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## **FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD – BIBLICAL PROVERBIAL PARALLELISM IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The Bible is the holy book of the Christian religion and it features a particular genre of oral literature known as proverbs. Proverbs embody wisdom amalgamated through generations, providing and promoting values, socio-cultural norms and knowledge in a pithy, expressive custom. The aim of this research is to establish the similarities between two collections of Biblical proverbs, Mieder's *Not by Bread Alone: Proverbs of the Bible* (1990) in English and Stošić's *Biblijske poslovice i izreke* (*Biblical Proverbs and Sayings*, 2007) in Serbian. The attempt is to compare Biblical proverbs found in these two collections in order to determine the levels of parallelism between the two books, and what such findings reveal about the two peoples' common moral and ethical codes of behaviour rooted in Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity respectively. The focus will be on finding common proverbs in the collections, by which we examine shared ethical values and appropriate behaviour which reflect the cultural heritage materialised in English and Serbian proverbs.*

**Key words:** *Bible, proverbs, parallelism, English, Serbian.*

### **Introduction**

The Bible is the holy book of the Christian religion, one of the three major Abrahamic religions, alongside Judaism and Islam. Since Christianity is born out of Judaism, and Islam builds upon both former religions, the Bible is regarded as significant not just for Christians, but for Jews and Muslims as well. It is the most translated book in the world.

It is composed of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is mostly written in Hebrew, with minor sections written in Aramaic. The thirty nine books of the Old Testament are summarised in McGrath as: the *Five Books of the Law* known as the Jewish *Torah* or *Pentateuch*, the *Historical Books*, the *Wisdom Writings* which includes *Proverbs*, and the *Prophets*.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament consists of twenty-seven books written in Koine Greek. The main components of the New Testament are: the *Gospels*, the *Acts of the Apostles*, the *Epistles* and the *Book of Revelation*.

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<sup>2</sup> McGrath 2000, 238–239.

The most revered translation of the Bible into English is considered to be the King James Bible published in 1611. It was described as a landmark in the history of the English language, shaping English literary nationalism and inspiring writers.<sup>3</sup> Throughout history, many writers and artists sought inspiration from the Bible. By translating the Bible into national and world languages, the spiritual world and life of not only the clergy, but ordinary people as well, were profoundly shaped. Lowes called the King James translation of the Bible the “noblest monument of English prose” whose literary style is woven into the texture of British literature, prose and poetry alike.<sup>4</sup> That is why it can be said that the Bible played a key role in introducing literacy and literature, even though there were written documents and numerous forms of oral literature before it.

In the 9th century the Slavic missionaries Cyril and Methodius translated the Bible into the Old Slavonic, language of the Macedonian Slavs. The first complete translations of the Bible into Serbian were made by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić who translated the New Testament in 1847 and Đura Daničić who translated the Old Testament in 1867.

A particular genre of oral literature which materialised in the Bible comes in the form of proverbs. This genre of oral literature embodies wisdom amalgamated through generations, providing and promoting values, socio-cultural norms and knowledge in a pithy, expressive custom. Mieder exhaustive definition of proverbs views them as “a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.”<sup>5</sup> When using proverbs objectivity, impartiality and truth are assured. This is because, as Hildebrandt puts it, “the locus of authority is moved from the speaker using the proverb to a collective indirect perspective.”<sup>6</sup> Using proverbs is thus similar to citing the Bible, prominent authors or recognised authorities in the relevant field, since such citations have evaluative function and a didactic tone when cited.<sup>7</sup>

Proverbs appear in the Bible as a separate book of *Proverbs* in the Old Testament. They are attributed to Solomon, King David’s son and the king of Israel. Alongside the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, they are often categorised under ‘wisdom literature’. Specifically, the *Proverbs* address symbolic and ideal wisdom (Prov 1–9), wisdom in the random events of daily life (Prov 10–29), and wisdom in two extreme conditions (Prov 30–31).<sup>8</sup> Proverbs also appear individually in other books of the Bible, but not all.<sup>9</sup> Proverbs from the Bible are today recognised as forms of enlightenment, containing principles and values about various matters within the framework of the Judeo-Christian culture.

