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Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia (1990–2020): Their Legal Status, Restructuring, and Overall State in 2021[1]

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Abstract

The article presents summarized and partial results of a five-year research (2022-2026) on the scientific project "Churches of Reformation Heritage in Croatia (1990-2020)." The article is published in two parts, in the spring and autumn editions of the Kairos Journal. The first part focuses on the legal status, restructuring, and overall state of churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia in 2021. The second part discusses and analyzes the burning issue of their spiritual, theological, and social identity. The first part of the article explains the objectives of the project, its applied research methodology, and terminology used, while also defining key concepts and explaining the basic characteristics of the aforementioned churches. The article then explores the legal status of churches after the separation of the Republic of Croatia from Yugoslavia and its independence in 1991. The legal status of churches in the Republic of Croatia was established by the Constitution, the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, contracts of individual religious communities with the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and accompanying implementing acts. This was followed by the process of restructuring the churches, which was thoroughly researched, and this article explains the most

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1   This article was written as part of the research project of the Biblical Institute in Zagreb: "Churches of the Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia 1990–2020."

important findings. Finally, the article provides statistical data on restructured churches of the Reformation Heritage as of March 28, 2021.

Keywords: *legal status, identity of Christians, evangelical Christianity, churches of the Reformation heritage, Protestantism, Baptists, Pentecostals, charismatics, independent churches, Churches of Christ*

Introduction

In addition to the large Catholic Church, several smaller religious communities operate in Croatia, including a group known collectively as the "Churches of the Reformation heritage" (hereafter: CRH). This group of churches remains largely unknown to the scientific community. A partial study of their beliefs and activities was conducted and published by researchers from the Institute for Social Research (ISR) in Zagreb as part of the project "Minor Religious Communities in Zagreb (1988–1991)." The project "Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia (1990–2020)" is partially built upon the research conducted by the Institute for Social Research and covers thirty years of the life and activities of the CRH from 1990 to 2020. Unlike the earlier project, which focused exclusively on small religious communities in Zagreb, this more recent project examines CRH throughout the entire country. It involves researchers from the Biblical Institute in Zagreb and partner institutions, as well as experts from other organizations specializing in social research, music, and architecture.

The research's starting point was provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities (ALSRC), various contracts between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and individual CRH, and the Register of Religious Communities and Associations. The researchers investigated archival materials from state, church, and private sources, as well as periodicals and relevant scientific literature, to establish a theoretical framework and conduct comparative analyses. The project included interviews with denominational leaders, personal meetings between researchers and church representatives, and the completion of questionnaires by local pastors regarding the status of their communities. The research covered a variety of topics, including the role of the CRH during the Homeland War, the founding of new believer communities, and an analysis of global spiritual movements that have influenced the establishment and operation of these new groups.

The findings will be published in two parts, in the spring and autumn issues of the *Kairos* journal. The first part will focus on the legal status, restructuring, and overall state of CRH in 2021, while the second part will analyze the pressing issues surrounding the spiritual, theological, and social identity of CRH.

Justification for Undertaking the Research Project

Throughout history, Christianity has been divided into several theologically and numerically significant groups. Since the 11th century, Christianity has primarily been divided between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. During the Reformation in the sixteenth century, two renewal movements emerged in Europe: the Protestant Reformation and the Radical Reformation. Building on the Bible and certain aspects of both Reformation traditions, the evangelical movement[2] gained significant traction in the 19th and 20th centuries. Particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements also flourished. The World Evangelical Alliance serves as a network for churches in 43 countries, connecting the majority of evangelical Christians worldwide. This organization provides a global identity, voice, and platform for over 600 million evangelical Christians.[3] According to a report by the Pew Research Center (2011), Christianity was the world's largest religion in 2010, with an estimated 2.2 billion believers, comprising almost a third (31%) of the global population of 6.9 billion. Gladwin (2019, 162) estimated that of these 2.2 billion Christians, around 820 million can be described as evangelical Christians, including Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals but excluding denominational charismatics. This data indicates that world evangelical Christianity has become the second-largest group, next to the Catholic Church. This is especially evident in the global context. Gladwin points out that the majority of these 820 million evangelical Christians reside in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – approximately 690 million, or about 85 percent of the total. It is important to note that a large portion of global evangelical Christianity consists of believers from Pentecostal and charismatic denominations as well as independent local churches, including those in Croatia.[4]

However, the situation in Croatia is considerably different. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination, while evangelical Christianity is a minority. Census data shows that the number of evangelical Christians in relation to the total population in Croatia is almost insignificant. Nevertheless, significant developments over the past thirty years indicate that evangelical Christianity in Croatia is participating in the broader trend of growth of evangelical Christianity worldwide.

2   The adjective *evangelical* accompanies the term Christian to point out that this Christianity (or Christians) base their preaching on the *gospel* (Greek *euangelion*). By using the adjective *evangelical* in the name of the church, one emphasizes the central role of Jesus Christ, grace, faith and the Holy Scripture in the beliefs and practices of the church. The term *evangelical Christian* encompasses every Christian who bases his or her beliefs and practices on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3   For more details, see World Evangelical Alliance; Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2013.

4   For further information, see Barrett 2019. For the situation in Croatia, see the research document entitled "Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia on March 28, 2021."

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, evangelical and Pentecostal-charismatic movements in Croatia have emphasized the importance of evangelizing those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. As a result, 176 local churches now operate in Croatia. It is noteworthy that these are independent local churches, rather than denominations, because evangelical Christianity teaches that the local church embodies the fullness of ecclesiality. Local churches can join to form a denomination, but a denomination's authority is limited to what individual churches choose to delegate. Individual local churches are united in various groups such as the Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the Church of God, the Council of the Churches of Christ, the Pentecostal Church of Christ, the "Word of Life" network of churches, the Church of the Full Gospel, and several independent local churches.[5] While these communities differ in some theological emphases, leadership styles, and activities, they all seek to ground their beliefs and practices on the Holy Scripture.

Project Goals

The five-year research project aims to thoroughly investigate and analyze the following aspects of CRH in Croatia: 1) The legal status, number, distribution, and condition of CRH. 2) The activities of CRH during the Homeland War, including their political and humanitarian efforts. 3) The emergence and activities of new CRH registered within existing denominations. 4) The emergence and activities of new CRH registered as citizens' associations in Croatia. 5) The emergence and activities of unregistered CRH. 6) The systems of biblical, theological, and general education for church leadership, as well as the training systems for future leaders in denominations and local churches. 7) The activities of Christian associations (parachurch organizations) operating under the auspices of CRH. 8) The missionary activities of CRH and collaborations with foreign missionary organizations. 9) Domestic and global movements that have influenced the establishment of new churches and religious associations. 10) Significant social and cultural trends that new churches and religious associations have participated in, along with the extent of their involvement. 11) The musical creativity of CRH and the impact of global music and trends on their spirituality. 12) The condition of spaces where local churches gather and operate, and the relationship between spirituality and building architecture. Based on this research, we will publish an analysis of the general state of CRH from 1990–2020, along with guidelines for their productive development from 2026 to 2050.

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5   A more detailed historical-theological discussion about evangelical Christianity in Croatia can be found in: Jambrek 2003, and Jambrek 2014a.

Overview of Previous Research

Although some CRH have been active in Croatia for over a hundred years,[6] their beliefs, convictions, and societal contributions have not garnered much research attention. Partial studies were conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Zagreb under the project "Minor Religious Communities in Zagreb (1988–1991)." This research covered 16 small religious communities in the city, most of which fall under the category of CRH.[7] The topic of small religious communities has intrigued other researchers, leading some to base their doctoral dissertations on related findings. For example, Ankica Marinović-Bobinac earned her doctorate in 1999 from the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, with her dissertation titled "Non-Church Religiosity in Croatia: The Example of Pentecostal Communities." Similarly, Goran Goldberger received his doctorate in 2011 from the same faculty, focusing on "Media Presentation of Small Religious Communities in Croatia: Analysis of the Content of Daily Newspapers." In 2003, Stanko Jambrek published a concise history of churches and movements, along with an overview of their theological thought, in the book *Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia.* Additionally, the Protestant-Evangelical Council hosted a scientific conference in 1996 (Oct 28-30) to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Evangelical Alliance, which contributed to the understanding of the evangelical movement (Jambrek 1997a). The *Lexicon of Evangelical Christianity* (2007), edited by Stanko Jambrek and published by the Theological Institute ("Bogoslovni institut") and Prometej in Zagreb, also provides relevant insights into the study of CRH. A more comprehensive list of related works can be found in the appendix titled "Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia 1990–2020: List of Relevant Works by Croatian and Active Authors in Croatia."

Methodology

The research is conducted by scientists at the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, in collaboration with various partners. The project leader is Stanko Jambrek, Ph.D., a scientific advisor in the interdisciplinary field of research. The team includes Doctors of Science Danijel Časni, Ervin Budiselić, Dalibor Kraljik, and Goran Medved. The research is divided into two main parts. The first part involved denominational leaders and pastors from local churches. The second part engaged experts

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6   The Baptist movement has been active in Croatia since the 1870s, and the Pentecostal movement since 1907.

7   In 1990 and 1991, as part of the project "Minor Religious Communities in Zagreb (1988–1991)," the researchers from the Institute for Social Research have published a series of books and articles: Dugandžija 1990; Kufrin 1991; Marinović-Bobinac 1991; Marinović Jerolimov 1991; Plačko 1991; Terzić 1991.

from various fields, including historians, theologians, biblical scholars, musicians, architects, and journalists.

This research employs an interdisciplinary methodology that incorporates historical, legal, sociological, and theological approaches. The *historical approach* examines key elements of the life and work of CRH in Croatia from their beginnings up until the end of the 18th century and extends to 2021, focusing particularly on the period from 1990 to 2020. It also considers significant historical, spiritual, theological, and cultural aspects of foreign denominations and spiritual movements, as well as the theological reflections of individuals associated with domestic churches and denominations. The *legal approach* involved a thorough analysis of fundamental legal documents, including the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, agreements between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and specific religious communities, and other relevant legal acts. This analysis established the legal framework within which these religious communities operate. The *sociological approach* provided quantitative insights into the life and activities of these communities. The data about CRH were gathered based on analyzing the agreements between each denomination and the Government of the Republic of Croatia; reviewing the Register of Religious Communities; examining the Register of Associations; and utilizing official data from denominations and independent churches, which included available annual reports, websites, and social media. Additional sources included archives of denominations and independent churches, private archival materials, and questionnaires and interviews with representatives of these denominations and church leaders. Furthermore, questionnaires and interviews were conducted with representatives of Christian associations operating under the auspices of the CRH, along with the analysis of research data collected through these questionnaires. The *theological approach* qualitatively supplemented the findings from the previous three approaches. The research utilized the evangelical theological method, which guides individuals in becoming and remaining disciples of Christ, fostering a quality relationship with God the Father, and co-creating life with God in the power of the Holy Spirit while fulfilling his creative will in everyday life.[8] Evangelical theology emphasizes a relationship characterized by knowing God, loving him, and obeying his will. In summary, the primary objective of evangelical theology is to glorify God through knowledge of him, love for him, and his creation, as well as through service to him in the world. This theology is rooted in listening to the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, and approaching the Word with faith, which leads to obedience and action. Ultimately, putting the Word into practice shapes both the individual and the Christian community, the Church.

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8   This is a summarized text about the evangelical theological method and the goals of evangelical theological research and writing found in Jambrek 2017, 18-26.

Evangelical theology is always closely related and connected with the church of God and its God-given commission. Therefore, the theology (mostly evangelical) in CRH in Croatia is closely linked with hearing and doing God's Word (the Bible). Christian theological thinking and service arise from a personal relationship with God, are rooted in God's Word, and, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, they complement each other in many ways.

Faithful evangelical theology is rooted in the Bible, which serves as the primary source for theological research and reflection, as well as the ultimate standard above all others. The Apostle Paul notes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Evangelical theology upholds the authority and primacy of Holy Scripture, placing it above tradition, experience, reason, and culture. While the significance of these latter elements is acknowledged, they are given a subordinate role within the hierarchy of authority. Therefore, the Bible serves as the foundation of theology, while tradition, experience, reason, and culture provide valuable support for the faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture.

1. CRH Terminology, Demarcations, and Basic Characteristics

During the research period from 1990 to 2020, three terms were used to describe the researched group of denominations and local churches in Croatia that aimed to highlight their established or desired identity: "Protestant churches," "Evangelical churches," and "churches of the Reformation heritage." Throughout the past two thousand years, Christians and churches have sought to understand the essence of Christianity and define the core of their faith tradition. Similarly, during the research period, CRH endeavored to establish and define their identity. We investigated the processes of acquiring, accepting, adopting, building, and changing identities, identifying and analyzing their development and the influences on CRH throughout the research period. We also summarized the outcomes of these processes and the impacts on CRH for each research topic.

