A Functional Analysis of the New Testament Dialogues: Ideology in Light of Functional Sentence Perspective

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1. Introduction

The paper deals with a functional analysis of the primary religious discourse offered by the New Testament dialogues. It focuses especially on the aspect of ideology and its manifestation in the discourse. The author makes use of the textual analysis provided on the basis of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) elaborated by the Brno branch of the Prague school of linguistics, above all by Jan Firbas (*Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication*, CUP 1992).

The corpus used for the analysis comprises a number of Biblical texts; as anticipated, these include texts of narrative, dialogic and poetic character. The texts are analysed in terms of the theory of FSP, presented in charts of analysis, and commented on with a special regard to their ideological nature. Although each of the New Testament sub-genres investigated manifests varied sets of distinctive qualities, most of the characteristic features investigated within the texts may be labelled as "generally religious". These are closely related to the basic purpose of the religious communication: to persuade the reader of the veracity of the Christian doctrine. Among other tools, the Christian ideology is presented via gradation effect, lexical and semantic density, repetition, syntactic patterning, emotional appeal, explicitness, etc.

The paper also tackles the area of the stylised character of the New Testament texts. Unlike the language of genuine conversation that manifests indirectness, impersonality, attenuation, accentuation and vagueness, the religious discourse is characterised by an almost

opposite set of qualities: directness, personal involvement, persuasion, clarity and unambiguity. All these, along with the syntactic devices mentioned above contribute to the overall ideological impact of the texts under examination.

1.1. Religious Discourse and Ideology

In the course of the author's research into the domain of the Firbasian theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) on the textual material of religious discourse, ideology has appeared to be one of the most prominent phenomena existing in the analysis – in both the linguistic and extra-linguistic sense.

New Testament dialogues – and religious texts in general – of course, represent a type of persuasive discourse and, as such, both create and reflect ideology. The task of religious discourses is two-fold: to record texts that serve as a source of ideology and, at the same time, to produce texts that legitimise particular acts conducted in the name of ideology. In other words, religious discourse analysis should include the study of both production and dissemination of the ideology contained in it. According to van Dijk,

> discourse has a special function in the expression, implementation and especially the reproduction of ideologies, since it is only through language use, discourse or communication… that they can be explicitly formulated (van Dijk 1998: 316-7).

Logically, the ultimate goal of a religious piece of writing or speaking is to persuade the audience of the veracity of the Christian doctrine. That is why Christian ideology, being related to faith, doctrines, and personal beliefs, is naturally and inevitably interwoven in religious discourse. Apart from discourse itself (verbal realisation of ideology), ideology should also be associated with two other dimensions: society and (social) cognition. Such a multidisciplinary approach seems to capture the whole complex of ideology in its entirety (van Dijk 1998). Although the paper is concerned predominantly with the linguistic discourse proper, the other two aspects of ideology will be taken into consideration.

1.2. Topic of the Paper

The present paper deals with an analysis of two New Testament dialogues, focusing especially on the aspect of Christian ideology and its manifestation in the discourse. The textual analysis is provided on the basis of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP), which was elaborated by the Brno branch of the Prague Circle, above all by Jan Firbas (Firbas 1992). The texts under FSP analysis are presented in charts and commented on with a special regard to their ideological nature. Although each of the New Testament sub-genres investigated manifests varied sets of distinctive qualities, most of the characteristic features investigated within the texts may be labelled as "generally religious". The paper focuses on how ideology is reflected in the dialogues under examination and what linguistic means contribute to the overall ideological character of the particular discourse. Another question raised is how ideology shapes texts to achieve its purposes.

1.3. Corpus

The author's research into the area of FSP has predominantly dealt with the text material of religious discourse as offered by the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. The Biblical texts have proved to be suitable for the purpose of the research in FSP and thus have supplied a syntactically rich source of discourse analysis studies (most notably Firbas 1992 and 1995, Svoboda 1983, Adam 2004 and 2006, and Chamonikolasová and Adam 2005). Especially the later studies published by Firbas dealt with a number of the Old and the New Testament texts (Firbas 1989, 1995 and 1996). Apart from its linguistic value, the Bible is particularly interesting thanks to its canonical, and thus fixed character and a variety of translations that are available.

