, pastor Ilić acknowledged that movement can be an unconscious method of worship. However, he emphasized that music is a priority for his own, as well as for other communities, as a method of worship (Interview with Mislav Ilić).

Out of the three offered, both interviewed pastors highlighted the method of worship with music as the primary one in their church services. Although the topic of music in church services is wide and highly debated, in this work, we will briefly touch upon it in the context of its relationship with silence in services. Closely related to this is the constant theological debate about the relationship between secular and church music, which was equally influenced by new technologies and the appearance of new instruments. The early church sought to differentiate itself from pagan practices in music, just as it did with Judaism in its worship. This has resulted in ongoing dilemmas about church and secular music to this day (White 2000, 117). The organ serves as an essential example and proof of these theses, but also of further arguments. In antiquity, organs were used in gladiator games and significant social events and were the favorite instrument of Emperor Nero. It was not until the 11th century that they began to appear in churches (Steere 1960, 191).

The facts presented raise questions about how we approach new things and how much we stick to labeling tradition as sacred. Are our definitions of the quality and sacredness of certain music in history accurate? We often rely on age and historicity, or the so-called test of time, to determine the value of a work. However, at the time a piece of music was created, it may have been considered unacceptable according to the standards of sanctity or values of that time. For example, the organ was once deemed inappropriate in the church due to its association with pagan rituals but is now considered an unsurpassed sacred sound of the church. Similarly, Bach's "spiritual harmonies" are considered to stand above all secular music, even though the style of his secular works does not differ from that of his sacred works (Steere 1960, 191). Also, in the Middle Ages, the use of the augmented fourth was forbidden as a highly dissonant sound that belonged to the devil. Yet, this sound interval is commonly used today (Allan 1987, 72).

No matter where a discussion about excellence and the value and aesthetics of a work of art or instrument leads, and it can at least remind us that often a work of art or instrument was like a prophet, unwelcome in its time, the fact remains that the purpose of worship is not to teach art. Of course, this does not exclude the desire and aspiration to offer the best and highest quality in worshiping God.

In the 10th century, the organ entered the Western Church from the secular world, revolutionizing music by introducing new sounds, styles and concepts. Similarly, the electric keyboard in the 20th century opened up a whole new realm of sounds and styles (White 2000, 129). However, the specificity of the organ to hold the tone and to create a background atmosphere is not reserved only for modern times. Organs had this possibility long before the synthesizer, but they never used it in the way it is used today, when you press one chord on the synthesizer and hold it for a long time. Church music for the organ used pauses and the end of compositions and preludes as something akin to background music, to create an atmosphere of sublimity and reduce distractions within the church space during transitional parts of liturgy. However, Calvinists, for example, excluded the organ because it became a substitute for singing and deprived the congregation of words of worship and participation in the liturgy. Lutherans excluded the organ from some parts of the service for a time but restored the instrument for meditation and a sense of continuity within the service (Wilson-Dickson 1997, 432–436). We can therefore say that there is a fine line between the usefulness and distraction of music and musical instruments in worship and that it depends on the motivation of the musicians and church elders. Pastor Medan points out that he is against the manipulation of worship methods, especially music, since the whole church is responsible for worship, and not only leaders with manipulative capabilities (Interview with Ratko Medan). The motivation of those who lead the musical part of worship certainly plays an important role in the method of worshiping with music. Modern musical expression brings with it self-absorption, the desire for self-presentation, and superficial excitement, but it also encourages emotional depth (Allan 1987, 72), which is God's gift to man for communication that does not need words.

Therefore, without shutting out novel ideas that may one day become “classics,” and by being aware that under the influence of the new culture of background music or noise, and Platonic philosophy of the body, we choose and emphasize methods of worship that we may have unconsciously chosen earlier, and by bringing awareness to the motivation of musicians, who may either enhance or detract from the overall purpose of worship, we can further explore the method of silence. The issue of distraction during worship, which the musical instrument can either cause or remedy, and the attempt to reduce it in order to achieve the purpose of worship, is not limited to musical instruments. This issue is closely related to what we will say about the method of silence in worship.