The project was named "Churches of the Reformation Heritage." Why? Should not the denominations and independent local churches we included in the research belong in the group of Protestant churches? Some authors do see them as Protestant,[9] while others consider them evangelical. However, as a whole, they are neither completely Protestant nor evangelical, although their beliefs and activities have certain elements of both Protestantism and evangelical Christianity. Until 1997, I regarded them as evangelical (Jambrek 1997b). However, after being influenced by historical, spiritual, theological, and cultural arguments, I later referred

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9   For example, Magda T. 2019; Matošević 2012; Matošević, Šeba, and Knežević 2022.

to this group as "churches of the Reformation heritage" (Jambrek 1999). In my book, *Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia: A Review of History and Theological Thought*, I defined the term "churches of the Reformation heritage in Croatia" and examined their historical development and basic characteristics (Jambrek 2003, 13-19). Below, I summarize a more detailed discussion from the book.

Why do I refer to these as churches of the Reformation heritage rather than Protestant churches? The terms Protestantism and Reformation can be confusing, even after 500 years. To clarify, it is essential to define and differentiate between the terms Reformation and Protestantism. The Reformation (from the Latin *reformare*, meaning "to change" or "to transform") was a spiritual movement aimed at renewing the doctrines and practices of the church in 16th century Europe.[10] Alister McGrath (2006, 85) states that the Reformation was a movement that sought to return the Western Church to its biblical foundations in terms of belief systems, morals, and structures. The term "Reformation" has several meanings and is also used to describe the historical period from 1517 to 1618. McGrath (2006, 88) identifies four key elements within the Reformation: Lutheranism, the Reformed Church or "Calvinism," the "Radical Reformation" (often referred to as "Anabaptism"), and the "Counter-Reformation" or "Catholic Reformation." Therefore, he discusses the Lutheran, Calvinist, radical, and Catholic reformation (2006, 88-100) or the Reformed Church and the Lutheran, radical, and Catholic reformation (2003, 5-11). He categorizes the Reformation into Protestant and Catholic movements. David V. N. Bagchi (2000, 462) classifies the various reformation movements into three confessional groups: 1) the Protestant Reformation, which includes Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican traditions; 2) the Radical reformation, which encompasses Anabaptists, spiritualists, and rationalists; and 3) the Catholic Reformation, which includes reforms based on the Council of Trent, as well as developments associated with reforms within existing orders and the establishment of new ones.

The historical development of the Reformation led to the emergence of four main traditions:[11] 1) the Evangelical or Lutheran tradition, 2) the Reformed or Calvinist tradition, 3) the Anglican tradition, and 4) the Radical or Anabaptist tradition, which eventually gave rise to the tradition of the free churches (Jam-

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10 The Latin word *reformatio* had three basic meanings when used in the 16th century. First, it meant a new legal code or set of statutes, for example the "Reformation of the Imperial City of Nuremberg in 1484." Second, it signified the restructuring of the university's study curriculum (the meaning most used by Luther). The third meaning was the internal reform of the church (Scribner 1986, 4).

11 The tradition of the Reformation (Lat. *traditio*, from *tradere* – to give over, to hand over) implies the totality of religious teachings, regulations, customs, and rules of conduct that are transmitted from generation to generation through oral or written transmission, upbringing, and education (Jambrek 2013, 17).

brek 2003, 13; 2013, 41-53).[12] In relation to secular authorities, the Reformation is divided into the "magistrate Reformation,"[13] or "mainstream Reformation," which includes the Evangelical, Reformed, and Anglican traditions, and the Radical Reformation.[14]

The Radical Reformation, particularly its moderate Anabaptist tradition, serves as the "reformation of the Reformation" or the "correction of the corrections of Catholicism" (George 1994, 255). Amid spiritual, doctrinal, and liturgical reform, the Radical Reformers accepted some aspects of Lutheran and Calvinist reforms but continued to reform Christian life based on the Holy Scripture. Neither Roman Catholics nor the Protestant groups (Lutherans and Calvinists) accepted the Radical Reformation, and the Radical Reformers faced persecution from both sides. Therefore, the tradition of the Radical Reformation can be seen as a specific form of Protestantism – if one can consider it Protestantism at all – which differs significantly from the original Protestantism as defined by the State Council at Speyer (1529) and Augsburg (1530).[15] The Reformation churches in Croatia today have primarily inherited aspects of the Radical Reformation from the Reformation era and only partially from the broader Protestant Reformation. Protestantism (from the Latin *protestare*, meaning "to protest" or "to oppose") has two primary meanings today. In a broader sense, it refers to the churches that emerged from the Reformation of the 16th century.[16] In a narrower

12 Each of these traditions is enriched by at least some sub-traditions. Thus, for a few decades, from the 1540s to the 1580s, the Lutheran tradition of the Reformation developed into two theological-political parties: the Philippists, i.e. the followers of Philipp Melanchthon, who advocated a humanistic-Lutheran theological orientation, and the Gnesio-Lutherans, also known as Flacians because they were led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus, advocated a "pure" biblical theological orientation. In the Reformed tradition of the Reformation, we can distinguish between Zwingli's and Calvin's orientations. The Radical tradition of the Reformation, for example, consists of several orientations: Anabaptist, clerical (spiritualist,) and antitrinitarian (Jambrek 2013, 16).

13 The Evangelical, Reformed, and Anglican traditions of the Reformation adopted the renewed doctrine of the church, but they still shared with medieval Roman Catholicism the ideal of a Christian state in which all citizens are baptized members of one church with one belief. The reformers of the Evangelical tradition of the Reformation believed that the church was subject to the secular action of the authorities, such as princes, magistrates, and city councils. Magistrates had rights within the church, and the church could rely on the authority of the magistrate to impose discipline, suppress heresy, or maintain order (McGrath 2006, 88).

14 Radical reformers challenged the permeation of the Church's and the magistrate's authority, considering that the reformation in accordance with the Holy Scripture was only partially completed. They believed that reform was not enough – they sought to establish the Church on ancient apostolic foundations, and that the Church and the state must be separated, theoretically and practically.

15 In order to shed more light on this point of view, we will use a comparison chart of the characteristics of the Protestant churches and the churches of the Reformation Heritage.

16 In its broadest sense, the term *Protestantism* encompasses the entire spectrum of non-Roman Catholic Western Christianity with different doctrinal worldviews. However, not all Christians and Christian churches of non-Roman Catholic Western Christianity are willing to be included

sense, it denotes the Lutheran tradition of the Reformation. The term Protestantism originated from a protest called the *Protestatio*, which was issued by six German princes and fourteen cities at the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529.[17] The Diet concluded that the Edict of Worms (1521), which outlawed Martin Luther and his associates, would be enforced. In response, those implementing reforms influenced by Luther openly protested with the *Protestatio*, defending freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities (McGrath 2006, 88). After Luther's death, the Lutheran tradition of the Reformation developed along two theological-political lines from the 1540s to the 1580s: the Philippists, followers of Philip Melanchthon, advocated a humanistic-Lutheran theological stance, while the Gnesio-Lutherans, led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus, advocated a "pure" biblical theological direction. In summary, the Philippists embraced humanism as the basis for interpreting the Bible and theological reflection, aligned themselves with authorities, and implemented political and humanistic reforms. In contrast, the Flacius faction pursued a "pure" biblical theological approach and sought to implement Church reforms even at the expense of conflicts with authorities. It is important to note that the teachings and actions of today's churches, including the CRH, reflect certain elements of the theological thought from the Protestant Reformation.[18] The tension between the political and humanistic theological orientation on one hand, and the "pure" biblical theological orientation on the other, is still evident in today's Protestant churches and the CRH. Liberal Protestant churches and progressive evangelical churches (progressive CRH) strongly embody the political and humanistic theological orientation, while conservative evangelical churches, including conservative CRH, strive to uphold a "pure" biblical theological perspective.[19] Progressive (liberal) church leaders and theologians

in Protestantism, nor do some Protestant churches, for example the Anglican and some Lutheran and Reformed churches, agree when some free churches are considered Protestant churches (Jambrek 2003, 13).

17 The term *protestant* was originally a political term, referring to those in the Holy Roman Empire who protested against the conclusion of the Second State Assembly in Speyer in 1529 (Scribner 1986, 3).

18 The Reformation had multiple influences on Croatian regions, stemming from three distinct traditions: Evangelical, Reformed, and Radical. The most significant impact came from the evangelical tradition, primarily from three centers, each with its unique goals and theological-cultural emphases. The leading center was the university in Wittenberg, led by Philipp Melanchthon, a humanist colleague of Martin Luther. Another important center for the Croatian territories was found at the court of Duke Christoph von Württemberg in Stuttgart, which included the university in Tübingen. The third influential center was the Gnesio-Lutheran movement in Magdeburg, led by Matthias Flacius Ilyricus. While all three centers adhered to Luther's original teachings, each pursued its own religious, political, and cultural objectives. These diverse aims were significantly reflected and realized in various areas throughout the Croatian lands (Jambrek 2013, 67).

19 We deal with these topics in more detail in the discussion of the relationship between progressive and conservative evangelical Christianity in the second part of this article entitled "Churches of

often identify as Protestants, while conservative leaders and theologians tend to lean towards evangelical Christianity and CRH.[20] The term "Protestant church" is a borrowing from Western terminology and is challenging to apply within the Croatian historical, theological, and cultural context. In Croatia, the only churches that can be historically, theologically, and culturally categorized as Protestant are the Evangelical Church and groups of Reformed churches.

Why choose the term "churches of the Reformation heritage" over "evangelical churches"? As the evangelistic fervor of the Reformation waned during the 17th and 18th centuries, evangelists like John and Charles Wesley, D. L. Moody, Charles Finney, and others ignited a renewed hunger for God's Word within American and European Protestant churches throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. This period was marked by significant spiritual awakenings that emphasized the authority of the Bible, divine sovereignty, human responsibility, and the necessity for personal purity and discipline. It also highlighted the importance of experiencing conversion to God, living a holy life, and demonstrating evidence of a newly acquired or renewed personal faith, which actively manifests in evangelism and service to those in need. Christians who accepted and preached the gospel experienced spiritual awakening, new birth, and conversion to God grounded their beliefs and actions on the gospel of Jesus Christ. They came to be known as "evangelical Christians," and the movement of proclaiming the gospel was referred to as the "evangelical movement" (Jambrek 2007, 174-176).

The evangelical movement (Greek term *euangelion*, meaning "gospel" or "good news") focuses on the proclamation of the gospel – the good news that Christ died for humanity's sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures. This act provides redemption for sinful humanity. The gospel represents the good news of salvation and the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, as it is described in Romans 1:16: "It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." A person's conversion to God and their faith in him is the appropriate response to this message of salvation. To enable people to respond to the gospel, it must be consistently proclaimed and preached across generations. Thus, the evangelical movement can be seen as a continuous history of preaching the Word of God.

In the 19th century, the evangelical movement sparked revivals across North America, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, and France. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, it faced strong opposition from liberal Protestant theology, which instigated its rapid decline. After World War II, the evangelical movement experienced a renewal; missionary activities in foreign countries

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the Reformation Heritage in Croatia (1990–2020): Spiritual, Theological and Social Identity."

20 Of the 37 interviewed leaders of local churches of Reformation heritage, only four stated that their churches belong to a Protestant church, while 33 stated that their churches belong to evangelical Christianity and churches of the Reformation heritage in Croatia.

were revitalized, Bible institutes and theological faculties were established,[21] work among university students was strengthened, and a plethora of books and magazines were published along with numerous radio programs. The leaders of this renewed evangelical movement distanced themselves from the tendencies of separation, anti-intellectualism, legalism, and moralism often associated with fundamentalism. Instead, they sought to spiritually renew the churches and build ecumenical bridges through evangelism, placing significant emphasis on the social gospel.

Key characteristics of this new group of evangelical Christians include: a revised interpretation of the concept of biblical inerrancy (based on the acceptance of historical criticism), which asserts that the teaching of the Bible is inerrant, in contrast to the older fundamentalist view that regarded the text of Holy Scripture as completely error-free; an emphasis on Christian action as essential evidence of saving faith; a rejection of dispensationalism and its associated pessimism; a renewed focus on the social dimension of the gospel; and engagement in dialogue with ecumenical liberalism and other religious traditions (Smith 1992, 62). In the following text, we will only briefly outline the key elements of the development of the evangelical movement in Europe and its influence on Christianity in Croatia.

The development of the new evangelical movement, both globally and in Croatia, has been significantly influenced by evangelical alliances[22] and the Lausanne movement.[23] For instance, the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) was established in 1951 to connect national evangelical alliances into an active community. By the early 21st century, national alliances from nearly every European country were represented in the EEA.