It has become evident that it is necessary to distinguish between the primary and the secondary sources of religious discourse. The primary religious discourse covers the area of religious texts that were written for the original purpose – to serve the believers (members of a religious community) as a source of worship material

(Ghadessy 1988). First, it is obviously the Bible itself; the Old and the New Testaments represent the most varied and universal basis for Christian teaching, interpretation, Church tradition, theological doctrines as well as a practical everyday guide. Another example of primary religious discourse is connected with different kinds of prayers and other liturgical texts, originally written for the primary goal of Christian faith – to worship God. The secondary religious discourse is, on the other hand, represented by writings that comment, further discuss or interpret the primary religious texts. Among the secondary ones, there are for instance Biblical commentaries (i.e. a distinct genre of theological literature interpreting the Scriptures) or sermons delivered in a church. These actually build on the base formed by the original religious texts and develop them in a certain way.

Following late Firbasian tradition in analysing Biblical discourse, the first stage of research was almost exclusively dealing with Old and New Testament texts; to be more specific, narrative, dialogic, and poetic texts (prayers, poems, proverbs etc.) from the Bible were scanned and explored (Adam 2004, 2005 and 2006). The second stage of research into the domain of religious discourse involves analyses of theological Biblical texts (especially epistles) and also scripted sermons (Adam 2008). In all the cases above the texts underwent a multidimensional analysis (i.e. were explored from the point of view of distributional macrofields) and were studied in terms of their stylistic and other qualities, the principal method of investigation being FSP analysis. Research has shown that such treatment gives a plastic picture of the text, and reveals textual characteristics.

The present paper will make use of just a fraction of the entire corpus of texts of religious discourse gathered by the author; the whole corpus is formed by texts of approximately 60,000 words and their FSP analyses. Here, only two short extracts of dialogic character will be used to illustrate the nature of Biblical dialogues.

2. Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)

2.1. Text Linguistics

As the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) deals with text linguistics, it will be necessary to provide the reader with at least a brief outline of this approach towards the study of language.

Text linguistics has played a crucial role in the development of discourse analysis. It views texts as elements strung together in definable relationships (see e.g. van Dijk 1985 or de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981), dealing with the analysis of the surface structures that unify the text (cohesion) on the one hand and the deep semantic relations between the elements (coherence) on the other. These concepts derive basically from the British discourse analysis approach represented by Halliday (Halliday and Hasan 1989). Text linguistics treats the text material from different perspectives; it is, however, unified by interest in describing language from the higher-level, suprasentential perspective as well as in the role of context and communicative approach.

Text grammarians take into consideration concepts such as hypersyntax (i.e. the syntactic structure of the whole text), standards of textuality and text types (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 3ff), discourse topic and the representation of discourse content (proposition) (van Dijk 1977 or Kintsch 1974), cohesion (texture) and coherence (e.g. Halliday and Hasan 1989, or Hoey 1991 and 2001), schemata as "higher-level complex knowledge structures" (van Dijk 1981: 141ff), context, "text-world" as a network of relations between elements (Beaugrande and Dressler 1981) etc.

Closely related to the study in the field of text linguistics is the information processing theory developed by the Prague (and Brno) School of Linguistics (Prague Circle), most notably by Jan Firbas – the theory of functional sentence perspective. Generally speaking, it explores the theme-rheme structures and the relationships between the units of information in the utterance.[1] The theory of functional

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[1] The true pioneer in the study of word order (and so information structure) was a French classical scholar Henri Weil, who distinguished between "the movement of ideas" and "the syntactical movement" (Weil 1844). Weil's contemporary, Hungarian polymath Sámuel Brassai, was the first to notice word order differences between Hungarian and Indo-European languages and to reveal that word order in Hungarian sentences is based on a division between a topic and a comment (Brassai 1860). Similarly, developing his ideas in an identical direction, a German general linguist and Sinologist

sentence perspective (FSP) and its analytical methods have been considered one of the prominent tools of discourse analysis and information processing.

2.2. Functional Sentence Perspective

Combining the approaches adopted both by formalists and functionalists, the theory of functional sentence perspective draws on the findings presented by the scholars of the Prague Circle. The founder of FSP himself – Jan Firbas – drew on the findings of his predecessor, Vilém Mathesius. As early as in 1911, Mathesius was the first to notice the language universal of every utterance having a theme (topic) and a rheme (focus/comment), and to formulate the basic principles of what was to be labelled FSP only later.

In Firbas's view, the sentence is a field of semantic and syntactic relations that in its turn provides a distributional field of degrees of communicative dynamism (CD); Firbas defines a degree of CD as "the extent to which the element contributes towards the development of the communication" (Firbas 1964: 270). The most prominent part of information is the "high point" of the message, i.e. the most dynamic element; other elements of the sentence are less dynamic (have a lower degree of CD). The degrees of CD are determined by the interplay of FSP factors involved in the distribution of degrees of CD: linear modification, context and semantic structure (Firbas 1992: 14-16). In spoken language, the interplay of these factors is joined by intonation, i.e. the prosodic factor.