Since the Bible is the second major source of common European proverbs, following proverbs of Greek and Roman antiquity,<sup>10</sup> proverbs from the Bible are found in various collections of proverbs, be it thematic, regional, historical, or comparative. There exist collections of proverbs which comprises Biblical proverbs which have entered public discourse in an unaltered or somewhat changed form. Mieder’s collection of Biblical proverbs *Not by Bread Alone: Proverbs of the Bible* (1990) is an example of such a collection. It consists of 425 proverbs originating from the Bible, of which 212 come from the Old Testament, 31 from the Apocrypha

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<sup>3</sup> McGrath 2000, 14–15.

<sup>4</sup> Lowes 1963, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Mieder 2004, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Hildebrandt 2005, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Norick 1985, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Bartholomew and O’Dowd 2011, 75.

<sup>9</sup> A complete list of books containing proverbs in English is found in Mieder 1990, 15–16.

<sup>10</sup> Mieder 2004, 10–11.

and 182 from the New Testament. They are divided into 19 thematic chapters averaging 22 proverbs per chapter. Mieder explains that the decision to thematically divide the proverbs was a reflection of their applicability in matters both sacred and secular. He also emphasises their communicative function: “[They] help us all communicate with each other in everyday encounters, basing our moral judgements and social behaviour on an ethical and religious values system that has withstood the test of time.”<sup>11</sup>

The Serbian equivalent to Mieder’s book of proverbs can be found in Stošić’s *Biblijske poslovice i izreke* (Biblical Proverbs and Sayings, 2007) consisting of 643 proverbs and 704 sayings. Unlike in its English counterpart this book lists the proverbs and sayings alphabetically, with no thematic division. Commentary at the end of the book addresses the meaning of selected proverbs and sayings, placing their origin within specific books of the Bible.

Research into comparative analysis of English and Serbian proverbs pertaining to the Bible was carried out by Jevrić who analysed common English and Serbian proverbs containing the entries *God and Bog, devil and đavo or vrag*.<sup>12</sup> The corpus consisted of proverbs selected from English collections of proverbs (Flavell and Flavell 2007, Speak 2007, Hazlitt 2007), while Serbian proverbs were selected from Marković (2005). This edition includes proverbs collected by Vuk S. Karadžić (1849). The research identified common values and lessons between two cultures ostensibly distant, yet sharing a common European ancestry. Petrova and Stefanova used the English collection as a corpus in order to analyse evaluation in the Biblical proverbs.<sup>13</sup> They showed that acts of evaluation were found in the majority of the Biblical proverbs, with *attitude* being the most numerous category.

### Methodology and the Corpus

The corpus of this study consists of proverbs from Mieder’s and Stošić’s books of Biblical proverbs published in English and Serbian languages, respectively. Since not all books in the Bible contain proverbs, Mieder gives an exhaustive list of books which were consulted for proverbial harvesting.<sup>14</sup> The 19 thematic chapters incorporate the following themes: *Good and Evil, Prophecy and Prediction, Parents and Children, Love and Friendship, Speaking and Hearing, Faith and Spirit, Wisdom and Folly, Law and Judgement, Joy and Contentment, Vanity and Transience, Wealth and Poverty, Hate and Strife, Action and Consequences, Time and Chance, Deception and Appearance, Work and Laziness, Men and Women, Advice and Prudence, and Lord and God*. Detailed information regarding the books in which proverbs are found is given below every proverb.

Stošić’s collection of 643 proverbs was used in the analysis. Stošić’s commentary addressing the meaning of proverbs is consulted in the analysis, because it provides a wider context, guaranteeing a comprehensive understanding of the proverbs as they may provide culturally specific meanings. An example of this would be the usage of a metaphor, which can differ depending on the culture in question. Throughout the analysis the Bible will be consulted for context, especially when the meaning of the proverbs in isolation is unclear. Hildebrandt stresses the importance of examining the context as “proverbs are critically dependent on the context and culture in which they are used.”<sup>15</sup>

The aim of this paper is to compare Biblical proverbs found in these two collections in order to determine the levels of parallelism between the two books, and what such findings reveal

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<sup>11</sup> Mieder 1990, 13–14.

<sup>12</sup> Jevrić 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Petrova and Stefanova 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Mieder 1990, 15–16.