In Croatia, the term "evangelical church" refers only to a portion of the churches and Christians present.[24] There are several reasons for this. First, although "evangelical churches" imply fellowships of Christians that base their faith and practice on the gospel of Jesus Christ, some churches in Croatia do not wish to adopt this label, due to complexities within the evangelical movement.[25] Additionally,

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21 For example, London Bible College in Great Britain (1943) and Fuller Theological Seminary (1947) in the USA.

22 For more information on evangelical alliance, see: World Evangelical Alliance, European Evangelical Alliance; Protestant Evangelical Council in the Republic of Croatia.

23 For more details on the Lausanne movement, see https://lausanne.org/.

24 The research results of the Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia (1990–2020) project will show a clearer picture.

25 The world evangelical movement brings together an entire spectrum of denominations and independent local churches, from fundamentalist and conservative to progressive and distinctly liberal, as well as elements of a number of other spiritual movements and their specific practices. Due to issues of relationship to the Bible, the questioning and ignoring of its authority and the powerful process of Bible relativization, some denominations and independent local churches do not want to identify themselves as part of the world evangelical movement.

some congregations prefer to avoid the term "evangelical" to prevent confusion with the Evangelical Pentecostal church, a specific denomination. Moreover, the Protestant Evangelical Council (Protestantsko evanđeosko vijeće – PEV) in Croatia, which serves as an evangelical alliance and fellowship for evangelical Christians, includes only four denominations.[26] This excludes other denominations and independent local churches that also align with global evangelical Christianity in terms of beliefs and practices.

Given that the terms "Protestant Church" and "Evangelical Church" do not fully capture the reality of the Croatian context, a more fitting term is "churches of the Reformation Heritage."

1.1. Definition of Churches of the Reformation Heritage

CRH are independent and autonomous local churches (denominations) that ground their teachings and practices in the Bible, drawing inspiration primarily from it, and secondarily from the Reformation of the 16th century as well as various evangelical movements of faith that have emerged from the 17th to the 21st century. Just as Christians and churches have sought to identify the essence of Christianity and articulate the core of their faith tradition over two millennia, CRH have also engaged in a quest for their own identity during the research period from 1990 to 2020. We have examined the processes of acquiring, accepting, adopting, building, and evolving identities, identifying and analyzing their developments and influences during this period, and summarizing the outcomes of these processes on CRH for each research topic. The topic of the spiritual, theological, and social identity of CRH in Croatia will be further explored and published in the next issue of this journal.

In the previous definition of CRH identity in Croatia, the characteristics of foreign churches and denominations (from North America and Europe) were simply replicated and imposed onto the Croatian context, neglecting the unique Croatian historical, spiritual, theological, and cultural influences. When considering the churches in Croatia, which have some historical and theological ties to the 16th-century Reformation, I have chosen to categorize them into two groups: Protestant churches (the Evangelical Church and Reformed Christian churches) and churches of the Reformation heritage (free churches of the Radical Reformation tradition).[27]

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26 The Protestant Evangelical Council consists of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the Union of Baptist Churches, the Church of God, and the Council of Churches of Christ.

27 In the Croatian context and in its broadest sense, the term "Protestant church" can sometimes include churches of the Reformation heritage, but the term "churches of the Reformation Heritage" can also include Protestant churches. But the difference between them is really too great for these two expressions to be identified without an exhaustive explanation.

From the Protestant Reformation, CRH embraced the call to return Christianity to the teachings of the Holy Scripture, emphasizing that only *Scripture, grace,* and *faith* form the foundation of humanity's relationship with God. Additionally, from the Anabaptist orientation of the Radical Reformation, CRH adopted the practical application of biblical teachings, even in the face of persecution and torture. They inherited from the Anabaptists the doctrine of discipleship, which holds that one must first believe to receive the blessings of baptism, as well as the commitment to practically implement Christ's mission of proclaiming the gospel and a zeal for evangelization. Following Anabaptist teachings, CRH believe in the separation of church and state, asserting that each local church possesses the fullness of ecclesiality, as the Word of God is preached within it and the Spirit of God resides there; hence, each local church is autonomous and independent.

CRH base their doctrine on the Holy Scripture and embrace the principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda* – the belief that the Church is always in the process of reform and change. With encouragement from Anabaptists toward the practical application of biblical teachings during the Reformation, they also draw from the traditions of evangelical revivals, including Pietism and Puritanism.

Anabaptism and Pietism sought to fulfill the Reformation not only through doctrinal reform but also through reforming everyday life in alignment with the Holy Scripture. These movements advocated for a thorough renewal of the Church, emphasizing vitality and faithfulness that mirrored the 1st-century Church – a church characterized by fellowship and mission. Puritanism was known for its efforts to reform or purify the worship and lives of believers. These movements emphasized the necessity of being born again, the heartfelt experience of faith, and the transformational reality of renewal, complementing the Reformation's focus on justification by faith (Bloesch 1989, 23).

1.2. Basic Characteristics of the Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia

The basic characteristics of CRH[28] are compiled based on documents from various denominations and independent churches. The key documents endorsed by the Protestant Evangelical Council[29] include the *Lausanne Covenant*, the *Manila*

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28 In the book *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj: Pregled povijesti i teološke misli*, I have listed ten basic characteristics of the CRH (Jambrek 2003, 18). In this, I took into account the characteristics of the time, or modified and supplemented them a little on the basis of exhaustive research on the CRH project. I combined the third and fourth characteristics into one under the title "The Church is a Community of Born-Again Christians." As the fourth and fifth characteristics, I put: "Believer's Baptism" and "Evangelization – the activity of the Holy Spirit in and through the believers." I removed the tenth characteristic "Openness to Truth under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit" from the list of basic characteristics, because it is very difficult to notice in most CRH.

29 The documents are accepted and their statements are promoted in Croatia on their social net-

Declaration, and the *Cape Town Statement of Commitment*. The foundational documents of denominations and independent local churches reflect their core beliefs, statutes, and teachings. Typically, the statements of faith are published on websites of the denominations and independent local churches. I would like to highlight the following basic characteristics of the CRH:

1. Acceptance and Application of the Authority and Power of the Bible – the Word of God.

In Croatia, the CRH are primarily recognized by their believers' relationship to the Bible. These churches uphold that the Bible is inspired by God, infallible (true), and wholly reliable as the Word of God. In essence, the Bible or Holy Scripture serves as the only final authority for Christian belief and life, as well as for the beliefs and actions of the Church. Holy Scripture is regarded as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and morality. As stated in the *Lausanne Covenant* regarding the authority and power of the Bible:

> We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God. *(2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; John 10:35; Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 1:16, Matthew 5:17,18; Jude 3; Ephesians 1:17,18; 3:10,18).*

The CRH in Croatia strongly emphasize the authority and power of Holy Scripture in the life of the Church. They believe that the proclaimed Word of God positively influences and transforms people's lives, thereby significantly impacting contemporary culture and society. Recognizing the authority of Holy Scripture empowers believers to lead abundant lives in obedience to God, under his authority.

2. Jesus Christ is the Savior and the Only Way to God. Salvation by God's Grace is Received by Faith in Christ.

The Holy Scripture clearly states that salvation is a gift of God's grace that man can only accept but cannot earn or merit through good behavior (Rom 1:16-17; Eph 2:4-8). God's work of salvation was made possible through the death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus Christ is the

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works by the following denominations and members of the Protestant Evangelical Council: Evangelical Pentecostal Church, Union of Baptist Churches, Church of God, and Churches of Christ.

center of the gospel, the good news of salvation (1 Cor 15:3). His death was a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, bridging the gap between humanity and God, and enabling individuals to enjoy fellowship with him. By dying on the cross, Jesus Christ accomplished the work of substitution, redemption, and reconciliation. Therefore, Christians in the CRH strongly emphasize that God's grace is the only means of salvation, and that salvation is a gift accepted only by faith. True faith, however, is demonstrated by the good works that God has prepared in advance for Christians to carry out (Eph 2:10).

3. The Church is a Fellowship of Born-Again Christians.
The Church is a community of saints, or the fellowship of born-again Christians (Jn 3:1-8), who are baptized as adults after confessing their sins and repenting, along with expressing personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The new birth is God's work in man, and man's response is to convert to God through confession of personal faith, repentance, and confession of sin. The Church consists of born-again Christians who have a personal relationship with God; therefore, in the CRH, there is a noticeable renewal of the Church in both belief and action, modeled after the Church described in the Acts of the Apostles.

4. Baptism of Believers.
Baptism is a public identification with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12). It serves as an external sign of union with Christ by faith and symbolizes baptism into the Body Christ (1 Cor 12:13). Believers' baptism is for the individuals who have confessed their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. The prerequisites for baptism include rebirth, conversion to God, and faith (Acts 20:21). The baptized person must repent of their sins, turn to God, and believe in Jesus Christ as their exalted Lord and Savior, while also committing to becoming his disciple. They should understand the basics of the Christian faith and demonstrate a renunciation of their old way of life, expressing a desire to be obedient to the Lord in their daily lives.

5. Evangelization: The Work of the Holy Spirit in and Through Believers.
An integral part of Christian life is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers (Lk 24:49; Acts 2:36-39). This indwelling is manifested in the development of a Christlike character (the fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5:22-23), holy living (1 Pet 1:16-17) and fulfilling the will of God (Mt 7:21), particularly by proclaiming the gospel to all who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Awareness of sin, faith in Christ, the new birth, and spiritual growth are works of the Holy Spirit, which is why evangelism arises spontaneously from a Spirit-filled Church (*Lausanne Covenant 14*). Evangelism is the most important ministry and task of the Church (Jn 17:18; Mt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 20:27; Eph 1:9-10; 3:9-11; Gal 6:14, 17; 2 Cor 6:3, 4; 2 Tim 2:19-21; Phil 1:27; Jn 9:4; Mt 9:35-38; Rom 9:1-3;

1 Cor 9:19-23; Mk 16:15; Isa 58:6.7; Jas 1:27; 2:1-9; Mt 25:31-46; Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). The Church is central to God's plan and is ordained for spreading the gospel (*Lausanne Covenant 6)*. The ultimate goal should be, using all available means as quickly as possible, to ensure that every person has the opportunity to hear, understand, and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ (*Lausanne Covenant 9*).

6. Each Local Church is Autonomous and Independent.

The Church is a community of people, saved by the grace of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and equipped with various ministries. It lives as the Body of Christ, where all believers are connected directly to the Head, Jesus Christ. Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they fulfill the Word and the will of their Head (Jambrek 2022, 16). The local church is a gathered community of believers that glorifies Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:2) in a specific location. It represents the Body of Christ where it gathers (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12), as Christ is present through the Holy Spirit in every community that comes together in his name to confess and glorify him as Savior and Lord. The local church is simultaneously a part of the universal Church and encompasses the whole Church. Therefore, no group of churches (denomination or regional church) can exert authority or power over a local church. Every local community of believers that gathers and serves in Christ's name is an independent and autonomous church because Jesus Christ is present in it through the Holy Spirit.[30]

7. The Priesthood of All Believers.

A born-again believer filled with the Holy Spirit can approach God directly, serve him, and fulfill his will. All who believe in Christ have the right and authority to read, interpret, and apply the teachings of the Holy Scripture. Born-again Christians are united with Jesus Christ and are called to participate in his priestly ministry, learning directly from the Word of God and applying the commands and instructions of the Holy Spirit.

8. Following Jesus Christ – Discipleship.

The task of evangelizing the world, also known as the Great Commission, is recorded in all four Gospels (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-22) and Acts (1:8). Jesus' central command to Christians is to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations. This command includes preaching the good news, bearing witness through one's own experiences and relationship with God, demonstrating love for one's neighbor, all supported by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the process of discipleship and growing into the Church. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus and is dedicated to his mission (Mt 4:19, 22). This person consciously and continuously identifies with the life, death, and resurrection of

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30 For a more detailed doctrine of the Church in the churches of the Reformation heritage in Croatia, see Jambrek 2022.

Jesus through their words, actions, attitudes, motives, and intentions. A disciple's character, values, priorities, and relationships are shaped by Jesus. Discipleship refers to the *state* of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and the *process* of making disciples. The process of making disciples involves baptizing disciples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. Preaching the gospel leads people to decide to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord, while baptism introduces them to the church, a community of disciples or saints in Christ, where they are then taught and trained to fulfill all that Jesus Christ has commanded.

9. Unity in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CRH accept and practice spiritual unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ despite denominational and structural differences. The Bible does not advocate for a uniform idea of church but reflects the reality of the unity of those whom God the Father gave to Jesus Christ, who have accepted his word and put it into practice (Jn 17:1-26). Believers in CRH gather around the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than around specific ideas, theologies, or institutions. Regarding unity, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue, which have been prominent issues for decades, the majority of believers and local churches in the CRH accept only unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the leadership of individual local churches and denominations may sometimes engage with proponents of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in their church policies.[31]

10. Agape Love as the Only Appropriate Motivation for Christian Living.

Jesus said to his disciples, both old and new: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34-35). The Church is the Body of Christ in which all members must maintain right relationship with the Head – Jesus Christ – and with one another (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-27). Much of the spiritual growth and development of believers comes through relationships with other believers, mutual sharing, and various expressions of brotherly love.