It is the continuum of the degrees of CD along with the interplay of the basic FSP factors that make FSP specific within the field of text linguistics. One is able to analyse and interpret a clause making use of exactly given criteria. CD operates on the level of a clause; the individual thematic and non-thematic elements – when viewed from the level of a macro-structure – form then thematic and non-thematic strings (see below). In other words, the theory of FSP transcends the

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Georg von der Gabelentz (1891) dealt with the distinction between a so-called "psychological subject" and "psychological object".

domain of text grammar, enriching it with the approach adopted by the study of information processing.

Since the pioneering work of Jan Firbas' research into the theory of functional sentence perspective, the interpretative analysis of the clause has been the corner stone of FSP. Indeed, it is the FSP analysis of a basic distributional field (clause) that is the starting point of the functional interpretation. The Firbasian notions connected with the functional and dynamic approach towards text derive from the functional analysis of the clause; Firbas claims that the central position in FSP interpretation "is occupied by distributional fields provided by independent verbal sentences" (Firbas 1992: 11-12). He views a clause as "a field of relations" (syntactic and semantic above all) that determines the distribution of communicative dynamism (CD) over individual communicative units of the clause. Units carrying a lower degree of CD form the thematic part of the clause and those carrying a higher degree of CD form – together with so called transition – the non-thematic part of the clause (Firbas 1992: 80-81).[2]

Since the sentence is a field of relations, it is necessary to define what is meant by a basic distributional field. Firbas (1992: 15-17) agrees with Svoboda (1989: 88) that "a sentence, a clause, a semi-clause and even a nominal phrase serve as distributional fields of CD in the act of communication, and their syntactic constituents (e.g. subject, predicative verb…) serve as communicative units". Through the interplay of FSP factors (context, semantics and linear modification), it is then possible to identify the degrees of CD carried by the communicative units: according to the gradual rise of CD, it is theme proper (ThPr) – diatheme (DTh) – transition proper (TrPr) – transition (Tr) – rheme (Rh) – rheme proper (RhPr).[3]

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[2] Also Svoboda (1989: 25) considers the functional study on the level of the sentence a basis of functional syntax. He labels the sentential level units "mezzo-structures", hierarchically occupying the sphere between micro-structures and macro-structures.

[3] The distribution of degrees of CD within a sentence is not necessarily implemented linearly, and so it is inevitable to distinguish between the linear arrangement of sentence elements on the one hand, and their *interpretative arrangement* on the other (Firbas 1995: 63). The latter is defined as "the arrangement of the sentence elements according to the gradual rise in CD irrespective of the positions they occupy within the sentence" (Firbas 1986:

The domain of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) has been explored mostly on the sentential level, i.e. in the area of the basic distributional field created by the clause. Recently, however, attention has been paid also to the functional picture of higher hierarchical levels of text; the research has shown that the principles adopted in the FSP analysis of a clause are applicable also to higher hierarchical levels of text, such as paragraphs or chapters. The dynamic relations appear not to be restricted to the level of individual clauses but to exceed them, to operate on the suprasentential, macro-structure level of a communicative macrofield (for details see Adam 2004: 17-18). An FSP analysis of a distributional macrofield (a paragraph, a chapter) is a promising step taken in the study of FSP and that it can reveal significant characteristic features of a whole text (cf. Adam 2004 and 2006).

Within the FSP analysis of a distributional macrofield, two principal types of chains of semantically related items are worth mentioning; due to their dynamic-semantic character they are crucial for further analysis of a text. To be more specific, it is of crucial importance to distinguish between the co-referential strings on the one hand and the dynamic-semantic strings on the other. The co-referential strings are chains of individual communicative units with the same referent; the string usually starts in the rhematic sphere and, moving across the transition, it finally establishes itself in the thematic layer (Firbas 1992: 27-29). In the thematic sphere, if the notion remains context-dependent, the process may continue within a number of distributional fields. Firbas defines the co-referential strings as "linguistic elements naming or indicating the same extralinguistic phenomenon, in other words having the same referent" (Firbas 1992: 32). In the flow of communication, "co-referentiality links elements together, producing co-referential strings" (Firbas 1992: 63). Apparently, the co-referential strings – in contrast with the syntagmatic quality of the FSP analysis of the clause – run in the text in vertical direction, forming thus a field of paradigmatic relations.

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47). The two arrangements may either coincide, or there are differences of various kinds.