<sup>15</sup> Hildebrandt 2005, 20.

about the two peoples' common moral and ethical codes of behaviour rooted in Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity respectively, as the Bible "forms the basis for our moral and ethical codes of behaviour."<sup>16</sup> The focus will be on shared ethical values and appropriate behaviour which reflect the cultural heritage materialised in English and Serbian proverbs. This entails finding common proverbs in English and Serbian across the thematic division. The comparison will be based on Mieder's thematic division of proverbs. Since its Serbian equivalent is not organised thematically, the matching proverbs in the Serbian collection will be searched in two ways, manually and by consulting the index of relevant terminology, thus ensuring a complete and comprehensive comparative analysis.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Good and Evil

Only one common proverb is identified in the first thematic section, *You can see a mote in another's eye but cannot see a beam in your own*, and its two Serbian variants, *Vidi trun u tudjem oku, a ne vidi gredu u svome* or *Vidi tudju dlaku, a svog brvna ne vidi*. This proverb exposes the hypocrisy of those who have an inclination to highlight the minor flaws of others (*mote* means *a tiny speck*), while disregarding their own, much larger faults, symbolised by a *beam*. Analysing this proverb from the perspective of the present age, one might say that the Bible promotes values of introspection and emotional intelligence.

Two Serbian variants exemplify a recurring phenomenon in the corpus: the repetition of proverbs in identical or somewhat modified forms. Dundes argues that proverbial variants, be it doublets or triplets, confirm their folkloristic nature.<sup>17</sup> He asserts that all genres of folklore have multiple existence and variation, including proverbs, all equally traditional and equally correct. The Bible therefore can be viewed as folklore, having previously existed as oral tradition before being recorded in writing. The two variants also exemplify another phenomenon within the corpus. They contain two different lexemes, *trn* (Eng. *mote*) or *dlaka* (Eng. *hair*), and *greda* (Eng. *beam*) or *brvno* (Eng. *log*). This example illustrates how metaphors can vary cross-culturally and within a single culture, even within a single proverb.

### Prophecy and Prediction

Four proverbs were found to be common in this section. *A prophet is not without honor save in his own country* or *Teško je biti prorok u svom selu* are the words of Jesus upon his return to Nazareth, facing the disbelief and rejection of his fellow citizens, despite his acclaim. The proverb conveys the idea that familiarity with an individual and insight into their life beyond general perception can result in lack of understanding or outright dismissal of their transformation. *To whom much is given much shall be required* or *Kome je više dato, od njega se više i traži* represents Christian values of responsibility, stewardship and ethical duty. Individuals who are blessed with favourable circumstances in life ought to handle them responsibly and find the means to give back.

*When pride comes, shame also comes* or *Gordost prethodi, a stid i sram slede* serves as a caveat against pride and arrogance inevitably leading to shame and embarrassment. Instead, one should choose humility, as it precedes honour (Proverbs 18:12). *Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together* or *Gde je strvina, tamo se i psi kupe* appears in Matthew

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<sup>16</sup> Mieder 1990, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Dundes 1999, 9, 18–19, 78.

24:28 and Luke 17:37 as a reminder about signs indicating that the end of times are near, as clear as eagles gathering around a carcass. The metaphor of the eagles and the carcass can also symbolise cruel exploitation or violence of the strong against the weak in the animal kingdom, but in the human world as well. Gordon, however, explains that it refers to events occurring according to a natural order.<sup>18</sup>

### Parents and Children

In this section two common proverbs were found. The first one is *Like mother, like daughter*, or in Serbian *Kakva majka, onakva i kćerka*. *The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge* appears in Serbian in three different variants, *Ako su preci jeli kiselo grožđe, potomcima trnu zubi*, *Oci trpko jedoše, a deci potmuše zubi*, or *Ovi naši jedoše nezrele voćke, a nama zubi utruli*.

The first proverb suggests that the mother-daughter bond is an archetypal one, and that not only daughters but all children may resemble their parents' genetic traits, and through nurture may also adopt their parents' values, habits or mannerisms. The second common proverb addresses the generational consequences of poor decision-making children have to endure because of their parents. Dundes concludes that because of the broader context it is evident that "the future citation of this proverb will not be necessary":<sup>19</sup> "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel" (Ezekiel 18:2–3).

### Love and Friendship

The only common proverb in this section is *A threefold cord is not quickly broken* or *Trostruko spletena vrpca ne skoro se prekida*. This proverb symbolises strength and resilience in social connections suggesting that stronger bonds are not easily severed.

### Speaking and Hearing

One proverb is found in both collections: *The tongue can break a bone though itself has none*, and *Jezik kosti nema ali kosti lomi* or *U jeziku nema kosti*. Such is the strength of language that if used to inflict harm upon others, its severity is comparable to breaking bones, proverbially known for their strength and resilience.