2. The Legal Status of the CRH in the Republic of Croatia

In the late 1980s, Croatia experienced several socio-political processes that directly and indirectly affected the churches of the Reformation heritage. The most significant of these was the preparation for and establishment of the Republic of Croatia.

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31 More information in the following articles: Jambrek 2008, 61-76; Jambrek 2014a, 155-170, and Jambrek 2014b, 251-263.

Another important process involved the social regulation of religious communities.

The path toward secession from Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Republic of Croatia unfolded over several decades. Key socio-political moments during this time include the death of Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito in 1980 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Catholic Church in Croatia, along with Vatican diplomacy, played a crucial role in these preparations and the eventual establishment of an independent Republic of Croatia. The Catholic Church's involvement significantly influenced the legal status of the CRH and all other religious communities.

The legal status of the CRH was defined by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, adopted on December 22, 1990 (NN 56/90). This Constitution outlines the fundamental rights of believers and religious communities as follows:

- "All persons in the Republic of Croatia shall enjoy rights and freedoms, regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other conviction, national or social origin, property, birth, education, social status or other characteristics. All persons shall be equal before the law" (art. 14).
- "Freedom of conscience and religion and the freedom to demonstrate religious or other convictions shall be guaranteed" (art. 40).
- "All religious communities shall be equal before the law and separate from the state. Religious communities shall be free, in compliance with law, to publicly conduct religious services, open schools, academies or other institutions, and welfare and charitable organizations, and to manage them, and they shall enjoy the protection and assistance of the state in their activities" (art. 41).
- "Everyone shall be guaranteed the right to freedom of association for the protection of common interests or promotion of social, economic, political, national, cultural, and other convictions and aims. For this purpose, anyone may freely form trade unions and other associations, join them or leave them, in compliance with law" (art. 43).

Following the adoption of the Constitution on December 22, 1990, the state of Croatia aimed to address its "political debt" to the Catholic Church in Croatia. This was achieved by introducing religious education in schools and by signing international agreements between the state and the Holy See (the Catholic Church) in 1996 and 1998.

The process of incorporating religious education into schools began with discussions among experts and the public during 1990 and 1991. The Ministry of Education and Culture decided to introduce confessional religious education in primary and secondary schools, starting with the 1991/1992 school year. The CRH learned about this decision through public reporting. They responded swiftly and,

with the help of the Ministry, became involved in religious education in primary and secondary schools where they met the requirements.[32]

The process of social regulation of religious communities in Croatia began with the Catholic Church, which was granted the highest privileges in the newly formed state due to its political contributions. This elevated the Catholic Church to the status of a "state church." All other religious communities are governed by the 2002 Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, which includes the CRH. This law establishes the legal framework for the relationship between the state and religious communities. By resolving its relationship with the Catholic Church through interstate agreements with the Vatican – agreements that take precedence over domestic law – and applying the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, the state introduced legal inequalities, which consequently produced several types of religious communities.

According to the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, a church or religious community is defined as a group of individuals exercising their freedom of religion by equally practicing their rites and other expressions of faith, registered at the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia (art. 1).

After completing the process of social regulation concerning the status of religious communities, Croatian legislation recognizes five categories of religious communities: 1) The Catholic Church; 2) Registered religious communities that have signed a contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia regarding matters of common interest; 3) Registered religious communities that were not permitted to sign a contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia regarding matters of common interest; 4) Communities of believers registered as citizens' associations (emerging fellowships), which, once they meet specific conditions, can be registered as religious communities; 5) Communities of believers that are not registered as religious associations. Given that the Catholic Church, the oldest and most numerous religious community, holds a unique position due to its historical significance in culture and state formation and is regulated by the Contracts with the Holy See, our research focuses on the application of social regulation concerning the other four groups of religious communities, particularly in relation to the CRH.

2.1. Registered CRH That Have Signed the Contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia Regarding Matters of Common Interest

Based on the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, and according to the model of the interstate Contract with the Catholic Church, the Government of

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32 For more details, see: Kerep 1997, 97-107.

the Republic of Croatia signed the Contract Regarding Matters of Mutual Interest with other religious communities.[33] These include the denominations categorized as CRH. On July 4, 2003, the following organizations signed this contract: the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Croatia, the Pentecostal Church of Christ in the Republic of Croatia, the Church of God in the Republic of Croatia, the Union of Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia, and the Churches of Christ in the Republic of Croatia, which associated for this occasion. This signed contract confirmed that these five denominations and their local churches had legal personality and were registered in the Register of Religious Communities before the enactment of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities.

Despite their fervent requests, the "Word of Life" network of churches and the Church of the Full Gospel were not permitted to sign a contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia in 2003. Their aspirations were only fulfilled after the European Court of Human Rights mandated that the Government of the Republic of Croatia sign a contract with them. This was officially done on September 12, 2014.[34]

Some religious communities chose not to sign a contract with the state. Others, who were registered before the adoption of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, believed they had a right to demand such a contract based on the law. However, the authorities deemed it unnecessary to grant contracts to certain groups. Since the Act and related legal documents do not specify clear criteria for signing a contract, the Government of the Republic of Croatia considered the matter carefully. As a result, the following conclusion was adopted in a government session on December 23, 2004:

33 In 2002, 2003, and 2014, the Government of the Republic of Croatia signed contracts regarding matters of common interest with various religious communities. Besides the contracts made with the Catholic Church, the Croatian government signed six contracts with 17 other religious communities. On December 20, 2002, agreements were signed with 1) the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia and 2) the Islamic Community in Croatia. On July 4, 2003, contracts were signed with 3) the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia, 4) the Reformed Christian (Calvinist) Church in Croatia, 5) the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Croatia, which represents two other churches: the Church of God in the Republic of Croatia and the Union of Christ's Pentecostal Churches in the Republic of Croatia, 6) the Christian Adventist Church in the Republic of Croatia, representing the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, and 7) the Union of Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia, representing another church (Church of Christ). On October 29, 2003, contracts were signed with 8) the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Croatia, 9) the Croatian Old Catholic Church, and 10) the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Croatia. Finally, on September 12, 2014, the Government signed a contract with the "Word of Life" network of churches, the Church of the Full Gospel, and the Protestant Reformed Church in the Republic of Croatia.

34 The "Word of Life" network of churches, the Church of the Full Gospel and the Protestant Reformed Church in the Republic of Croatia were prevented from signing the Contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia, so they sued the Croatian state at the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg for discrimination.

> To sign a contract regarding matters of common interest between the Republic of Croatia and one or more religious communities, there are two conditions that must be met: 1) The community must have been active in the Republic of Croatia since April 6, 1941, demonstrating continuity and legal succession, and have a minimum of 6000 believers according to the last population census. 2) The community must be a historic religious community within the European cultural sphere (Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia, Reformed Christian Church in Croatia, Islamic Community in Croatia, and Jewish Community in Croatia).[35]

With these conclusions, registered religious communities in Croatia are categorized as historic religious communities of the European cultural sphere, churches with roots in Croatia, and other churches or religious communities.

According to the Government's conclusion, the CRH that signed the objection had to be active before April 6, 1941, and demonstrate continuity and legal succession. The Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the Church of God, the Pentecostal Church of Christ, the Union of Baptist Churches, and the Churches of Christ met these criteria.[36] Conversely, the "Word of Life" network of churches and the Church of the Full Gospel did not meet the specified requirements. They signed the contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia based on the ruling from the European Court of Human Rights.

What rights do the CRH signatories of the contract with the Government hold? The Republic of Croatia grants significant rights to religious communities, of which I will highlight the most relevant for the CRH. The objection ensures the internal autonomy of the CRH regarding the organization of churches, the founding, modification, and dissolution of local churches and other legal entities (art. 3), as well as elections, appointments, and assignments in accordance with their regulations (art. 4). Churches are allowed to construct new church buildings, expand, or remodel existing ones, in accordance with the legislation of the Repub-

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35 Conclusion of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, class: 070-01/03-03/03, Registration number: 5030104-04-3 from December 23, 2004.

36 The Commission for Relations with Religious Communities found the activities of the Churches of Christ on April 6, 1941 and their continued activities in continuity and legal succession controversial. Therefore, I was asked to come on as an expert on CRH, and try to explain and prove their activity on April 6, 1941. The problem was that the first Church of Christ was registered or introduced in the Register of Religious Communities in 1985, while not meeting any of the criteria for signing the Contract. However, that was only partially accurate. In the process of church restructuring during and after the passing of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, Church of Christ of the Brethren and Churches of Christ merged and continued to act as Churches of Christ. Therefore, acting in terms of continuity and legal succession is recognized from the oldest church registered or introduced in the Register of Religious Communities. As the Church of Christ of the Brethren were active at the end of the First World War in Yugoslavia, the Churches of Christ met the criterion that they were active on April 6, 1941.

lic of Croatia (art. 6).[37] Churches are guaranteed freedom of the press, including the printing and distribution of books, newspapers, and other materials related to their activities (art. 7). A marriage performed in a religious ceremony officiated by an authorized church official is recognized as a civil marriage (art 8). Churches may freely establish institutions to facilitate charitable activities and social care (art. 9).

The Contract dedicates most of its attention to religious education in public schools (art. 10–14) in accordance with the teachings and programs of each denomination that has signed the contract. Religious education in primary and secondary schools is considered an optional subject, but it is compulsory for students who choose to participate. A minimum of seven (7) students is required to form an educational group for religious education within a particular church. If a church lacks seven students to establish a group in a public school, the Contract permits religious education to take place outside of school, specifically in the church. This external religious education must adhere to the same pedagogical obligations as education conducted within schools – this includes planning, programming, maintaining pedagogical documentation, evaluating the performance of the religious teacher, and ensuring quality control in teaching.

The Contract regulates the right to pastoral care in medical institutions, penitentiaries, and prisons (art. 15), as well as addressing the cultural and artistic heritage rights of the church.

The Contract states the Republic of Croatia's obligation to budget for co-financing the activities of the signatory churches, enabling them to "properly continue their activities in the promotion of the common good" (art. 23). The Contract then defines the annual financial support that the Republic of Croatia will provide to each signatory church from the state budget.

2.2. Registered CRH That Were Not Allowed to Sign the Contract

Churches registered after 1941 have legal personality and are listed in the Register of Religious Communities, which is managed by the Ministry of Justice Administration and Digital Transformation, but they are not permitted to sign the Contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia. This includes Christ's Spiritual Church (Kristova duhovna crkva) in Zagreb, Christ's Spiritual Church of the "Infant-baptized," (Kristova duhovna crkva malokrštenih) The

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37 Article 6 of the Contract points out: "The responsible body of the Church delivers the decision on the need to build a church or a church building to the relevant bodies of the Republic of Croatia and chooses the location in agreement with these relevant bodies, but in accordance with the implementation of the urban plan." Practice has shown that it is very difficult to realize this right, because in a large part of the city services responsible for its implementation there is strong social resistance, which stops most of the churches' initiatives.

Good News Church (Crkva Radosne vijesti), Christian Prophetic Church "Jesus is King" (Kršćanska proročka crkva "Isus je Kralj") the Independent Baptist Church (Neovisna baptistička crkva) in Čakovec, and The Church of Christ's Disciples (Crkva Kristovih učenika) in Tenja.

Additionally, there are congregations registered as citizen's associations, such as the Christian congregation in Šibenik, the Remar Croatia Association with communities in Zaprešić, Rijeka, and Lupoglav, the Dunamis Association in Zagreb, the "Christ is International" Association with communities in Zagreb, Pula, Rijeka, and Split, and the Christ's Community "Home of Grace" Association in Zadar.

In Croatia, numerous congregations meet regularly, regardless of whether they are registered as churches or citizens' associations. These communities strive to function like churches but believe they do not require legal personality. As a result, they choose not to register or be listed in the register of associations. The law recognizes them as citizens' associations without legal personality. According to the specific legal provisions of the Associations Act, the legal regulations pertaining to partnerships are applied to such associations in an appropriate manner (art. 1, par. 3).

3. Restructuring of the CRH (1990–2020)

Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Republic of Croatia, local churches in Croatia were separated from denominations that were active in Yugoslavia by mutual agreement. As a result, groups of churches in Croatia were registered under various names, including the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia, the Union of Baptist Churches of the Republic of Croatia, the Church of God in the Republic of Croatia and the Alliance of Christ's Pentecostal Churches in the Republic of Croatia, Christ's Spiritual Church in the Republic of Croatia and Christ's Spiritual Church of the "Infant-Baptized" in the Republic of Croatia.