The other type of vertical chain – the dynamic-semantic tracks[4] – is not based on such inter-layer relations as the co-referential strings are, but on the links established within one of the tracks exclusively. The existence and function of the dynamic-semantic tracks was first described by Firbas in relation to the concept of notional homogeneity of the RhPr layer (Firbas 1992: 77 and 1995: 64-66). The tracks are formed by all the thematic, transitional and rhematic elements of the text respectively. In other words, the rhematic track of a text, for example, may be described as a complete set of all the rhematic elements found in the given passage. It follows that since the rhematic sphere is the most dynamic section of every piece of text (Rh-elements carry the highest degrees of CD), it is usually the rhematic track that is central to the functional analysis of a text. Also the thematic and even transitional tracks are, however, capable of chaining into separate dynamic-semantic tracks.

3. Discourse of Biblical Dialogues: FSP Analysis

Prior to the FSP analysis proper, it will be necessary to throw some light on the genre of Biblical dialogues. There are two essential reasons for that: firstly, Biblical dialogues represent a somewhat specific discourse that apparently stands between typically spoken and typically written discourses; they are recorded in a written form (hence sometimes "scripted dialogues"); however, they were primarily spoken as genuine conversational texts. Secondly, as Biblical dialogues create a substantial part of most writings of the Bible, they serve as a mediator of crucial theological values. It

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[4] To name the vertical dynamic-semantic strings, two different labels have been used: *layers* and *tracks*. In his key monograph (Firbas 1992) and preceding works, Firbas consistently uses the term *layer*. In Firbas 1995 (an article dealing for the first time with the FSP principles adopted in higher-level approach) and the following articles, he replaces this label by *track*; this term, in his opinion, depicts the dynamic character of the strings. The term *layer* is then used for the whole bodies of the thematic, the transitional and the rhematic spheres. In the present paper, I am using the terminology accordingly.

follows that it is important to treat dialogic texts of the Bible as a sub-genre *sui generis*.

As to the style and mode, the Biblical dialogue differs in many respects from the Biblical narrative: it comprises records of direct speech of two or more participants and the setting of the scene or reporting sentences occur in the text just to a limited degree. The development and the tension of the story are carried predominantly by the power of direct speech. It differs, however, from what is usually referred to as genuine / authentic conversation (see e.g. Urbanová 2003), i.e. a natural, spoken form of dialogue happening at a certain location and at a certain time. In the case of the Scriptures, it is not possible to speak of genuine conversation (implementing usually informal language), the core of which is depicted by Crystal as "the most fundamental and pervasive means of conducting human affairs" (Crystal 1987: 116). The dialogues in the Scriptures have to be treated as dialogues with their origin in writing.

Furthermore, in contrast to the narrative, the dialogic texts do not contribute much to the development of the story via narration, but they are suitable for treatment of abstract issues, such as explaining various concepts or ideas. In the scope of the four Gospels, for instance, this is the primary function; whenever a theological problem occurs, the narration stops and conversation takes over.

To use the FSP terminology and to depict another phenomenon typical of a dialogue, let me say the following: the dialogic text may be analysed either as a whole or it may be treated as a set of two (or more) utterances of individual speakers separately. In other words, each of the participants of the conversation may be restricted to one particular FSP analysis. Of course, both the lines should not be artificially separated and must be regarded as one dialogue consisting of a set of interwoven reactions; the split might be, however, functional for the purpose of tracing the individual dynamic-semantic strings.

In this section, two different extracts taken from the New Testament will be explored and discussed; both of them are found in the opening chapters of the Gospel according to St. John and will be cited according to the *New International Version* of the Bible (Kohlenberger 1997). Before each interpretation a brief introduction of the textual context will be provided.

3.1. *Jesus Teaches Nicodemus* (John 3:1-18)

This story is recorded in the Gospel according to St. John and represents one of the first occasions when Jesus explains his teaching to a non-Christian. He speaks to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who is a member of the Jewish ruling council (Douglas 1982: 664). Nicodemus is confronted with Jesus' teaching and, at the same time, faces difficulties in comprehending the metaphors Jesus is using (Jonge 1970: 337). The discussion concerns one of the essential concepts of Christian faith: 'new birth'. The fallen man, when converting to Christ and receiving his mercy, needs to be 'born again'; Ringwald defines the new birth as "a radical act of the Holy Spirit on the sinful human nature, leading to a renewed approach towards the world and following God" (Ringwald 1975: 176). In the dialogue of John 3:1-18, this theological principle is explored by Jesus and presented to Nicodemus.

Below is the text under examination in a full linear form, with individual distributional fields numbered, and a sample fraction of the chart offering the functional analysis of the passage under discussion (Fig. 1).[5,6]

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council (1). He came to Jesus at night (2) and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." (3) In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (4) "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked.