### Faith and Spirit

Four proverbs are common in this section. *Man cannot live by bread alone* and *Ne živi čovek samo o hlebu* is understood if provided with a larger context *Man shall not live on bread alone, by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4). The proverb underscores the importance of nourishment of both the body and the soul, placing significance on the role of faith in one's life. *Ask, and it shall be given you* and *Ištite i daće vam se* is believed to be about the power of prayer.

*Faith without works is dead* and *Vera bez dela mrtva je* call attention to the importance of living by the Christian doctrine, rather than merely professing it. *Cast your bread upon the*

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<sup>18</sup> Gordon 1890, 309.

<sup>19</sup> Dundes 1999, 79.

waters, for you shall find it after many days and *Pošalji tvoga hleba i vodom, po nekom vremenu hoće ti se k tebi s dobrom vratiti* contain a metaphor purportedly to mean generosity. Having genuine commitment and faith in performing charitable acts will ultimately be rewarded.

### Wisdom and Folly

The common proverbs acknowledge wisdom and knowledge whose acquisition brings sorrow due to heightened awareness about the world's injustices, alongside a better understanding of the complexities of life: *He that increases knowledge increases sorrow* and its continuation *In much wisdom is much grief* or *Gde je mnogo mudrosti, mnogo je i brige*. Wisdom is revered as more important than physical strength: *Wisdom is better than strength* or *Bolje je s pameću nego sa snagom*. Humans should also strive for a balance between wisdom and compassion: *Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves* or *Golubija prostota i zmijska mudrost čine savršenog čoveka*.

*Zeal without knowledge is the sister of folly* or *Revnost za Boga, ali ne po razumu* also highlights the need for balance between wisdom and fervour. The two proverbs seem to send a somewhat different message, as the literal translation of the Serbian equivalent would mean: *Zeal for God, but not according to reason*. The Serbian proverb provides a better understanding of the context. In Romans 10:2 Paul says: "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Here he speaks of Israelites and their zeal or enthusiasm to accept God, but who have not yet acquired knowledge of what that actually encompasses. Mieder explains that some proverbs in English are not exact quotes from the Bible, but were inspired by particular passages from the Bible.<sup>20</sup> The same can be said for some Serbian proverbs. When examining their origin by using the Bible, we would encounter proverbs in a different or longer form.

### Law and Judgement

*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth* or *Oko za oko, zub za zub* is known as *lex talionis* or *law of retaliation*.<sup>21</sup> This principle found in the Old Testament advocates that a punishment should fit the crime, and should thus avoid retaliation and disproportionate punishment. Contrasting this principle to a seemingly opposing one professed by Jesus in the New Testament, *Turn the other cheek* (appearing in *Hate and Strife*), Wink interprets it in the following way:

Jesus is not telling us to submit to evil, but to refuse to oppose it on its own terms. We are not to let the opponent dictate the methods of our opposition. He is urging us to transcend both passivity and violence by finding a third way, one that is at once assertive and yet nonviolent.<sup>22</sup>

Wink proposes a more correct translation of the proverb: "Don't react violently against the one who is evil."

*Do unto others as you would they should do unto you* or *Čini drugima ono što želiš da drugi čine tebi* is known as the Golden Rule. It is a Christian principle by which humans should live with empathy, fairness and regard for others. It is found to traverse religions and various

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<sup>20</sup> Mieder 1990, 11.

<sup>21</sup> From: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/lex%20talionis>.

<sup>22</sup> Wink 1998, 100–101.

philosophical teachings. By meticulously detailing the chronology of the Golden Rule Gensler argues that it is present in various forms in all, or nearly all religions.<sup>23</sup> *They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind* or *Ko seje vetar, žanje buru* is a metaphor about bad deeds, small mistakes and transgressions causing severe, major consequences, far worse than they were in the beginning. *Let the one without sin cast the first stone* or *Ko je bez greha, neka prvi baci kamenicu* is a Biblical teaching which, in the context of Jesus and an adulterous woman, inspires compassion and forgiveness. Because one without sin does not exist, members of the congregation cannot stone her.<sup>24</sup>

*Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice* or *Bolja je mala čast s pravdom i mirnija, negoli golema s nepravdom i nemirna*<sup>25</sup> suggests a preference for having a peaceful and meaningful life over material possessions.<sup>26</sup> Similarly to the Golden Rule proverb *With what measure you measure it shall be measured unto you* or *Kojom merom merite, so tom će vam se odmeriti* also relates a message of justice, fairness and exemplary behaviour. There is a need for humane interpersonal relations, for individuals to live peacefully with one another, which is assured by regarding others according to the wisdom of Christian teachings. *Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's or Daj caru carevo, a Bogu Božije* is Jesus' response to a question about Jews paying taxes to Caesar. With this proverb Jesus makes a clear division between lay authorities and God (the continuation of this verse is *and unto God the things that are God's*), reminding them of both secular responsibilities and religious commitment.