After gaining independence, the Republic of Croatia sought to define and legislate the rights and obligations of religious communities, including the CRH. This effort included the adoption of the Constitution in 1990, interstate contracts with the Catholic Church in 1996 and 1998, and the enactment of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities in 2002. Additionally, the Government addressed concerns with individual religious communities through Contracts in 2003 and issued Government Conclusions in 2004. As a result of these laws and regulations, the CRH underwent a lengthy restructuring process that yielded both positive outcomes and some challenges. This restructuring aimed to balance the state's demands with the needs of various denominations and independent local churches.

Most of the CRH entered the restructuring process with established practices and characteristics. According to Jesus' commandment, preaching the gospel is the primary responsibility of Christians and the Church as a community of believers (Mk 16:15). Churches emphasize the priesthood of all believers, meaning that anyone can be called by God to found and lead a new church. Since each church operates independently, no one has the right to oversee the quality of leadership, teaching, and activities of newly established churches, because each church's leader or leadership is responsible for choosing, adopting, and implementing its teachings and community life.

During the CRH's restructuring, three notable processes emerged: 1) separation processes, 2) joining processes, and 3) processes of establishing new local churches.

Separation Processes. Alongside the establishment of new independent churches – often supported by foreign mission organizations, churches, associations, and influential individuals – there was a significant trend in the 1990s of local churches or groups of churches separating from existing denominations.[38] In these instances, a separating church (or a group of churches) aimed to maintain its legal identity and historical, legal, and cultural continuity while opting out of spiritual and structural continuity.

In the early 2000s, the state attempted to limit and, finally, prevent these separation processes. Consequently, the Government of the Republic of Croatia stated: "A church or a religious community that separates itself or has separated itself from a church or religious community is now considered a new church, or religious community, and the start of its activities is recognized as the date of separation or establishment…"[39]

With these conclusions regarding the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, the state has made it significantly more difficult for groups of believers and local churches to separate from existing denominations and form new churches or denominations. As a result, the state has halted the previously established practice that allowed churches or groups of believers that separated themselves from existing structures to maintain their legal personality and keep building their historical, legal, and cultural continuity. While the state does not deny a local church or community of believers the right to secede from a regis-

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38 This process can be seen, for example, in the Reformed Church, from which two new denominations emerged, and also in the Evangelical Church. After the name change in 1989 from the Pentecostal Church of Christ to the Evangelical Church, several local churches did not accept the name change and formed the Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ. In the early 2000s, the Church of the Full Gospel from Zagreb and EPC Bethesda from Zadar (today it operates as a citizens' association) separated from the Evangelical Church in Croatia and continued on independently.

39 Conclusion of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, class: 070-01/03-03/03, Registration number: 5030104-04-3 from December 23, 2004.

tered church or religious community, it mandates that this group must start anew as a separate church or religious community.

Joining Processes. In preparation for signing contracts with the CRH denominations, the Government initiated and facilitated a process for existing autonomous and independent local churches to join one of the registered denominations. It allowed for various types and models of association among local churches and denominations.

The processes of associating independent local churches with registered churches and merging smaller denominations have significantly impacted the structures and identities of these denominations. For example, the Church of Christ and the Church of Christ of the Brethren have merged and are now registered together as the Churches of Christ. The Government of the Republic of Croatia did not sign a contract with every denomination; instead, it grouped several denominations under one contract based on its criteria, which were agreed upon by the individual denominations.[40] For instance, three Pentecostal denominations have unified for this contract. The Evangelical Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Croatia, the largest among them, serves as the bearer and signatory, while the Church of God and the Alliance of Christ's Pentecostal Churches also signed the Contract (Contract, Article 2). Similarly, the Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia has joined forces with similar churches of Christ, and the Seventh-Day Adventist Reform Movement is now affiliated with the Christian Adventist Church in Croatia. Through these mergers, the denominations and their local churches retained the legal personality they had before the enactment of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities.

What was gained through the joining processes? The state has defined and facilitated its relations with religious communities, successfully addressing potential issues that could arise from interstate contracts with the Catholic Church in the long term.[41] Denominations and their local churches have received confirmation of their legal personality and the opportunity to enjoy the benefits provided by the Contract with Croatia's Government, which would have been difficult to achieve independently.

Some independent local churches also took advantage of the joining processes, aligning themselves with spiritually similar denominations. So, for example, between 1990–2020, several independent local churches joined the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the Union of Baptist Churches, and Churches of Christ. This joining had both positive and negative implications, both for the churches

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40   The contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia was signed by the Evangelical (Pentecostal) Church in the Republic of Croatia, the Christian Adventist Church in the Republic of Croatia and the Baptist Union in the Republic of Croatia.

41 I base the term "successfully" on the results of the CRH project (1990–2020) according to which the local churches are satisfied with their relationship with the state.

that joined and for the denominations they aligned with. On the positive side, independent local churches benefited from inclusion in a denominational family atmosphere, increased fellowship, and the opportunity to implement larger, more comprehensive plans. For the denominations, each integration brought several advantages, from numerical growth to infusing spiritual freshness into potentially stagnant denominational structures.

Of course, every joining also leads to some negative consequences for independent local churches. One downside is that they lose a sense of spiritual and organizational self-sufficiency and significance. Additionally, they must accept the beliefs, values, principles, structures, and operational methods of the denomination. The implications for the denomination itself are also noteworthy, particularly in terms of the spiritual atmosphere, both positive and negative, that the newly affiliated church introduces. Every independent church is rooted in a particular spiritual movement and its specific theology, which can perhaps be only tangentially similar to the theology of the denomination it joins. Based on my experience, the theologies brought in by affiliated churches have created, and continue to create, numerous challenges in the struggle for identity for both the newly joined churches and the denominations.

What was gained by the joining of five independent local churches to the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia? To put it simply, each church brought unique influences. The Hosana Church from Pula introduced strong elements of the charismatic movement and the Foursquare denomination. The Baptist group that founded a church in Šibenik contributed the influence of liberal Baptists. The church in Karlovac brought the influence of the Only Jesus movement. The church in Čakovec introduced teachings from Pastor Chuck Smith and the American Calvary Chapel denomination. The group known as "Borongajci" in Zagreb added numerous influences from the house church movement, especially from Uganda and China. While most of these influences are not inherently negative, they have contributed to the dilution of theology, beliefs, and identity of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia by introducing differing beliefs and practices.

Why do some local churches prefer not to join larger denominations? Many independent local churches fear losing their spiritual identity, which is why they justifiably do not want to merge with existing denominations. They have estimated that what they might lose in terms of spirituality, identity, and structure is more valuable than what they would gain by joining a larger, distinct local community. Additionally, there is an apprehension about losing influence and opportunities as a specific local community. Many of these churches feel spiritually, organizationally, and financially strong enough to eventually numerically surpass the "old, unspiritual, and stunted" denominations to which they are similar.

Establishment of New Local Churches. The commission of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15-16), is still binding for today's Christians. In carrying out this mission, Christians in Croatia face challenges in legally establishing the position of new groups of believers who have converted after hearing the gospel. The legislation of the Republic of Croatia provides four options for this.

First, the establishment of a church within a registered denomination (group of churches) or a registered independent local church. Churches operating as legal entities since the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities came into effect in July 2002 can apply for registration in the Register of Religious Communities. These registered churches can freely establish new ones, with an authorized representative submitting an application for registration as their organizational form.

Secondly, the establishment of a church as a registered association of citizens that functions as an emerging religious community. To limit and slow down the establishment of new religious communities, the state requires that such a community must have at least 500 believers and must be registered as an association for at least five years before applying for registration in the Register of Religious Communities (ALSRC, art. 5 and 21). This tacitly encourages newly founded churches to join existing registered denominations or registered independent churches.[42] The newly joined churches gain their legal personality as the organizational form of the church or denomination they have chosen to join (ALSRC art. 6).

Thirdly, the establishment of a church as an unregistered association of citizens. The newly established church can also operate as an unregistered citizens' association without legal personality. ALSRC explicitly states: "This Act does not prevent or limit the establishment and operation of associations with or without legal personality founded by individuals to exercise their religious beliefs and freedom of confession" (art. 7). However, the second paragraph of this article mentions that unregistered associations do not have the status of recognized religious communities and cannot gain or realize rights that the ALSRC or other laws give to religious communities.

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42 This process is visible in the Church of the Full Gospel from Zagreb (introduced in the Register of Religious Communities in 2003), which was joined by the Church of Christian Community "Lončareva kuća" (introduced in the Register in 2014), Metanoia Church (introduced in the Register in 2018), and Light of the World Church (introduced in the Register in 2020). A similar thing happened in the Independent Baptist church Tree of Life from Čakovec (introduced in the Register in 2004). It was joined by the Independent Baptist Church Victors from Varaždin (introduced in the Register 2010), the Independent Baptist Church New Life from Zagreb (introduced in the Register 2018), and the Independent Baptist Church Anchor of the Soul from Split (introduced in the Register 2023).

Fourthly, organized gatherings of believers at some location. Believers can gather freely and engage in organized activities for studying the Holy Scripture, prayer, worship, witness, and all other activities aligned with God's will. Such gatherings do not require registration, and the Republic of Croatia does not impose restrictions on them (ALSRC, art. 7).

4. Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia on March 28, 2021

This is a short outline of the restructured CRH in Croatia on March 28, 2021.[43] After the implementation of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities (ALSRC) between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and individual religious communities, the processes of church restructuring have been completed.

The data on CRH in Croatia[44] have been compiled based on various sources, which include: Contracts with individual denominations with the Government of the Republic of Croatia; the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia; the Records of Associations in the Republic of Croatia; the Register of Business Entities in the Republic of Croatia; official records about denominations and independent churches (including annual reports and websites); archives of denominations and independent churches; private archival materials; questionnaires and interviews with official representatives of the denominations; questionnaires and interviews with local church leaders; analysis of research data collected through the questionnaires. The situation is as follows:

Denominations Registered in the Register of Religious Communities in Croatia – 162 Listed Churches

The Church of God in Croatia – 7 registered church municipalities

The Full Gospel Church – 4 registered churches + 1 organization/institution

Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) – 60 registered churches + 10 organizations/institutions

Churches of Christ in Croatia – 14 registered churches + 1 organization/institution

The Union of Baptist Churches of Croatia (SBC) – 53 registered churches + 6 organizations/institutions

"Word of Life" network of churches – 12 registered churches

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43 Detailed data can be found in the research document "Analysis of Questions 1 and 2 from the Questionnaire (March 2024)," signed by the researchers from the Biblical Institute in Zagreb: Stanko Jambrek, Danijel Časni, Ervin Budiselić, Goran Medved, and Dalibor Kraljik from the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek.

44 This data does not include groups of believers who gather regularly, but have not shown enough spiritual and numerical growth to transition from a house group of Christians to a church.

The Union of Christ's Pentecostal Churches – 9 registered churches

Independent Baptist Church – 3 registered churches

Independent Local Churches Registered in the Register of Religious Communities in Croatia – 6 churches

The Good News Church, Zagreb

Christ's Spiritual Church, Zagreb

Christ's Church of the Infant-Baptized, Zagreb

Christian Prophetic Church "Jesus is King," Zagreb

Church of Christ's Disciples, Tenja

Evangelical Christians, Tenja

Communities of Believers that are Registered as Citizens' Associations – 4 communities

Humanitarian Association Remar Croatia, Zaprešić (registered on June 7, 2006)

Christ is International Association, Mušalež (registered on March 8, 2017)

Christian Community Šibenik (registered on January 1, 2018)

Dunamis Association, Zagreb (registered on February 14, 2020)

Communities of Believers That Are Registered as Business Subjects (Other Organizations) Related to Religious Organizations' Activities

Christian Prophetic Church Maranatha, Split

Communities of Believers Who Gather Without Being Registered as Associations or Churches – 3 communities

Independent Spiritual Community, Osijek

Christian Community Split

Christ's Community "Home of Grace," Zadar

Based on the basic characteristics of the CRH,[45] the research team concluded that on March 28, 2021, eight denominations[46] and their 162 local churches were recorded in the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia. The Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, which comprises nine registered churches, and the Independent Baptist Church, with three registered churches, did not participate in the research. Consequently, the research focused on 150 churches that are listed in the register. Upon reviewing the official data from these denominations, we found that out of the 150 registered churches, 121 are active,

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45 See Introduction to the Research for the definition.

46 The denomination in this research is a religious community registered in the Register of Religious Communities, which has three or more local churches/communities as its organizational forms.

while the remainder are categorized as dormant.[47] In addition, there are six independent local churches registered in the Register of Religious Communities, four communities of believers registered as citizens' associations, one community registered as a business entity related to religious organizations, and three groups of believers that gather but are not registered as associations or churches. This leads us to conclude that as of March 28, 2021, there are 176 local churches of various legal forms in Croatia.