4. Silence as a Method of Worship

Silence as a form of worship poses a dilemma between the Old Testament principle of prayer that should always be audible and the questioning of its purpose if

the goal is only to create a “racket” and noise (Allan 1987, 67). The Old Testament shows a certain tension between silence and various forms of vocal expressions and their symbolic meaning. In the Tanakh, silence is connected with defeat in war as well as the defeat of death, since the dead, or those that go into silence, cannot glorify God. Although the Jews distinguished dumb idols from the One God, they still thought that God, as if he were a man with ears, should hear the prayers spoken. At the same time, there was mistrust towards those who engaged in silent prayers, since it could not be known what they were striving for and what they were looking for. This is evident in the reaction of the priest Eli to Anna’s silent prayer (1 Sam 1:10-18). Thus, the directed noise of worshiping God is common in Israel (MacCulloch 2013, 13–14, 20).

God is the God who creates through speech, communicates with his people, appears with the noisy effects of thunder and fire and uses the voice of a mediator. When God is silent, the people are unhappy because they are deprived of God’s presence (Ps 22). The silence in creation, from which the work of creation begins, is followed by the rest in silence of the seventh day, in the “sanctity of silence” (MacCulloch 2013, 17–21, 28). In the midst of the sounds of joy associated with God’s presence and daily life activities like temple rituals and a relationship with God, there are special places of silence. The moment when a quiet silence can be heard, as described in the Hebrew original, in which God speaks to Elijah at Horeb in 1 Kings 19:11-13 carries a great significance. One of the most important places of silence and God’s presence is the Holy of Holies, which is far enough away from the joyous courtyards where people sing, sacrifice, and celebrate. Apart from this obvious spiritual-physical space of silence, social conventions imply silence before the monarch, as seen in Psalm 37 (“Be still before the Lord”), while Psalm 19 also conveys the idea of “silent worship.”

Various mystics have described the attitude and the purpose of silence in worship. Dionysius the Areopagite believed that spiritual growth is not achieved by knowing about God, but only by removing all knowledge of God in silence does “the bare communion of the soul with God” come. However, according to Allan (1987, 75–77), this type of spirituality is not available to every Christian and can be dangerous as it is similar to the mysticism of other religions. Western mystics considered silence to be an art equal to speech and stressed the importance of good measure in both cases. Ambrose of Milan also referred to the new concept of joint reading of the psalms as silence, in which everyone speaks and no one interrupts, and all distractions from the outside are abolished (MacCulloch 2013, 86, 92, 94). Speaking about the world, the Catholic theologian, Cardinal Robert Sarah, criticizes the world’s incessant, fast and loud monologue that precludes the world from hearing God: “The noise is misleading, addictive, and a false tranquilizer” (Sarah and Diat 2017, 56).

The Reformation movement restored the Tanakh's attitude towards silence and, in its "era of words," kept speaking, producing, and explaining the Word. Protestants added to this noise by incorporating congregational worship in the form of music, although Zwingli also acknowledged that "true prayer is silent prayer." These emphases will vary in different theologies and churches (MacCulloch 2013, 129, 131–132). While pastor Medan mentions the possibility of using parts of the service after the sermon and before the Lord's supper as possible spaces for silence in his local church, he concludes that silence is not an integral part of the service (Interview with Ratko Medan). Pastor Ilić says that he did not notice silence in other Evangelical churches and, even in his church, which does not use musical instruments, a dedicated silence of a few minutes during the service is very rare (Interview with Mislav Ilić). It is interesting to observe how the pastor of a church without instrumental support, who is himself a lover of silence, recognizes that people often have a need to fill the silence with speech, songs or rustling sounds, and states that he would like to introduce spaces for deliberate silence. Pastor Medan, on the other hand, is not comfortable with absolute silence and believes that our culture is hostile to silence. He advocates for an atmosphere of silence that enables calm in the form of background music (Interview with Ratko Medan). The services of their churches, which I attended on two Sundays in May 2023, will reflect the honest descriptions of their characters and the character of their churches.

5. Two Services: EPC "Rock of Salvation" and the Church of Christ

In May 2023, I attended two Sunday services in Zagreb: one at the Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Rock of Salvation" and the other at the Church of Christ on Kušlanova Street. At the "Rock of Salvation", the service began at 10:30 a.m. with an opening song. This song was followed by another song with guitar accompaniment, which ended in an *a capella* form. The band included a female lead vocalist, a guitarist, a drummer, a bassist, a flautist, and three backing vocalists. After the *a capella* ending of the second song, the guitar continued gently as a musical background for prayer, followed by two cheerful songs. These songs were followed by pastor's prayer accompanied by a guitar. Then there was a reading from the Bible without musical accompaniment. However, towards the end of the reading the guitar gently became the basis for the prayer of the worship leader, which was followed by a song that people swayed to, raised their hands, and sang gently. Although the song ended, the guitar remained as the background, while the person leading the service prepared the church for Lord's Supper. The pastor took over this part of the service, with constant guitar strumming in the background. At 11 a.m., the church sang *Jesus Paid it All*, followed by background silence for

the duration of the prayers, the reading of the biblical text that will be preached, and a prayer for the preacher. The sermon began at 11:15 and ended at 11:53, immediately followed by the last song led by the band, which started preparing during the last sentences of the sermon. After the last song, there were announcements, followed by a short prayer accompanied by the guitar, and a final greeting and prayer. The recorded background music started playing at 12:03.