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[5] Note that the numbers in brackets, such as (5), mark verse numbers in the text of the Bible (see also Column 1 in the chart). In the chart of FSP analysis, the numerals following the units (such as God2) mark the real sequence of the basic communicative units – in other words the actual linear arrangement of the clauses; the original verse numbers are to be found in the very first column of the charts.

[6] In the charts, the individual lines of the direct speech held by different speakers are differentiated by means of graphics: one participant's utterances are in boldface, while the other ones are italicised. The rest of the text (narrative and reporting clauses) is in casual typeface.

"Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (5) Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to a spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (6) "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. (7) "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, and you do not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen (8) (…)

(Kohlenberger 1997: 631-635)

Clause	Conj.	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
1		there2	Now1	was3		a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus…4	Pr
2			He1 at night4	came2	to Jesus3		Q
3	and 1			said2	"..."3		Q
3a		*Rabbi1 we2*		*know3*	*'...'4*		Q
3a'		*you1*		*are2*	*a teacher who has come from God3*		Q
3b	*For 1*		*no one2*	*could perform 3*	*the miraculous signs you are doing4 if ...5*		Q

3b'	*with him3*		*were not2*		*God1*	Pr
4	Jesus2	In reply1	declared3	"..."4		Q
4a	**I1 you3**		**tell2**	**the truth4**		Q
4b		**no one1**	**can see2**	**the kingdom of God3 unless ...4**		Q
4b'	**he1**		**is born2**	**again3**		Q
5	Nicodemus1		asked2	"..."3		Q
5a		*How?1 a man2*	*can... be born again3*	*when he is old4*		Q
5b	*he2*	*Surely1*	*cannot enter3*	*(not) a second time4 into his mother's womb to be born5*		Q
6	Jesus1		answered2	"..."3		Q
6a	**I1 you3**		**tell2**	**the truth4**		Q
6b		**no one1**	**can enter2**	**the kingdom of God3 unless...4**		Q
6b'	**he1**		**is born2**	**of water and the Spirit3**		Q
6c		**Flesh1**	**gives birth2**	**to flesh3**		Q
6d	but	**the**	**gives**	**to spirit4**		Q

	1		Spirit 2	birth3			
6e		You1		should not be surprised2	at my saying 'You must be born again'3		Q
6f			The wind1	blowes 2	wherever it pleases3		Q
6g		You1		hear2	its sound3		Q
6h	but 1	you2		cannot tell3	where it comes from or where it is going4		Q
6i	So1	it2		is3	with everyone born of the Spirit4		Q

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Fig. 1 John 3:1-18 (fraction)

First of all, the dynamic-semantic string of "Jesus" will be explored: Nicodemus is assuring him that the Jewish council is aware of him being "a teacher who has come from God" (3a'); only God "could perform / the miraculous signs..." (3b). Jesus takes the opportunity and explains: "no one / can see / the kingdom of God / unless / he / is / born again" (4b). The same principle is recalled in (6b). **Repetition** is used throughout the whole passage; the table below illustrates the repetitive tendency within the text under examination. The chart contains a list of elements recurring in the distributional fields (4) – (8) and the frequency of their recurrence.

key words	number of occurrences
born (again) / birth	7
God	7
believe	6
Spirit	4
Son (of Man)	4
no one	4
whoever / everyone	4

Fig. 2 Key words of John 3:1-18

Obviously, the passage (in fact two distributional fields only!) is especially dense in expressions referring to the theology of Jesus' teaching. Logically enough, some of the notions are close to each other semantically, and so the issue is viewed from several different angles. The concept of eternal life is referred to, for instance, as "entering the kingdom of God", or "new birth". In this respect we may observe the same approach to the explored topic – everything is examined from several perspectives, exemplified and gradually clarified. For one concept several specifying attributes are used at different stages of the discussion. It follows that the question-answer conversation is held in an unambiguous, **straightforward** manner.

It is worth noting that it is not only the lexical content that contributes to the persuasive power of the passage; the same forceful tendency is reflected in whole syntactic structures. It seems that certain patterns of sentence types are repeated on purpose:

I / tell / you / the truth. (The very same clause appears in 4a, 6a and 8c!)

No one / can see (enter) / the kingdom of God / unless / he is / born again. (4b, 6b).

Everyone (whoever) / who / believes in him. (8l, 8m'', 8p, 8q)

Flesh / gives birth / to flesh. (6c) ~ 'The Spirit / gives birth / to spirit'. (6d)

Let me come back to the establishment and the role of the dynamic-semantic layers of the passage. The following chart describes the inner development of the rheme-proper (RhPr) string and speaks of a high degree of **dynamic-semantic homogeneity**.