The questionnaire was completed by five of the eight denominations, including 87 of the 135 active local churches across six denominations and one independent community.

Active Local Churches in the Denominations That Participated in the Research: 121 Churches

The Church of God in Croatia – 7 church municipalities
The Full Gospel Church – 4 churches
Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) – 44 churches
Churches of Christ in Croatia – 12 churches
The Union of Baptist Churches (SBC) – 44 churches
"Word of Life" network of churches – 10 churches

The Number of Local Churches That Participated in the Research48 – 86 out of 121 (71.01%)

The Church of God in Croatia – 6 out of 7 church municipalities (85.71%)
The Full Gospel Church – 3 out of 4 churches (75%)
Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) – 36 out of 44 churches (81.82%)
Churches of Christ in Croatia – 9 out of 12 churches (75%)
The Union of Baptist Churches (SBC) – 30 out of 44 churches (68.18%)
"Word of Life" network of churches – 2 out of 10 churches (16.67%)

Four independent local churches listed in the Register of Religious Communities in Croatia were deemed not relevant for this research. The Good News Church and the Christian Prophetic Church, "Jesus is King," both located in Zagreb, did not respond to repeated requests for participation. Similarly, three communities of believers registered as citizens' associations did not respond to the invitation

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47 A church can be dormant for different reasons. It can happen because of lack of quality leadership, insufficient number of active believers, believers from the church temporarily moving away, etc. The church does not close when it is dormant, because it has the prerequisites to be activated at any moment. Potential local leadership, activation of existing believers, arrival of believers from other local churches, efforts in evangelization, own space for meetings, etc. stand out among the prerequisites.

48 Churches that have filled out the Questionnaire.

to participate. Among the communities of believers that gather but are not registered as an association or church, only the Independent Spiritual Community from Osijek took part in the research.

During February and March 2024, the data collected from the questionnaires was entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The questionnaires for the leadership of the denominations were completed by the following individuals: Bishop Matej Lazar Kovačević for the Church of God in Croatia; President Damir Špoljarić for the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia; Pastor Mario Dučić for the Full Gospel Church; Head of the Council of Churches of Christ, Mladen Dominić, for Churches of Christ in Croatia; and Apostle Damir Alić for the "Word of Life" network of churches. Although it was initially agreed upon, the president and general secretary of the Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia did not complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire for the local church was filled out by official representatives, including pastors, preachers, or leading elders.

4.1. Approximate Number of Believers in CRH

Determining the exact number of believers in the CRH is impossible; therefore, we can only provide an approximate estimate. To arrive at this estimate, we utilized several sources, including population censuses from 1991, 2001, 2011, and 2021; available denominational data; available archival materials; publicly published information; and data collected through questionnaires for denominational leaders, local churches, and experiential assessments by the researcher.

There are several reasons why it is challenging to ascertain the precise number of believers. First, population censuses do not provide accurate estimates because the individuals compiling the census forms often lack understanding or recognition of the internal processes and struggles for identity that occur within various denominations and local churches. This lack of understanding results in significant discrepancies in data from one census to another for the same group of believers.

Second, the available denominational data is only approximate for several reasons. It is uncommon for a local CRH to maintain and regularly update official membership records. Additionally, many CRH do not track membership at all, instead reporting attendance numbers for Sunday services. Moreover, some local churches experience a high turnover rate, where individuals may come and go, including believers from other churches or friends who visit temporarily. Finally, the definitions of church membership can vary widely from one church to another. For example, in the Catholic Church and many Protestant churches, all baptized individuals, typically as infants, are considered members regardless of their beliefs. In contrast, the CRH considers only those who have been baptized

as believers – adults who have accepted Jesus Christ and adopted the Bible as their standard of belief and life – as true members of the church.

The publicly available data and archival materials we reference represent approximate figures collected in various ways by the author.

In the questionnaires distributed to local churches, we aimed to gather as much accurate information as possible, which we present here. This data has been supplemented with the experiential assessments of researchers with extensive experience in the Union of Baptist Churches, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, and the Churches of Christ. These researchers are well-acquainted with the local churches of their own (and other) denominations and other independent congregations.

Approximate Number of Believers in Churches That Participated in the Research

Name of the organizational form of the community	Number of active churches	Approx. number of believers		Approx. number of believers, including children	Notes
		Research data	Denominational data		
Church of God	7	255	275	310-335	21% of these are children
Full Gospel Church	4	265	270	310-332	Estimation - 23% of these are children
Evangelical Pentecostal Church	44	1.719-1.789	1.800-1.900	2.214-2.337	23.16% of these are children
Churches of Christ in Croatia	12	224	250	294-329	31.6% of these are children
Union of Baptist Churches	44	1.771-1.800	-	2.199-2.235	24.17% of these are children
Word of Life network of churches	10	700-850	1.100-1.200	865-1.05049	Estimation – 23.5% of these are children
Independent Spiritual Community, Osijek	1	50	50	55	
Total	**122**	**4.984-5.233**	**5.516-5.749**	**6.247-6.668**	

49 As there is no quality sample for calculating the number of believers with children, the data are estimated based on the researcher's experience and secondary sources. The percentage of children is calculated on the basis of data from other denominations.

Approximate Number of Believers in Churches in 2021 That Did Not Participate in the Research

Name of the organizational form of the community	Number of active churches	Approx. number of believers		Approx. number of believers, including children
		Estimated data	Denomi-national data	
Union of Christ's Pentecostal Churches	9	400-500		492-615
Independent Baptist Church	3	80-120		99-148
The Good News Church	1	50-70		61-86
Christ's Spiritual Church	1	15-25		18-30
Christ's Spiritual Church of the Infant-Baptized	1	15-25		18-30
Christian Prophetic Church "Jesus is King"	1	40-60		49-73
Church of Christ's Disciples, Tenja	1	15-25		18-30
Evangelical Christians, Tenja	1	15-25		18-30
Humanitarian Association Remar Croatia, Zaprešić and Rijeka	2	50-70		61-86
Christ is International Association, Mušalež	1	100–150		123-185
Christian community Šibenik	1	50–70		61-86
Christian Community Split	1	40-60		50-70
Christian Prophetic Church Maranatha, Split	1	40-60		50-70
Dunamis Association, Zagreb	1	20-30		24-37
Total	**25**	**930-1.290**		**1.142-1.576**

Approximate Number of Believers in 2021 in All Churches and Communities (both those that participated and those that did not participate)

Churches and communities	Number of active churches	Approx. number of believers		Approx. number of believers, including children
		Estimated data	Denomina-tional data	
Churches and communities that participated in the research	122	4.984-5.233	5.516-5.749	6.247-6.668
Churches and communities that did not participate in the research	25	930-1.290	-	1.142-1.576
Total	**147**	**5.914-6.523**		**7.389-8.244**

4.2. The Trend in the Number of CRH Believers in Relation to Demographic Processes

The demographic development of Croatia from 1990 to 2020 is characterized by several key processes, primarily total and natural depopulation, as well as demographic aging. Emigration for economic reasons, which began in the 1960s, intensified during the Homeland War and has continued into the 2020s. This trend has been exacerbated by the adverse effects of the Homeland War, a severe economic crisis, the implications of Croatia entering the European Union, and the consequences of careless and ineffective policies by ruling parties that led to the systematic decline of domestic production.

According to the population census, Croatia had 4,784,265 inhabitants in 1991, but this number dropped to 3,888,529 by 2021.[50] Over the course of 30 years, Croatia lost 895,736 residents. However, despite these unfavorable demographic trends, the number of local CRH and their congregants has increased. For example, in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC), the number of local churches grew from 23 in 1991 to 44 active churches in 2021. The number of believers rose from approximately 900 in 1991 to between 1,700 and 1,800 in 2021, with an estimated total of 2,214 to 2,337 when including children. A similar growth trend has been observed in the Union of Baptist Churches and other groups, such as the Churches of Christ, the Word of Life network of churches, and the Full Gospel Church. As of 2021, the CRH in Croatia consists of 176 local churches[51] with varying legal statuses, serving between 5,914 and 6,523 active believers, which increases to approximately 7,389 to 8,244 when including their children

Conclusion

The period from 1990 to 2020 was characterized by the restructuring of local churches and CRH denominations in Croatia, alongside spiritual, theological, and cultural processes aimed at the search for identity, but also the renewal, change, and affirmation of identity. During the time chosen for this research (1990–2020), three terms were used to identify the group of denominations and local churches in Croatia, reflecting their acquired or desired identities: "Protestant churches," "Evangelical churches," and "churches of the Reformation Heritage." Since the terms "Protestant Church" and "Evangelical Church" only partially represent the Croatian context, the most suitable designation is "churches of the Reformation Heritage" (CRH). The CRH in Croatia are self-contained and independent local churches and communities of churches (denominations) that base their teach-

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50 For a detailed analysis, see: Živić, Pokos, and Turk 2005.

51 Out of that number, 147 are registered as active, and 29 as dormant churches (i.e. inactive churches).

ings and practices primarily on the Bible, drawing inspiration from both the Bible (mostly) and the Radical tradition of the 16th- century Reformation (to an extent), as well as various evangelical movements from the 17th to the 21st century.

In defining the identity of the CRH in Croatia, there has been a tendency to merely replicate and transfer the identities of foreign churches and denominations (American and European) to the Croatian reality, without adequately considering the specific historical, spiritual, theological, and cultural context of Croatia. The only Protestant churches in Croatia are the Evangelical Church and the Reformed Christian Churches, which trace their historical and theological origins back to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. The CRH identity is rooted, besides the Bible, in the Radical tradition of the Reformation, as evidenced by their core characteristics explained in this article, which are confirmed by the beliefs, statutes, and doctrinal reviews of the denominations and local churches.

Following Croatia's independence, the process of social regulation of religious communities commenced, establishing a legal framework for the relationship between the state and religious organizations. Consequently, Croatian legislation recognizes five groups of religious communities: 1) the Catholic Church; 2) registered religious communities that have signed a contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia regarding matters of common interests; 3) registered religious communities that were not permitted to sign such a contract; 4) communities of believers registered as citizens' associations (emerging communities) that can be registered as religious communities once specific conditions are met; and 5) communities of believers that are not registered as religious associations. Since the first group comprises the privileged Catholic Church, the CRH fall under one of the remaining four groups.

Following the enactment of the CRH laws and regulations, the CRH underwent a multi-year restructuring process. They aimed to meet the demands of the state on one hand and the expectations of each denomination and independent local church on the other. Most CRH entered this restructuring process with pre-existing practices and characteristics. Consequently, three notable processes emerged during the restructuring of the CRH: 1) separation processes, 2) joining processes, and 3) the processes of establishment of new local churches.

This article summarizes the state of the CRH after the restructuring process, revealing that, despite a significant decline in the population of Croatia, the number of local churches and believers has been slowly and steadily increasing during the research period.

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Stanko Jambrek

Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj (1990. – 2020.): Pravni položaj, restrukturiranje i stanje 2021. godine

Sažetak

U članku su objavljeni sažeti i djelomični rezultati petogodišnjeg istraživanja (2022. – 2026.) na znanstvenom projektu „Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj (1990. – 2020.)". Članak se objavljuje u dva dijela, u proljetnom i jesenskom izdanju časopisa Kairos. Prvi dio usredotočen je na pravni položaj, restrukturiranje i stanje crkava reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj 2021. godine. U drugom se dijelu razmatra i analizira goruće pitanje njihova duhovnog, teološkog i društvenog identiteta. U prvom dijelu članka obrazloženi su ciljevi projekta, primijenjena metodologija istraživanja i korištenje nazivlja te su definirani ključni pojmovi i obrazložene osnovne karakteristike spomenutih crkava. Zatim je istražen pravni

položaj crkava nakon izdvajanja Republike Hrvatske iz Jugoslavije i njezina osamostaljenja 1991. godine. Pravni položaj crkava u Republici Hrvatskoj uspostavljen je Ustavom, Zakonom o pravnom položaju vjerskih zajednica, Ugovorima pojedinih vjerskih zajednica s Vladom RH i pratećim provedbenim aktima. Nakon toga započeo je proces restrukturiranja crkava koji je iscrpno istražen, a najvažnija saznanja obrazložena su u članku. Na kraju članak donosi statističke podatke restrukturiranih crkava reformacijske baštine na dan 28. ožujka 2021. godine.