During the service, my thoughts were focused on the anticipation of spaces of silence and opportunities for inner contemplation in any part of the service. However, silence, in its literal sense of an intentional or unintentional activity by any member of the worship team or service leader, was not accomplished. During the service, the guitar played continuously, filling the gaps between songs and other parts of the service, except for the sermon and the actual celebration with songs. The service also included prayers, announcements, and the sermon itself, which were all part of the constant sound of songs, instruments, and speech. However, if someone were observing the service without focusing on waiting for silences, they could describe it as well-prepared and flowing smoothly from one part to another. In terms of sound, the decibel and dynamics meter would show that every dynamic was changed with a fine use of transitional dynamics of *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, giving the illusion of silence and a sense of peace in the quieter parts of the guitar, or in the microdynamics of the sermon.

As a classically trained musician, I appreciate the structure of compositions that have a clear beginning and end. However, in the Christian music world, it has become popular to perform a series of songs seamlessly without breaks, preferably in the same key. The musicians at the “Rock of Salvation” Church have executed this trend very well, creating a continuous music backdrop. However, this approach ignores the individuality of each composition as a standalone piece and also treats silence as hostile, because it does not use a single pause to anticipate the sound, since the sound does not subside. This *perpetuum mobile* of sound is particularly distracting to my introverted nature – I require moments of stillness to gather my thoughts and immerse myself in God’s presence. My personal preferences obviously influence my observations, and further research would have to include a more significant number of respondents of different ages and professions to obtain a more accurate ratio of those who need silence, especially in the church, and those for whom the described service might even seem insufficiently loud and unconnected. However, before conducting this research, pastors and worship leaders should consider how valuable silence really is to their congregation. In the end, the goal of worship was accomplished, and the methods used – music, raising of hands, clapping and light dancing, and silence as the most peaceful parts of the service contrasted to the louder and more active parts, contributed to this. This unity was evident through the Church’s prayer, song, and attentive listening to the Word of God, which gave glory to the Lord.

The following Sunday, I attended the Church of Christ's Sunday service located on Kušlanova Street in Zagreb. I was interested in this particular community because they do not use musical instruments during their services. I was curious to see the extent to which music, which is greatly influenced by the world in terms of technological innovations, the style and legality of composition, and the overall stage expression of musicians (Ingalls 2017, 10–12), is the main or perhaps the only method of worship that takes away silence. Since there were no instruments in the church, the organ, the keyboard, or strumming of guitar will not tirelessly maintain the background music, and the human voice, which is particularly valued in this church, is not capable of holding a single tone for 30 minutes without tiring.

The service began in relative silence, with only the light humming of the projector which would remain present throughout the service. After the introductory reading of the biblical text and prayer, three songs followed, with the pastor saying the number of the song in the hymnal. The leader, prepared in advance, started the song, and the rest of the congregation joined him. All voices could be heard; one could distinguish between young and old voices singing, and I even heard my own voice. After the last song, the congregation silently waited for the leader who led the prayer. Since there was no microphone, the congregation further stilled their movements and commotion so that they could hear the prayer. Prayer introduced the Lord's Supper. The first prayer was over the bread and was followed by song as the bread was shared and eaten. Then, there was a prayer for the wine, and the pattern was repeated. After the song ended, there was a two-minute silence while everyone waited for others to take and return the wine and for the servers to do everything related to that ministry. Then, the prayer began again, followed by reading the text as a preparation for the offering, which was done in silence, lasting two minutes. The sermon followed immediately after the offering. When the sermon was over, there was one last song, followed by announcements at the end of the service. This was immediately followed by socializing and conversation.