The enumerated rhematic elements convey the basic message of the story.

> **RhPr:** the truth (4a) → the kingdom of God unless / born again (4b) → the truth (6a) → the kingdom of God unless / born of water and the Spirit (6b) → to spirit (6d) → [so it is] with everyone born of the spirit (6i) → the truth (8c) → ...what we know (8d) → what we have seen (8e) → our testimony (8f) → of earthly things (8g) → [you] do not believe (8h) → of heavenly things (8i') → into heaven (8j) → [everyone who believes in him] eternal life (8l) → [God gave] his one and only Son (8m') → eternal life (8m''') → not to condemn the world (8n) → to save the world / through him (8o) → in the name of God's one and only Son (8q')

To sum up, the Biblical dialogue seems to be strikingly different from what we label as genuine face-to-face conversation. In the case of the New Testament conversation, we deal with a more-or-less **stylized text**; though deriving from a real dialogue, it is recorded with the aim to persuade. One of the most obvious concerns of the author is undoubtedly **to persuade** the reader that his values are the right ones; one can hardly think of a more open and direct presentation of beliefs than those recorded in the passage under examination.[3]

3.2. *John the Baptist Denies Being the Christ* (John 1:19-28)

The dialogue of John 1:19-28 introduces one of the crucial characters of the New Testament: John the Baptist. Theologians agree that he is the last Old Testament prophet and that his role was "to prepare the way for the Messiah and to initiate Jesus' ministry in public" (Brownlee 1958: 33). It was John the Baptist that started baptising people, including Jesus himself, and so he was considered incorrectly the coming Messiah. John the Baptist, however, denies being the Christ (=Messiah) several times (Douglas 1982: 383-384). One of these occasions is recorded in this passage.

> Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. (1) He did not fail to

confess (2), but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." (3) They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" (4) He said, "I am not." (5) "Are you the Prophet?" (6) He answered, "No." (7) Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (8) John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert. 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" (9) Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (10) "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." (11) This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (12) (Kohlenberger 1997: 619-621)

The FSP analysis as offered by the chart shows the semantic-syntactic structure of the passage. First of all, I will explore the notional track of "John the Baptist" (the elements are written in bold print in the chart). The notion of John the Baptist enters the Rh-layer in the form of an Sp-element – "John's testimony" (1). John was asked whether he was the Messiah by the Jewish priests and he confesses that he is not the Christ (3a). The Jews, however, keep asking him many more similar questions, investigating his identity and activities. John provides them with explanations and announces that the real Saviour is coming and is much greater than him: "I / am / not worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals" (11c''). Before the scene and the dialogue reach their culmination in John's prophetic statement, he touches on the issue of baptism in (10) and (11) (for details see e.g. Brownlee 1958: 33ff).

From the point of view of functional syntax it can be said that the dynamic-semantic string of 'John the Baptist' follows a simple pattern: within ten basic distributional fields of the dialogue, there are four almost identical sentence structures; these will be presented in the sequence they appear in the course of the communication:

I / am / not the Christ. (3a)
I / am / not. [Elijah] (5a)
I / am / the voice of one calling in the desert. (9a)
I / am / not worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals. (11c'')

John the Baptist declares four times he is not the Christ: three times by a negative reference (3a, 5a, 11c''), in one case by means of a positive statement (9a). All the four structures follow the same syntactic structure: *I* + *am* + *complement*. At first sight, the repetitive use of this simple structure might seem monotonous and semantically weak, but the opposite is true: it is highly functional. The simplicity of the structure and its repetition contribute to the clarity of the message conveyed. The pattern used in the utterances of John the Baptist in this passage evokes the analogous structures of Jesus Christ (see the previous section).

If the dynamic-semantic string of John the Baptist is extracted, a simplified outline of the conversation comes forward; as usual, only the RhPr-elements are included:

RhPr: John's testimony (1) → to confess (21) → not the Christ (3a) → am not (5a) → No (7) → the voice of one calling in the desert (9a) → [make] straight way / for the Lord (9b) → one you do not know (11b) → the one who comes after me (11c') → whose sandals I am not worthy to untie (11c'')

Attention will be now turned towards the dynamic-semantic string of the Jewish leaders, who represent the other participant of the conversation (the elements involved are italicised in the chart). In harmony with the preceding gospel passage under analysis, the role of the priests is reduced to that of asking questions and investigating into the topic. In the case of this text – John 1:19-28 – there are altogether seven questions; all of them are uttered by the religious leaders who try hard to find out about John's real identity. Being confused, they enumerate possible answers. In this respect, their questions may even anticipate the potential questions and doubts of the readers. The typical question pattern is obvious also from the following outline of RhPr- and DTh-elements of the dynamic-semantic string of the priests:

RhPr/DTh: who? (4a) → Elijah? (4b) → the Prophet? (6) → who? (8a) → [give us] an answer...(8b) → What... / about yourself? (8c) → Why? (10a) → not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet? (10a')

It is also worth noting that the notional homogeneity is not manifested only in the rhematic layer (as demonstrated by all the RhPr outlines above); a special semantic structure may be observed also within the transitional layer (Tr). Examining the Tr-layer in the chart, the question-answer pattern is found to be employed in the area of the verbs as well:

Dynamic-semantic string	Transitional elements
John the Baptist	confessed (3) said (5) answered (6) replied (9), (11)
Jewish leaders	asked (4) said (8) questioned (10)

Fig. 3 The question-answer pattern in the transition

The findings deriving from the FSP analysis will be discussed and generalised in the following section of the paper.

4. Ideology in the mirror of FSP

It will be consistent to recall again that the purpose of religious writing, including the dialogue, is naturally connected with ideology. Firstly, the phenomenon of ideology – being a very vague substance – needs to be defined. Carter and Nash define ideology as "a socially and politically dominant set of values and beliefs which are …constructed in all texts especially in and through language" (Carter and Nash 1990: 21). In their study, they sub-divide the participants of communication with respect to style and ideology into "the interested writer" and "the interested reader" domains – "writers are concerned in varying degrees with: first of all persuading readers to pick up the text and to read it; second, they are concerned with prompting readers to act in accordance with a set of behaviours" (Carter and Nash 1990: 50-51). The reader, on the other hand, should be challenged to take over and accept the values. Also in the case of

Biblical dialogues, the linguistic means serve as a vehicle for communicating the message; Carter and Nash speak of the fact that "ideology is encoded in the linguistic organisation of the text" (Carter and Nash 1990: 59).

On a more socio-linguistically oriented note, Eagleton (1991) offers a number of possible angles from which ideology may be looked at. Among other labels, he provides the following: "a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class", "ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power", "identity thinking", "the conjuncture of discourse and power", "action-oriented sets of beliefs" (Eagleton 1991: 1). Obviously, also Eagleton pursues the three-vertex triangle of society, cognition and discourse, which was commented on above in connection with van Dijk's understanding of ideology (cf. van Dijk 1998).

How is Christian ideology constructed and/or used by the members of the social group referred to as Christian believers then? Drawing on the above general characteristics of ideology within discourse, a more specific insight into the area will be discussed now – on the basis of the FSP analysis done in the previous section of the paper. As the research is predominantly concerned with the syntactic-semantic (-lexical) level of discourse (FSP), the following discussion will be restricted to structures and strategies falling into these categories. For that matter, according to van Dijk, "variation in the order or hierarchical relations of the structures of clauses and sentences is a well-known expression of dimensions of meaning as well as of other underlying semantic and pragmatic functions" (van Dijk 1998: 202). In this way, hierarchical relations and syntactic-semantic structures may play a significant role in "emphasising or concealing preferred or dispreferred meanings, respectively" (van Dijk 1998: 203).

Above all, as apparent from the outlines of the two passages under analysis, the RhPr-elements indeed communicate the core of the message. There are, however, some other aspects that deserve a more thorough commentary. The first aspect has already been mentioned: **repetition.** By means of recurrence, the author succeeds in presenting the message in a lucid manner. The key notions (such as salvation, worship, life, etc.) are repeated many times in the dialogues of the gospels and so the **lexical density** (or **saturation**) of the theological terms is considerably high. The passages are

equipped with a limited range of expressions of the same kind that recur throughout the whole text frequently. The words – related predominantly to the vocabulary of Christian theology (monothematic content) – form a substantial part of the text. On the very syntactical level, this tendency may be seen in frequent use of **parallel expressions**, such as reiterated syntactic patterns. The purpose is clear: the role of the text is to present a Christian concept to people and to convince them that it is the appropriate way for their lives. It actually seems that in the sub-genre of dialogue, the degree of **persuasion** is even higher than in narrative or poetic texts (on details, see Adam 2006: 46-47 and 55-56).

Another feature typical of the dialogues recorded in the gospel is their **explicitness**. All points in the discussion are made openly and explicitly; there is hardly any attempt to hide things. The participants of the conversation do not play with words but get down directly to the issue. This method may be considered as unnatural and too persuasive, but it depicts the very nature of the Biblical message. By means of emphasising and continuous clarifying, the text provides the reader with a clear picture of theological concepts.