Biblical Identity of Churches of the Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020[1]

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Abstract

The article aimed to investigate and describe the biblical identity of the Churches of the Reformation Heritage (CRH) in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020. The author utilized sources such as newspapers, magazines, books, and social media published by the CRH during the relevant period, as well as personal observations of how CRH believers identified themselves, biblical texts, and his own long-term experience as a CRH member and an associate of CRH's educational and research institutions. The biblical identity of the CRH is based on the fundamental common belief that the Bible is the Word of God and, therefore, the supreme authority for faith and life, which includes the identity that God gives to those who accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. The believers in CRH identified themselves, based on the New Testament texts, as born-again, consciously baptized, "in Christ," saved, converted, God's children and God's family, Christ's disciples, saints, Biblical or New Testament Christians, and as God's, that is, Christ's church. Biblical identity was primarily shaped through participation in local church activities, where the Bible was taught and studied, as well as through personal Bible reading and study. Certain deviations from biblical identity are also described.

Keywords: *Churches of the Reformation Heritage, Evangelical Christians, Bible, Identity*

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1 This article was written as part of the Zagreb Biblical Institute research project: "Churches of Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020."

Introduction

Churches of the Reformation Heritage (further "CRH") in Croatia can be defined as:

> …autonomous and independent churches which from Luther's Protestantism accepted that only Scripture, grace, and faith are the foundations of man's relationship with God, and from the radical wing of the Reformation inherited the doctrine of discipleship, the belief that man must first believe to receive all the blessings of baptism, the awareness of the practical implementation of Christ's mission in proclaiming the gospel, and the zeal for evangelism. Following the Anabaptist teaching, the Churches of the Reformation Heritage believe that church and state must be separated, legally and practically, and that each local church has the fullness of ecclesiology because the Word of God is proclaimed in it and the Spirit of God dwells in it, and therefore each local church is autonomous and independent (Jambrek 2003, 17).

From the above description, it is noticeable that two historical-theological origins or influences are cited that shape the identity of the CRH, namely the Reformation (Protestantism) and the Radical Reformation (Anabaptism). Leaving aside the discussion of the historical-theological influences that have developed and continue to grow in evangelical Christianity since the time of the Reformation, both in the Croatian context and more broadly, the purpose of this article is to explore how biblical truths have shaped the identity of believers in CRH, that is, their understanding of their relationship with God. Namely, for the question of identity, as for all other questions, the CRH primarily use the Bible because they consider it to be God's revelation and God's word, and therefore the supreme authority for belief and life.

We investigate the biblical identity of the CRH in the Republic of Croatia by identifying the biblical truths on which the CRH taught and built up its believers during the mentioned period. In the first part, we investigate the importance and role of the Bible for the CRH; in the second part, we look at how the importance and role of the Bible was applied in practice; in the third part, we state which biblical truths believers in CRH used to express their identity the most, and in the last part we state and briefly explain how the formation of the biblical identity of the believers was carried out in the CRH, and what deviations occurred in that process.

The challenge of the research has been the difficulty in finding written sources that discuss the topics of this article. Specifically, in our region, we have not found extensive research on the CRH from 1990 to 2020. Also, the CRH in Croatia consists of a certain number of denominations and independent churches. Due to the independent activities of the churches mentioned above, it was necessary to search in many different places to find information on the topics of this article,

and the churches were not inclined toward systematic written treatment of biblical and theological topics. Therefore, some of the statements made in the article are based on the author's extensive experience (over 30 years) as a member of the CRH and as an associate of the educational and research institutions affiliated with the CRH.

1. The Importance and Role of the Bible for CRH: Beliefs

Listing the essential characteristics of CRH, we can put the Bible in the first place "as the sole and final authority for Christian belief and life, and the belief and action of the Church. The Holy Scriptures are the sole final authority in matters of faith and morals" (Jambrek 2003, 18). The importance of the Bible is evident in the beliefs of CRH, which are found on their websites and literature:

- The Evangelical Pentecostal Church, in its text "Belief," places the statement about the Bible first: "We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible, trustworthy and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and life" (Evanđeoska pentekostna crkva u RH s. a.). This is followed by statements about belief in God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and other related matters.

- In the Baptist principal beliefs, Horak first writes about the Bible: "For Baptists, only what the Holy Scripture teaches is authoritative. In this, they differ significantly from some traditional churches, which do not consider the Holy Scripture to be the ultimate authority in matters of faith, and in addition to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, they hold tradition to be also authoritative" (Horak 1989, 27-28).

- The Church of God in the Republic of Croatia, in its text "Beliefs and Doctrines," follows the same pattern and first places a statement about the Bible: "We believe in the Holy Scriptures, inspired by God, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (Crkva Božja u RH s. a.). This is followed by statements about the Triune God, Jesus Christ, and other related topics.

- In the document "Beliefs of the Churches of Christ in the Republic of Croatia," the belief about the Bible is listed first: "The Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21) and the ultimate authority (Mt 4:4; 5:17-19; 24:35) for Christian belief and life (Jn 8:31-32)" (Vjerovanje Kristovih Crkava u RH 2021, art. I). This is followed by beliefs about the triune God, the person of Jesus Christ, and other related concepts.

- The church Word of Life, in the section "Who We Are / Vision / Belief," places the Bible at the forefront of their beliefs as the Word of God, emphasizing: "We believe that the Bible is inspired by God and revealed

to humanity. It is the supreme authority in all matters of faith and morals. The Word of God is the direct revelation of God's will to all mankind for all time (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:2)" (Kršćanski centar Riječ Života 2015). This is followed by a statement about one God of triune nature, etc.

- The Full Gospel Church, in the section "What Do We Believe?", puts the statement about the Bible first: "We believe that the Bible is the inerrant and unchangeable Word of God" (Crkva cjelovitog evanđelja s. a.). This is followed by a statement of belief regarding the triune God, Jesus Christ, and other related matters.

What is noticeable is that in the above cases, the statement of belief about the Bible is placed before the statement of faith regarding God, Christ, and other biblical and theological doctrines.

A more detailed understanding of the importance and role of the Bible for the life and work of the CRH and the believers in these churches can be found in the book on the beliefs of the Evangelical Pentecostal Churches, as well as on the website of the Alliance of Baptist Churches, both of which cite the Lausanne Covenant,[2] which in the second paragraph states the following:

> We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness, and authority of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and Scripture is unchangeable. Through it, the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illuminates the minds of God's people in every culture, enabling them to perceive the truth freshly through their own eyes, and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; John 10:35; Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 1:16, Matthew 5:17,18; Jude 3; Ephesians 1:17,18; 3:10,18) (Balog 2009, 98; Savez baptističkih crkava u RH 2016b).

It is important to note that the two largest CRH denominations in Croatia, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Alliance of Baptist Churches, as well as the Churches of Christ, also cite in their publications the confession of faith written in the Cape Town Commitment:[3]

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2   The Lausanne Covenant is a confession of faith of evangelical Christians that was written in 1974 at the First International Congress for the Evangelization of the World in the Swiss city of Lausanne.

3   See the web page of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (https://epc.hr/povijest_i_dokumenti), the web page of the Alliance of Baptist Churches (https://baptist.hr/images/stories/Dokumenti/capetownski%20iskaz%20o%20predanju.pdf), and *Obiteljski list*, no. 2, year 1, 2012 (Zagreb: Kristove crkve u Hrvatskoj).

We love God's Word in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, echoing the joyful delight of the Psalmist in the Torah, 'I love your commands more than gold… Oh, how I love your law.' We receive the whole Bible as the Word of God, inspired by God's Spirit, spoken and written through human authors. We submit to it as supremely and uniquely authoritative, governing our beliefs and our behavior. We testify to the power of God's Word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. We affirm that the Bible is the final written Word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God's people so that the Bible continues to speak God's truth in fresh ways to people in every culture (Cape Town Commitment 2010, 29).[4]

These few quotes demonstrate that when discussing any topic related to CRH, including the topic of identity, the indispensable starting point is the supreme authority of the Bible, which they consider to be the Holy Scripture, that is, the Word of God.

2. The Importance and Role of the Bible for CRH: Practice

The importance and role of the Bible for CRH in practice stem from the fact that, as Jambrek points out, "The Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and life. Therefore, all Christian belief and life must be founded in the Bible and judged by it" (Jambrek 2003, 191). Such a position stems from the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* ("Scripture alone") and the Reformation call *ad fontes* ("to the sources"), which served as a call for the Church to return to the source of belief, that is, to the written Word of God and the beliefs and practices of the early Church described in the New Testament.

CRH believe that the authors of the biblical texts were directly inspired by the Spirit of God when they wrote God's revelations, and this view is confirmed by texts from the Bible (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:21). From this, the understanding is derived that nothing may be added to, taken away from, or changed from the biblical revelations (e.g., Rev 22:18-19). Jovanović points out, "Even in the Old Testament, God emphasizes that his Word is perfect and forbids the Jews from altering it by any addition or omission" (Jovanović 1997, 68), citing examples from Deuteronomy 4:2 and Proverbs 30:5-6. A little later, based on Jesus' words in Mark 7:7-9, he concludes: "…no human tradition, no matter how old and convincing, can replace what God has ordained" (Jovanović 1997, 71). CRH believe that

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4   The Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Manila Manifesto (1989), and the Cape Town Commitment (2010) are documents of faith produced by world congresses of evangelical churches. In addition, most evangelical churches accept the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

the canon of the Bible ended with the book of Revelation in the era of the early Church[5] and that the Word of God is found only in the Holy Scriptures, not in church tradition. The viewpoints mentioned above are common and primary to all believers in CRH, reflecting the belief in the supreme authority of the Bible.

Another important understanding is the view that every religious claim should be tested and judged based on the Bible (Jambrek 2003, 191). This practice is confirmed by a biblical precedent, specifically the example of the Bereans, more precisely, the Jews who gathered in the synagogue in the Greco-Roman city of Berea in first-century Macedonia, a province of the Roman Empire (Acts 17). The apostle Paul spoke to them about Jesus being the Messiah, and the author Luke writes: "They examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11b, NIV). As a result, many were convinced of the truth of Paul's message and accepted faith in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (Acts 17:12). Another example of this viewpoint is Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good" (1 Thess 5:19-21, NIV). Testing implies checking claims to see if they align with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

According to the author's assessment, in practice, CRH adhere to the principle of *prima scriptura* (Scripture first), where the Bible remains the supreme authority, but there is awareness (and for some, unawareness and misunderstanding) that the Word of God is not interpreted in a vacuum, but that there are additional elements in interpretation as well as a particular subjectivity. In addition to holding the Bible as the supreme authority, interpretation is also influenced by a particular tradition (e.g., Reformation tradition, Protestant-Evangelical tradition), affiliation with a particular denomination or movement (e.g., Pentecostal), the culture in which we live (e.g., Western), and personal experience (e.g., new spiritual birth).

Regarding the Bible translations used in the CRH during the period in question, it is worth noting that until the 1970s, CRH believers primarily used the translation made by Daničić and Karadžić in the mid-19th century, which was revised (croatized) for the Croatian edition by Šulek and Rešetar in the late 19th century. Since the 1970s, the Bible published by Stvarnost (also known as the Bible of Kršćanska sadašnjost or the Zagreb Bible) and the Šarić Bible published by the Croatian Bible Society in Zagreb have been used predominantly. In the early 1990s, believers used existing translations of the Bible in Croatian. The New Testament, translated by Duda and Fućak, was popular and distributed free of charge in significant quantities by the Gideons. Later, individuals and organizations within the CRH themselves published specific translations or had existing translations printed with the publisher's permission, excluding the apocryphal books. Transla-

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5   The CRH accept the Protestant canon of the Bible, which consists of the 39 writings of the Old Testament and the 27 writings of the New Testament, excluding the deuterocanonical or apocryphal writings.

tions of the New Testament were made by Vrtarić (1998), Knežević (2001), and Jovanović (2006). In 2012, the Varaždin translation was published according to the model of an explicitly literal translation (word-for-word). In 2018, the Bible Plus was published as the so-called "Study Bible" because it contains short commentaries, theological articles, and a concordance. However, it is not a new translation; instead, it uses the Šarić translation from the fourth revised edition. The Contemporary Translation (Suvremeni prijevod) of the New Testament was published in 2006, and the Contemporary Croatian Translation (Suvremeni hrvatski prijevod) of the entire Bible was first published in mobile applications (Biblija 365 and Biblija – Suvremeni prijevod) in 2017, followed by a printed edition in 2020. Due to the text being easy to read and understand, this edition gained popularity in CRH; however, the Bible published by Kršćanska sadašnjost was the most widely used.[6]

There were other translations released between 1990 and 2020, so we can say that CRH, despite their small number, were very engaged in creating and distributing new translations to make the Word of God reach as many people as possible in the Croatian-speaking area.[7] Such an approach is in line with the missionary drive for evangelism that is emphasized in CRH, that is, in evangelical Christianity.[8]

3. Formation of Biblical Identity

The Bible clearly describes the identity that God gives to people who believe in Christ and accept him as their Savior and Lord. This identity is based on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the believer accepts it as God's truth. As believ-

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6   In a research on reading habits conducted in the period from March 20 to May 10, 2023 in four Zagreb churches: Church of Christ Kušlanova, Dubrava Baptist Church, Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Stijena spasenja," and Church of Christ Samobor, on a sample of 58 respondents, it was determined that the Bible published by Kršćanska sadašnjost is the most widely read (35), but the Contemporary Translation is also widely read (22) despite the fact that it has not been on our market for long. Of the other translations, 10 respondents stated that they read the Varaždin Bible the most, and 8 respondents stated the Šarić Bible (Biblical Institute. 2025. "Research on reading habits and knowledge of the Bible"). At the time of writing this article, the document had not yet been published. The document will be published in *Kairos* 19, no. 1, 2025.