Although this service differed from the one at the "Rock of Salvation" by two distinct characteristics, namely the absence of constant background music and two two-minute silence breaks, my personal impression is that there is still a lot of room for dedicated, but also spontaneous silence. When a child is learning to play an instrument and make musical breaks, sometimes there is an impatience to endure the prescribed break for fear of being late or making a mistake on the next note. Similar to this, the service could also have had several spaces of natural silence with its own tempo and pulse, which were often interrupted prematurely by an impatient chant or prayer before the sustained beat of the break. Therefore, after observing this service, I believe that there is room for more dedicated silence, especially after the sermon, but, more importantly, that one does not need a musical instrument to disturb the silence. A person does this through impa-

tience generated by his desire for things to run smoothly. He does this through nervous movements, shuffling, and the fear of “idling” which is nowadays seen as a waste of time or a sign that some ideal of well-prepared program has not been accomplished. He interprets such spaces as unpleasant silences that need to be filled, as Pastor Ilić himself observed in our conversation (Interview with Mislav Ilić). However, it is precisely the desire to fill them that creates the effect of a conspicuous premature reaction, because of which everything falls out of rhythm and becomes nervous. The nervousness accompanied by sound breaks the silence, and more importantly, the sense of peace necessary to accomplish the purpose of worship.

The surprising conclusion that came from observing these two services is that music is an effective and easy tool to break the silence, but not the only one. The conclusion is also that music can be a form of silence to some extent, especially when a wide dynamic range of sound is allowed in which the quietest sounds can be defined as an atmosphere of silence, a position advocated by pastor Medan (Interview with Ratko Medan), but also that the interruption of real silence in the form of speaking, walking, rustling, singing prematurely in the context of unsustained pauses is therefore easier to notice because it happens in an atmosphere where everything can be heard.

We must therefore ask what the purpose and role of silence, or the atmosphere of silence in the context of a church service, actually is. Is it really necessary for individuals to step away from sound in order to engage in personal contemplation with God during worship (Sarah and Diat 2017, 21–22)? Is silence, or the smallest amount of sound, something that is needed by everyone or just a minority? Or have the needs of people changed, as both pastors suggest, so that an atmosphere of silence created by background music, especially in hiding other distractions such as rustling, traffic, whispering or yawning, is a better way to facilitate personal conversation with God? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must ask a question that cannot be answered here, due to the need of approaching it from disciplines of psychology and sociology, namely, is it even necessary to fulfill people’s needs – that which they consider to be comfortable and necessary?

6. Silence and Worship through Music, Silence and Service, Silence and Worship

Building on the idea that a service is a Sunday gathering of the church that worships and glorifies God together, among other things, with song, while worship continues beyond the service in the individual lives of church members, we can observe the method of silence with the purpose of calming down and preparing for communication with God in three aspects: in glorifying God with song, in the entire event of a church service and in the worship life of believers.

First, we want to consider silence in relation to its greatest partner, and nowadays its rival, music. Parts of worship in which music is the main method of worshiping or glorifying God with song are spaces of prayer, or communication with God, and are often defined as praise. The question of silence in the church is always closely related to music, because music is defined both as that which breaks the silence, and that which eventually enables it. These two concepts are hard to separate because music permeates church services and it is not necessarily contained in just one part of the service. The two church services I observed have most of their songs at the beginning of the service, although worshipful singing will also be present during the Lord's Supper, during giving, and after the sermon.

By having the first part of the service where several songs are played alternately with prayer and reading of biblical passages, the local Church of Christ offers an example of a natural silence after each song, allowing for a brief pause and a space for silent prayer. Although this break is not a dedicated period of silence, it is natural – it is part of the music because it respects the laws of musical composition, allowing for a rest period between compositions, and taking into account the tonality, character and message of each piece of music. This is how services were conducted in many churches and many services until the 20th century. In contrast, modern concepts of worship have several songs collected and played in one or a related key, often without an ending, in order to create one long expression, one long song. Such uninterrupted sound of the “prolonged” song does not allow for the possibility to think about the song as one exegetical entity, as the author intended, which has a beginning, middle, and end, and which requires some space for reflection after it ends.