### Joy and Contentment

Similarly to the proverb in the previous section, here we also find: *It is better to enjoy a little with quietness than to possess much with trouble* or *Mal dobitak s mirom i s pravicom pače merovom s hilom i s nevoljom stečeno*. This proverb conveys the idea of proclivity towards a calm and simple life, unburdened by material possession, and the tension and worry which could accompany it.

### Wealth and Poverty

One common proverb portrays material pursuits as the cause of “all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10): *The love of money is the root of all evil* and *Srebro ljubije svakomu je zlo započelo i koren*. The proverb thus advises against placing too much emphasis and trust in financial wealth, which could potentially lead to neglecting matters of higher importance in life, such as love, family or charity.

Another common proverb is: *You cannot serve God and Mammon* and *Nijedan sluga ne može dva gospodara služiti*. The word *Mammon* is traced back from Late Latin, Ecclesiastical Greek, and finally to Aramaic *mamona* or *mammon*, to mean *riches* or *gain*.<sup>27</sup> France describes the concept as being elevated to the principle of materialism diametrically opposed to the service of God.<sup>28</sup> In Serbian the beginning of same verse from Matthew 6:24 is employed to reflect the same position: *No servant can serve two masters*. Two proverbs *Wealth makes many friends* (Proverb 19:4) and *The rich has many friends* Proverb (14:20) find their match in *Kad ima*

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<sup>23</sup> Gensler 2013, 61, 76–107.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Judge not, that ye be not judged* (Matthew 7:1).

<sup>25</sup> This type of proverbs is known as better-saying. For more on this see Heim 2013, 377.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Better a dry morsel and quietness with it, than a house full of feasting with strife* (Proverbs 17:1).

<sup>27</sup> From: [https://www.etymonline.com/word/Mammon#etymonline\\_v\\_6762](https://www.etymonline.com/word/Mammon#etymonline_v_6762).

<sup>28</sup> France 1979, 10.

*bogatstva, ima i prijatelja*. Another word of caution that individuals with means should be careful as their material wealth attracts and thus exposes people's dishonesty, disloyalty and lack of genuine emotions.<sup>29</sup>

### Hate and Strife

The following proverbs are common in English and Serbian: *He who lives by the sword dies by the sword* or *Ko se mača maši, od mača će pogunuti*, *Turn the other cheek* and in Serbian a fuller version of the proverb is given *Kad ga neko ošamari po jednom obrazu, on okrene i onaj drugi*, or *Ko te udari po jednom obrazu, okreni mu i drugi*. Also, we encountered *Every kingdom divided against itself soon falls* and the continuation of the same verse (appearing in Matthew 12:25, Mark 3:25, Luke 11:17) *A house divided against itself shall not stand* or *Svako carstvo u sebi razdeljeno razorice se* in the Serbian corpus.

The first two proverbs send a message against violence and aggression, advocating for the idea of forgiveness and pacifism. Violence only begets more violence. The third proverb introduces the concept of solidarity and unity between individuals within a group, stating that the opposite leads to potential division and final demise of the said group and its constituents. To Dundes the last cluster of proverbs is an example of how “fixed-phrase items of folklore do manifest variation.”<sup>30</sup>

### Action and Consequences

*Let another man praise you and not your own mouth* and *Bolje je da te drugi hvali (nego da se sam hvališ)* cautions us against self-praise and self-aggrandisement, upholding Christian values such as humility and modesty. Societal praise and respect are more worthy than any form of self-flattery.

### Time and Chance

Two shared proverbs are isolated between the English and Serbian corpora. *There is a time for everything* or *Vreme svakoj veštini ima* opens a passage serving as a reminder about the equilibrium of human experiences, with its joys and adversities. This proverb is the opening line of a poem consisting of fifteen lines speaking about, as Bartholomew and O'Dowd describe it, “the propitious time that correlates with how God has made the world.”<sup>31</sup> *There is nothing new under the sun* or *Nema ništa novo pod suncem* repeats the notion of the repetitive cycles of existence, a symbol of permanence against life's changing constituents.