In the gospel, the texts usually explore the topic of salvation from several different angles; the passages under examination show a high degree of **lexico-semantic diversity**. For instance, Jesus uses a number of explanatory illustrations to make his ideas clear – water, food, and harvest – within a few verses, and so by means of **relexicalization** reinforces explicitness of the text. Only exceptionally a term is clarified by means of just one simile or metaphor. Several times, Jesus is referred to as God who redeems people: Messiah, Christ, Savior, Lord (in other words a hypertheme). The message could be expressed, as it were, in one or two sentences; nevertheless, to avoid misunderstanding the author treats the topic in a thorough and exhaustive manner.

Finally, also hypersentential (discourse) syntax, i.e. the way macrostructures such as paragraphs, sections or whole texts are organised, may contribute to the overall manifestation of ideology in a discourse. The impact of religious texts – and even more so of those of doctrinal nature – is reinforced by **notional homogeneity of the tracks**. As shown above, especially the rhematic tracks usually contain a set of semantically related (notionally homogeneous) rhematic elements that by means of reiteration / relexicalization are

capable of enhancing the repercussion of theological content of the dialogue on the part of the reader. In harmony with van Dijk, such syntactical-lexical structures "may have an impact on the description of in-group and out-group actions, and hence on ideological implications of text" (van Dijk 1998: 203).

5. Conclusions

As has become obvious, production (and perception) of ideological discourse is an extremely complex process, which should be approached not only from the position of the discourse itself, but also from the social and cognitive perspectives. This paper, nevertheless, dealt above all with the discursive material proper. It does not pretend to provide a full stylistic description of the language of Biblical dialogues; the results deriving from the FSP analysis rather suggest several remarkable features of religious writing. The analysis and following discussion was concerned exclusively with the communication of the primary religious texts, namely dialogic texts of the New Testament.

The analysis shows that the written religious communication displays a considerably high degree of notional homogeneity: the thematic, the transitional and the rhematic layers of the text contain primarily elements that fit into the semantic content of the individual layer. Both the texts examined in the paper may be characterised as lexically and semantically dense; the passages are equipped with a limited range of expressions of the same kind that recur throughout the whole text frequently. The words – related predominantly to the vocabulary of Christian theology – form a substantial part of the text. We may thus speak of monothematic content of the religious writings. Among the most prominent tools used are frequent repetition and syntactic patterning.

The FSP analysis of the religious texts has indicated that there is actually a whole range of stylistic properties that may be related to the stylised character of religious texts. While the language of genuine conversation manifests indirectness, impersonality, attenuation, accentuation and vagueness (Urbanová 2001.52-55), it is possible to say that the religious discourse is characterised by the opposite: directness, personal involvement, persuasion, clarity and

unambiguity. In other words, the primary aim of genuine conversation is human communication, whereas the language of the Bible may be, in many ways, viewed as a counterpart to authentic conversation; its principal task is to present religious beliefs and to persuade the readers. This is not to say that there are no overlaps between the two discourses; we should rather speak of opposite tendencies, resulting from different motivations. Below is a table reflecting the contrast between the two kinds of register:

AUTHENTIC CONVERSATION	STYLISED CONVERSATION
indirectness	**directness**
impersonality	**personality**
attenuation	**persuasion**
accentuation	**clarity**
vagueness	**unambiguity**
▼	▼
SEMANTIC INDETERMINACY	**SEMANTIC DETERMINACY**

Fig. 4 Genuine vs. stylised conversation features

As has been anticipated, the character of the religious communication derives from one of its principal purposes: an explicit presentation of ideology and subsequent persuasion. The primary task of the Biblical texts is to offer Christian doctrines in a transparent way, to strengthen faith of the believers, to provide a source of information on different issues of theology, and, last but not least, to convince the readers – whether believers or non-believers – of the veracity of the Christian principles presented in the Bible. To achieve this, Christian ideology is effectively and explicitly presented via linguistic phenomena such as lexical and semantic density, syntactic repetition, syntactic patterning, explicitness, notional homogeneity, etc. Moreover, in case of Biblical dialogues, texts prove to be rather stylised in their nature and do not conform to the standard semantic indeterminacy implemented by authentic conversation. All these features strongly contribute to the ideological impact on the reader. Such an ideological appeal then helps to legitimate the set of values via language, i.e. the intended purpose of religious discourse is fulfilled.

Only in this way can discourse have a special function in "the expression, implementation and especially the reproduction of ideologies…" (van Dijk 1998: 317).

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