The concept of silence in church services can have different meanings and effects. Peterson (1992, 160) points to the slippery terrain of silence being welcome but also seen as a distraction: “Formality may be the expression of a very narrow and inadequate view of worship and informality may be an excuse for lack of preparation or any serious attempt to engage collectively with God.” On one hand, we are so used to smooth services that any part which is seemingly empty produces discomfort. This can put pressure on leaders to try to turn the service into a play, but such fears combined with the desire for excellence can also distract both active and passive participants from the true purpose of worship. Preparation for the service is the responsibility of the pastors, but also of the church. What is essential is the spiritual preparation and awareness that God is the one who “evaluates” our worship because it is directed at him. It is important to prepare and try to achieve excellence, but ultimately God does not need our excellence because it does not increase him at all while it can lead to pride and concern about the form, neglecting the content (Hayford, Killinger and Stevenson 1990, 18–19, 37). The technical preparation of those who lead is important, but the spiritual preparation of all present is even more important. This is because if

everyone is spiritually prepared, technical difficulties and apparent problems will not disturb the spiritual peace of those who lead worship. It is a circular problem that shows that every person in the community is equally responsible for creating an experience of worship in fellowship that pleases God, as pastor Medan teaches his church (Interview with Ratko Medan).

Ruminating on how to use music to enhance the moment of the offering of bread and wine and on the idea that there is no such thing as absolute silence, since there is always noise and distractions from the outside, the church organist, Steere (1960, 194), says that the organist can create “a fine fabric of organized sound” to counteract the noise and distractions from outside. Thus, the organ can offer the atmosphere of silence which can prepare for the sanctity of the moment. This is the common approach of most churches that have instruments. Steere sees the organ as the smooth link between different parts of the service, which removes distractions and offers a good preparation for the beginning of the service itself, and idea contemplated by pastor Medan as well (Interview with Ratko Medan). However, Steere also believes that the organ should not “speak” for the faithful, and that there should be space for “silent” personal prayer. He argues that playing music during quiet personal prayer can be distracting for some people, and that personal prayer should be free from any distractions. This is because some people cannot help but listen to music, and a melody can distract them from their prayers instead of allowing them to find peace.

Spaces of silence during church services, as we saw in the example of the Church of Christ, can be filled with non-musical sounds, words, prayers, and announcements and deliberately narrowed to avoid causing discomfort and the feeling of an unprepared service (Hayford, Killinger and Stevenson 1990, 60–61). However, the silence that has its space in church services and is jointly disciplined through Christocentric meditation, thoughts on his word and deeds, reflection on repentance, or the lesson presented is also purposeful and leads to worship (White 2000, 116). It is beneficial because it eliminates external stimuli and turns a passive worshiper into an active worshiper, brings worshipers closer to a deeper communion, who in silence become more aware of each other, and changes the direction of worship because by removing the “noise,” one listens more carefully to the Holy Spirit and his guidance (Allan 1987, 75–77). A memorable Sunday service is one in which all parts of the service: prayers, songs, readings, prayers, sermons, and the Lord’s Supper, point to the overall experience of the whole of that service (Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson 1990, 23). And Pastor Medan would add “to the entire Christian experience” because worship does not stop with leaving the space where the service took place (Interview with Ratko Medan).

In the broadest context of whole-life worship, we can implement the intimacy with God that we experience during a church service into our everyday lives. This is the third role of silence. Whether that everyday life will include the

search for spaces of solitude and silence to achieve communication with the Creator or whether there will be no need for that kind of isolation, will depend on the character of the individual but also on the example of the church community to which the individual belongs. Extracting from a series of thoughts of the Catholic priest Sarah about ways to encounter God, silence is emphasized as a necessity for such an encounter. Sarah (2017, 21–24, 27) believes that God’s voice is silent and that “we encounter God only in the eternal silence in which he abides.” He also believes that God Himself is silence and that this “divine silence dwells in man.” By becoming silent ourselves, we can discover God through His silence “inscribed in the center of our being.” Stating that no prophet met God without withdrawing into solitude and silence, he continues that it is not enough for man to be silent, but “[i]t is necessary to become silence.” While solitude is the best place to listen to God’s silence, the silence that reveals God resides within us and we can remain silent even in the midst of the noise that separates us from the transcendent dimension. “Silence is not an absence” but is a manifestation of the most intense presence. Sarah adds to this the thoughts of Benedict XVI who says that our society seems to need to fill every moment with “projects, activities and noise,” making it difficult for us to listen. Therefore, he encourages us to not be afraid “to create silence, within and outside ourselves,” to become aware of God’s voice and the voices of those around us.

Conclusion

So, should the language of a church service be understandable to the modern world? Should it speak in the language of constant sound, movement, and noise, such as the hum of a computer or background music? Should the church recognize that today’s world does not theoretically or practically define silence and peace as the absence of sound and maybe endeavor to create an atmosphere of peace with background sounds and constant movement to make worship more “pleasant” to the modern person? Or is the task of the church to educate and confront people with the forgotten and, for some, uncomfortable aspect of silence, and offer it to the person who cannot, or does not want, to escape from the daily noise of everyday life? Is there a place for “pockets of silence” and pauses in church services, and if so, how can they be implemented in the service liturgy? These are questions raised in this work, and here are some suggestions for addressing them.