### Deception and Appearance

Three proverbs are found to be common in the corpus: *When the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch* or *Kad slepac slepca vodi, oba u jamu upadaju*, *He that digs a pit*

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<sup>29</sup> If we use the Bible as the source, the two proverbs have their respective translations in *Bogatstvo pribavlja mnogo prijatelja* and *Bogati imaju mnogo prijatelja*. The assumption is that the version which appears in the Serbian collection is simply a variant of the original proverbs, although it is unclear which verse it references.

<sup>30</sup> Dundes 1999, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Bartholomew and O'Dowd 2011, 219.



*for another shall fall into it himself* or *Ko drugome jamu kopa, sam će u nju pasti* and *Man looks at outside appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart* or *Ne gledaj u lice, već u srce*.

The first proverbial expression teaches us not to follow individuals who they themselves are guilty of ignorance and ineptness. By observing the context, Matthew 15:14 and Luke 6: 39, we can discern that this originally pertained to matters of faith and morality. The second one cautions individuals against committing evil doings which would ultimately come back to exact a price. The third one warns us about the irrelevance of outward appearance when compared to inner qualities of individuals, such as their character and their heart.

### **Work and Laziness**

Two proverbs were found to be mutual. In English we have *As you sow, so you reap*, and in Serbian we encounter two variants, *Kakva setva, takva žetva* and *Što poseješ, to ćeš i žnjeti*. This teaching encourages us to live a life of honesty, morality and virtue. Any doing which would undermine these principles, would as a consequence adversely affect our future.<sup>32</sup> *He that seeks finds* or *Ako tražiš, naći ćeš* teaches the values of perseverance, diligence and industriousness in everyday life. These principles can also be implemented in search of the Divine.

### **Men and Women**

One proverb the two collections share describes the role of a woman's domain being extended to male-female relationships where rather judiciously and clandestinely she influences her husband and his decision-making: *The husband is the head of the wife* or *Muž je glava, žena vrat, vrat glavu okreće*. The last phrase in the proverb, *vrat glavu okreće* or *the neck moves the head* is originally not found in the Bible, but seems to be a result of cultural and cross-cultural development as it is attested in Serbian and other languages.

### **Advice and Prudence**

*A little leaven leavens the whole lump* or *I malečak kvasčić celo tekne testa može zakvasiti* appears twice in the Bible, in Galatians 5:9 and 1 Corinthians 5:6. In the first appearance it is Paul who reminds Galatians about false practices eroding the very understanding of the Christian faith, notwithstanding how small they are perceived to be. In the second appearance Paul admonishes a church in Corinth for tolerating sin, which would, like leaven, grow to become corrosive to the tenants of Christianity. The metaphor of leaven emphasises the value of caution, watchfulness and integrity with small matters conceivably affecting larger frameworks.

The meaning of *One cannot gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles* or *S trnja se ne beru smokve, niti grožđe s kupine* is clearer when observing the verse Matthew 7:15–20 in full:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *He that digs a pit for another shall fall into it himself*.

This is a warning about deception and caution for stern vigilance when assessing people's perceived appearances. Since one cannot pick grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, immorality and corruption are thus unproductive. It transpires that one's character is reflected in one's conduct.

*You can't put new wine into old bottles* or *Vino novo ne sipa se u staro bure* refers to Jesus' words of condemnation of the old practice of fasting and their incompatibility with the practices of fasting in Christianity. The metaphor stands for open-mindedness and adaptability in the face of new ideas and conventions. After appearing in *Wealth and Poverty* referencing *Mammon* or *wealth*, Matthew 6:24 appears again with the opening verse: *No man can serve two masters*. Four Serbian proverbs are found to match the English one, including the one already mentioned in *Wealth and Poverty*: *Dvojim gospodarom jedan sluga s poslovanjem svojim ne može na volju ugoditi*, *Dvoma gospodama niko ne može rabotati*, *Jedna raja, a dva gospodara (ne može biti)* and *Nijedan sluga ne može dva gospodara služiti*. This Christian teaching reiterates that serving two masters is an impossible feat.

*Do not cast pearls before swine* and in Serbian *Biser ne valja bacati (prostirati) pred svinje* or *Ne bacaj biser pred svinje* convey a message of futility in light of matters which are worthy or important. Those individuals who are incapable of understanding or acknowledging them should not be entrusted with them.<sup>33</sup>

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Out of 425 proverb in the English collection and 643 proverbs in the Serbian collection, 46 common proverbs were identified. Common moral and ethical codes of behaviour in these proverbs fall into two categories. The first category consists of moral and ethical codes of behaviour strictly pertaining to belief in God. They emphasise the importance of living by the Christian doctrine and the correct understanding of it, the importance of prayer, the separation of religious commitment and secular responsibilities, and the importance of faith as a source of values and moral guidance.

The second category consists of moral and ethical codes of behaviour which are aligned with Biblical teachings, but are concerned with everyday matters and are practical in nature. Proverbs thus advise against placing too much emphasis on and trust in financial means, which could potentially lead to undervaluing matters of higher importance in life. They also advise against immorality, pride, violence and self-praise. A few proverbs introduce the principle of morality as rewarding, while behaviour contrary to it leads to unfavourable circumstances. In a similar vein, the judgment of others should start with self-reflection. Shared ethical values are values of perseverance, justice and fairness.

English and Serbian proverbs share common ideas about appearances and how they should be interpreted in relation to someone's conduct and character. Common Biblical teachings address time as cyclical, suggesting events in life happen at a timely and natural order. They caution us that knowledge or wisdom might come with sorrow. Instead, wisdom should come in balance with compassion. Lessons are shared on responsibility, futility, familiarity, unity, caution and strength. Lastly, the two cultures share ideas about children resembling their parents and the relationship between the wife and the husband.

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<sup>33</sup> In Serbian we encountered the verse *Ko je sluga, nije gospodar*. Since the Serbian collection predominantly does not reveal the number of the verse, the assumption is that it is from John 13:16, *A servant is not greater than his master*, which does not appear in the English collection of proverbs. Ch. the verse from the English collection, Matthew 10:24 and Luke 6:40, *The disciple is not above his master*.

Two thematic fields which lack shared proverbs in entirety are: *vanity and transience*, and *Lord and God*. Despite the total number of proverbs in Serbian exceeding the ones in English, no matches are to be found between the two languages. There are numerous proverbs in Serbian which reference *God* (via the noun *God* or its adjectival word forms, both with a variation in cases) and three proverbs which reference *Lord*, but none of them were found to have English counterparts. The English collection also has proverbs about Lord and God. This does not mean that the two cultures do not have identical proverbs. If we observe proverbs in English and Serbian that describe women we find many common proverbs.<sup>34</sup> This principle should apply to both unmatched themes. The two denominations do differ in their view of theosis, liturgy, iconography, or teachings of the Church fathers being equivalent to the Bible, which might have influenced cultural practices and the appeal of Biblical proverbs over time.

*Vanity and transience* is only addressed in the English collection, but not in the Serbian one. In both subsets of Christianity, Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity, vanity is regarded as undesirable. It is not categorised as a sin, but it may be perceived as coming from pride, which is itself one of the seven deadly sins. In Hebrew the word *hebel* is used for *vanity*, and it means *breath* or *vapour*, describing something passing and insubstantial. Fry sees vanity as suggesting that “life is something to find a way through, and that the way of wisdom is the way out.”<sup>35</sup> The currency of proverbs addressing vanity and transience could potentially be associated with a more thought-provoking, contemplative and consequently less inspiring perspective on life, compared to proverbs which tend to be more inspiring, direct and practical. This may point to a nation’s unique historical, cultural, and social contexts in which Biblical proverbs emerged and gained prominence.

The reason for the discrepancy between the languages may not be rooted in different religious aspects or cultural singularities, but linguistic reasons. The survival and thriving of proverbs in a culture may be due to the translators: “Not all proverbs original to the Bible remained proverbial in the languages and cultures into which they were translated. Some translators lacked the skill to find the aesthetic form and structure necessary for a statement to become a proverb.”<sup>36</sup> Fry addresses this issue with the aphorism from the Bible, *The kingdom of God is within you*: “The translator’s own attitude is important for the translation. Those who feel that psychological metaphors express the profoundest truths will prefer “within”; those who want a more social gospel – and these translators clearly have a social conscience – will prefer “among”.<sup>37</sup> He also mentions Hebrew puns and popular etymologies which he describes as naturally untranslatable.