Every church and pastor faces unique challenges and specific calling to serve in a certain way to certain groups of people. This diversity is the strength of Protestant churches, as pastor Medan concludes (Interview with Ratko Medan). The challenges his vision for the “Rock of Salvation” as a city church with open doors for everyone contains include achieving a fine balance “between warmth and seriousness, distance and closeness.” The urban pastor Medan, along with his elders

and worship leaders, aims to create a city church open to everyone and an atmosphere in which our culture can thrive. Both pastors recognize this need to sustain an atmosphere of peace, with background music and a variety of transitional dynamics, including moments of silence as a good base that will allow for deep communion with God and the community. The goal is for the worship through song to transition into the worship of listening to the Word as the center of the church service. This will nourish and encourage the church, helping believers to continue worshipping God daily until they gather again for communal worship, whether over coffee, at the next Sunday meeting, or as the background music of the new service begins, ushering in a fresh nourishment of the Word. That church, in a more modern expression of our culture, will speak the language of a man accustomed to sound. And perhaps it will at times remember that there are introverts in the church who long for silence in communication with God and the church.

The challenges pastor Ilić is facing include preservation of the archeological artefact of silence – fragile and exposed to the elements that demand it to change, grow stronger, louder and more like the surrounding modern buildings in order to survive the culture of incessant noise. In the Church of Christ, we can learn to hear not only our own and other people’s voices in song, but also our own and other people’s silence, in which God speaks to us, without requiring many words. But if that church succumbs to the relentless challenges of modern daily noise, it will be loss not only for the members of that community, but for all of us. Communion with God and people in silence will only remain as a memory of this generation, as it will fade away into oblivion.

I believe that the very existence of this wealth of diverse church services can provide answers to questions raised in this article. One community will emphasize the modern language of culture, and the other will retain the language of the past. One will drown out the noise of the world with worship, with its drums and cymbals and voices, and the other will silently enter transcendent spaces where it will listen to God’s voice. One will raise their worship to the heavens and join their voices with the heavenly church, and the other will tear down the transcendent wall that separates us from God’s voice and enjoy him together with the heavenly church.

Perhaps some other community will look for balance in its methods, and inspired by the saints in the “Rock of Salvation” and the Church of Christ, accompany their instruments in praising God with not only a “new song” but also “new silence” as a creative response that God asks from us in a church service (Allan 1987, 63, 65). The idea of “new silence” in a church will have steps similar to those of a musician. At first, a novice on an instrument rushes through pauses, loses rhythm, and shows nervousness and impatience by shortening the pauses. However, with time and practice, the musician begins to master the sense of pulse and

time, eventually reaching a state of enjoying the silence of the pause, extending the time and creating a space for unique contact between musicians and listeners in an atmosphere of rapt attention. And, as any musician quickly learns, after much tireless practice, the church will master a new method of worship: dedicated silence – for all the introverts of this world, or at least those who speak the language of silence.

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Uloga i (ne)potrebnost za tišinom u štovanju

Sažetak

U ovom radu autorica je istražila postoji li i treba li postojati prostor tišine u štovanju Boga u vjerničkom životu, u crkvenom bogoslužju i u dijelu službe u kojemu se slavi Boga pjesmama. Usporedbom dvaju posjećениh bogoslužja dviju zagrebačkih crkava, Evanđeoske pentekostne crkve Stijena spasenja i Kristove Crkve (Kušlanova) te analizom zastupljenosti i uloge tišine, s obzirom na nekorištenje glazbenih instrumenata u Kristovoj Crkvi, zaključeno je da se „prazan“ prostor u bogoslužju između pojedinih manjih dijelova bogoslužja upotrebljava na razne načine. Stavljanjem u dijalog intervju s pastorima spomenutih crkava, Ratkom Medanom i Mislavom Ilićem, i promišljanja teologa i stručnjaka na području kršćanskog bogoštovlja, iznesene su različite definicije tišine, odnosno mira, koji u današnje vrijeme kod mnogih više ne podrazumijeva apsolutnu tišinu. Također je isti problem stavljen u kontekst modernog vremena koje ne poznaje tišinu i kojemu je tišina nelagodna.