## Conclusion

Proverbs are traditionally associated with folklore and oral literature. They represent the growth and consolidation of wisdom throughout the history of human, and in terms of European cultures, Christian civilization. The Bible as the foundational book of Christianity proffers values and principles peculiar to the Christian teachings. They can be found in the proverbs throughout the Holy Scripture, including the book entitled *Proverbs*. Researching proverbial parallelism originating from the Biblical in different denominations of Christianity may reveal common traits and norms for moral guidance for Protestant and Orthodox Christians.

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<sup>34</sup> Jevrić and Babić Antić, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Fry 1982, 124.

<sup>36</sup> Mieder 1990, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Fry 1982, 54–55.

In this research common moral and ethical codes of behaviour in British and Serbian cultural heritage rooted in Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity respectively were examined by identifying parallelism in two collections of Biblical proverbs. The corpus was formed by retrieving English proverbs from the Bible from Mieder's *Not by Bread Alone: Proverbs of the Bible* (1990), while Serbian proverbs from the Bible were retrieved from Stošić's *Biblical Proverbs and Sayings* (Biblijske poslovice i izreke, 2007). By identifying proverbs which these two collections share, we exposed common morals and values derived from the Bible, alongside culturally specific tropes.

Out of the 19 thematic chapters formulated by Mieder, 17 were found to contain parallel proverbs. Two chapters, *vanity and transience*, and *Lord and God*, were found to have no corresponding proverbs. The fact that the Serbian collection has 218 more proverbs resulted in a higher number of Serbian variants of certain proverbs, but not in a higher number of parallel proverbs in English and Serbian. Only 46 parallel proverbs identified. The number of proverbs in the Serbian collection being 643 would probably surprise even Mieder himself, who estimated that languages of cultures embedded in Christianity contain between three hundred and five hundred proverbs from the Bible.<sup>38</sup>

In the parallel chapters moral guidance offered within the frameworks of Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity highlighted another thematic classification of proverbs, this time under two categories, shared proverbs addressing belief in God and shared proverbs addressing varied practical and observational principles to abide by under such frameworks. The small number of corresponding proverbs, at times marked by culturally distinct metaphors, shares values such as justice, fairness and unity. These proverbs represent the shared core of Christian moral discernment and social conduct. Common proverbs provide a value system modelled on faith, making their tenets current and perennial.

Due to its focus on similarities in the two corpora, this study into Biblical proverbial parallelism in English and Serbian does not analyse the proverbs from the chapters *vanity and transience* in English, nor *Lord and God* in English and Serbian. It also does not explore different proverbs in the chapters which are common. Research can address these concerns so as to further understand the Bible as the foundation of our moral and ethical principles of behaviour. Additionally, an examination and thematic analysis of the largely unexplored Serbian collection, as well as a discussion of the influence of social and cultural circumstances on the meaning and currency of Serbian Biblical proverbs, might yield significant semantic and sociolinguistic results.

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**ВЕРА БЕЗ ДЕЛА МРТВА ЈЕ – ПАРАЛЕЛЕ У БИБЛИЈСКИМ ПОСЛОВИЦАМА  
НА ЕНГЛЕСКОМ И СРПСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ**

Библија је света књига хришћанске религије која садржи посебан жанр усмене књижевности, а то су пословице. Пословице оличавају мудрост сакупљену кроз генерације, дају и промовошу вредности, друштвено-културне норме и знање на сажет и изражајан начин. Циљ овог истраживања био је да се утврде сличности између две збирке библијских пословица, Мидерове *Not by Bread Alone: Proverbs of the Bible* (Не само о хлебу: пословице из Библије, 1990) на енглеском, која садржи 425 пословица, и Стошићеве *Библијске пословице и изреке* (2007) на српском језику, у којој се налази 643 пословица. Поређењем библијских пословица из ове две збирке ради откривања заједничких, испитивани су и морални и етички кодекси двају народа укорењени у протестантизму и православном хришћанству. Од укупно 19 тематских целина, паралелне пословице су пронађене у 17 поглавља, односно, њихов укупан број износи 46. Оне су даље категоризоване на пословице које се односе на веру у Бога, и пословице које садрже практичне принципе и савете везане за свакодневни живот. Заједничке пословице деле вредности као што су правда, правичност и јединство, а неке од њих садрже културолошки специфичне метафоре. Паралеле у библијским пословица представљају заједничку срж хришћанских моралних вредности и прихватљивог друштвеног понашања. Оне пружају систем вредности заснован на вери, чинећи такве вредности не само актуелним, већ и вечним.