7   Only a brief overview of some translations is provided for the purposes of this article. More detailed information will follow in the project "Churches of Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020." For a detailed overview, see also Knežević 2019; Berković 2018; Jambrek, and Knežević 2007.

8   One of the fundamental emphases of evangelical Christianity is to spread the Word of God, that is, the Good News of Jesus Christ, as much as possible, which can be seen in numerous articles in CRH magazines and church bulletins from 1990 to 2020, where evangelistic events are often reported and evangelistic radio broadcasts are announced. See also Cape Town Commitment 2010, 44-47.

ers are taught (through personal Bible reading, church services, small Bible study groups, and other means), they come to know more about the person and work of Jesus Christ and take on their God-given identity. This identity is described extensively and in detail in the New Testament texts, penetrating deeply into the core of the believer; that is, it radically changes the person who follows Christ.

By accepting the Word of God, doctrine is established, and standards for the individual's and the community of believers' lives are set. By applying these accepted standards, one's identity is confirmed. Biblical identity is manifested through the measure of acceptance and application of God's word in everyday life. Biblical identity begins to form from the moment a person experiences conversion, which is the term most often used in CRH to describe knowing Jesus Christ and personally surrendering one's life to him as Savior and Lord. This falls under the common principle of CRH, according to which a person who is capable of making their own decisions is expected to believe in Christ and decide to follow Christ (Jambrek 2003, 283). Therefore, it can be an older child, adolescent, or adult, regardless of whether they grew up in a Christian, atheistic, or some other environment, who clearly and voluntarily decides to reject their previous self-willed way of life and surrender to Christ. Conversion involves repentance for sins and faith in Christ, which is a turning away from a previous way of life to a new life in Christ. In this way, a person receives God's gift of salvation based on faith in the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation is thus received instantly, but it is also a process that consists of justification, sanctification, and final glorification. It is important to emphasize that in CRH, a person who has grown up in a Christian environment and church is also expected to experience a personal encounter with God and a personal surrender to God. Therefore, a person is not a Christian because they are part of a particular society, family, or church, but because they have personally come to know Jesus Christ and have decided to follow him. Another term often used in CRH, which denotes the beginning of a person's new, biblical identity, is the new birth, or being born again, which will be explained further in the text.

3.1. Identity is Acquired by Birth

In the genealogies of the Old Testament, we read that an individual acquires identity by birth into a particular nation, tribe, clan, and family. Why did God inspire the authors of the Old Testament scriptures to record genealogies? Of all the nations in the world, Israel had a unique identity because God created them (from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), chose them to be his people, and made a covenant with them. In other words, he determined their identity; he revealed to them who they were and what they were to do. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt to be his people, to serve him, and to live according to his instructions (the so-called

Mosaic Law, that is, the law that God gave to the people of Israel through Moses). Many genealogies were written down (e.g., Num 1:20; Joshua 17:3) to show who were the descendants of Abraham chosen by God were so that each of them would receive their inheritance in the Promised Land. A person today acquires their identity through physical birth into a blood family and their spiritual identity through spiritual birth into God's family.

3.2. Identity of the Born-Again

Believers in CRH often identify themselves as born-again believers to indicate that they are not merely nominal believers but rather have experienced the new birth that makes them true believers and new creatures. This experience is based on New Testament texts. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the necessity of the new birth in John 3:1-13. "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again… Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:3-5, NIV). Jesus thus indicates that the new birth is not a physical but a spiritual birth from God. The moment of new birth in some CRH is considered the moment when a person acknowledges their sinfulness, believes in Christ's sacrifice for forgiveness, and prays the so-called prayer of salvation. In some CRH, this moment is marked by water baptism. The first view is more challenging to support with biblical examples. In contrast, the second view is based on Romans 6: when a person believes in Christ and is baptized in water into Christ, he spiritually dies with Christ (Rom 6:3) and is resurrected with Christ to a new life (Rom 6:4). Thus the "old man" with his fallen human nature dies, and a "new man" with a new nature is born (Rom 6:6; 1 Pet 1:4). The new birth is a divine supernatural act, like a new creation. The apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here" (2 Cor 5:17, NIV). Jambrek writes, "By the mysterious intervention of the Holy Spirit, a new creature is born, for the Holy Spirit plants God's life in the human heart… At the new birth, the Holy Spirit acts in three ways: it convicts of sin (Jn 16:7-11), causes a new birth (John 3:5-6), and testifies that the person is saved (Rom 8:15-16)" (Jambrek 2003, 258). In a booklet on Baptist beliefs, Horak (1989, 45) writes, "The new birth comes from God and repentance and conversion from man. Thus, God creates a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and a child of God (John 1:12)."

3.3. Identity of the Consciously Baptized

Based on numerous examples of baptism in the New Testament, CRH consider it necessary for those who believe in Christ to be baptized in water baptism into Christ, by immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself was bap-

tized as an adult and later taught, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16a). Furthermore, the book of Acts records numerous examples of adult baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the act of baptism by one's own decision, in the name of Jesus Christ, is very significant in the identity of CRH believers. Adults or adolescents must understand what they are doing, repent of their sins, believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their salvation, and be baptized by immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. This is called the believer's baptism. In *Radosna vijest [The Good News]*, the magazine of the Church of Christ, we find an entry by the then preacher Mladen Jovanović in the article "Biblical Baptism":

> By comparing the biblical accounts of this act, we see that baptism was performed by completely immersing the person being baptized in water. The Greek word for baptism, "baptizo," means to dip or immerse. Changes in the method of baptism, such as by pouring or sprinkling, are of a later date and are not confirmed in the Word of God. The New Testament only contains records of the baptism of those who knew what they were doing on that occasion. In the New Testament, we cannot find an example of young children being baptized, that is, persons who could neither believe nor repent (Jovanović 2006, 2).

In the article "When to Be Baptized?" Volf writes about the necessity of conscious belief before baptism and concludes, "…in the New Testament, we do not find any theological considerations that would justify the baptism of young children. The New Testament clearly and unequivocally testifies that only those persons who can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior should be baptized" (Volf 2024, 287). Baptism practices may vary somewhat in CRH. For example, the Churches of Christ believe that a person should be baptized as soon as they believe in Jesus Christ. In contrast, Baptists require that a person receive catechetical instruction and give a testimony of conversion to the congregation before the act of baptism. Different kinds of CRH newsletters from 1990 to 2020 contain numerous reports and images of baptisms for adolescents and adults..

3.4. Identity in Christ

This identity is based on the New Testament texts and is received by every person who believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior, accepts him as Lord of their life, and is baptized according to their faith in Christ's name. The Apostle Paul uses the terms "in Christ," "by Christ," and "through Christ" over 150 times in the New Testament, referring to what has been done for the believer in Christ and to the new identity of the person who has become a believer. As an example, I quote Paul's letter to the Ephesians 1:3-10 (NIV):

> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

To be "in Christ" means to be united with him and to share in his identity and life. The apostle Paul claims that those who are baptized into Christ have died with him, risen with him, live with him, been raised with him, and are seated with him in the heavenly realms. Identification with Christ is a primary characteristic of the identity of believers within CRH. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 6 that in baptism, we are "(co)buried with him" (συνεταφημεν) and "(co)crucified with him" (συνεσταυρώθη). Since we have "died with him" (ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν), we will "(co)live with him" (συζήσομεν). Furthermore, according to Ephesians 2:6, we have been "(co)resurrected with him" (συνήγειρεν) and "(co)seated with him" (συνεκάθισεν) in the heavenly realms. These verses strongly indicate the identification of believers with Christ. What happened to Christ also happens to believers when they are baptized into Christ. It happens in a spiritual sense (crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension) while the body awaits a future resurrection. Moreover, believers are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18), and united with him (1 Cor 6:17).

For example, at a youth meeting of evangelical churches in the city of Rijeka, the following was said about identity in Christ: "Identity in Christ is challenged from within and without: a believer who sees the deviation of their daily life from the story they tell about themselves easily doubts its truthfulness. The world, actively or passively (by ignoring it), also challenges the Christian story, denying its truthfulness or morality. Therefore, a believer draws the stability of his identity in Christ from what God says about him, in the face of all challenges (1 Jn 3:1-42)" (Informativna baptistička agencija 2013). The expression "what God says about him" refers to the biblical, New Testament statements about the identity of believers in Christ. On the Baptist.hr website, in the article "Identity of Christians" (Savez baptističkih crkava u RH, 2016a), it states: "What is the core of a Christian's identity? Jesus Christ. Everything else is changeable, culturally dependent, historically conditioned, and theologically determined. Only Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever" and explains that a person who claims to be Christ's must have the same heart desire as Christ – to do God's will, the same mission as Christ – reconciliation with God, and the same method as Christ – to

bear his cross." The book *Znaš li svoj pravi identitet? [Do You Know Your True Identity?]* explores the current state of believers in Christ through four key points based on New Testament texts: "1. You are spiritually alive," "2. You are now in a covenant with God," "3. You are now righteous," "4. You have a new identity (You are a partaker of the divine nature)" (Loveless 2020, 50-52).[9]

3.5. Identity of the Saved

Believers in CRH often refer to themselves as "the saved." This biblically based term refers to those who are saved through faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ by the grace of God. In this case, the text from the Epistle to the Romans that speaks of salvation is often cited: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Rom 10:9-10, NIV). In the booklet *Abeceda spasenja [The Alphabet of Salvation]*, Kuzmič notes: "Repentance, conversion, regeneration, justification, and sanctification are central concepts of biblical soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) and are therefore of great importance for the understanding and experience of salvation, as well as for Christian witness to salvation" (Kuzmič 2020, 38). Jambrek describes salvation in the following way: "God's plan of grace foresees the salvation of humanity, and its ultimate intention is to make them like Christ." His goal is the complete restoration of the image of God in his child. The Holy Scriptures strongly emphasize that salvation is God's free gift of grace, which man can only accept but cannot merit or earn through good behavior" (Jambrek 2003, 249).

In CRH, the emphasis is typically on salvation from sins that lead to destruction, for eternal life with Christ, who fulfills God's plan for humanity (Jn 3:14-18; Rom 3:21-26; 6:4-11, 23). In the New Testament, salvation is described in various ways because there are multiple spiritual realities that God reveals through Christ's saving work and the work of the Holy Spirit in a person. These are forgiveness, redemption, liberation, justification, reconciliation, healing, new birth, new life, new creation, New Covenant, change of kingdom, change of Lord, entry into the kingdom of God, adoption (reception into God's family), and transformation into the image of Christ (restoration of God's image in a human) (Medved 2020). In their discourse on salvation, the CRH primarily emphasize the death and resurrection of Jesus and the doctrine of justification by faith to emphasize that sal-

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9   The book was edited by Vladimir Hoblaj (Association "Hope for Life," Varaždin) and published by Zdravko Konecky (Logos, Daruvar). Hoblaj and Konecky have made significant contributions to establishing the believer's identity in Christ through special seminars and the publication of books on such topics among the Churches of the Reformation Heritage and beyond.

vation is a gift from God and the merit of Christ and that it can only be received through faith in the work of Christ, and in no way earned by one's good works.

3.6. Identity of the Converted

When believers within CRH discuss their religious experiences, they often say that they were converted during a specific event when they had the experience of God revealing himself to them. This could be an evangelism event, a worship service, a youth camp, a personal Bible reading, or some other event when they felt that God spoke to them personally through the written or preached Word, convicted them of sin, and offered them salvation through faith in Christ. They most often view conversion as the moment when they repent of their sins, accept Christ as their Savior and Lord, and begin to live a new life following God's Word. These are often intense experiences that are remembered for a lifetime and recounted as a testimony before water baptism when evangelizing the unsaved or for the encouragement of other believers. Even those believers within CRH who grew up in the church have such an experience at some point. In describing evangelical Christians, MacKenzie emphasizes: "**The importance of personal conversion**. For evangelical Christians, Scripture is not an end in itself. It points to a personal relationship with the living God. Evangelical Christians, therefore, always look for evidence that someone has experienced personal conversion" (MacKenzie 1997, 84, emphasis his). Conversion is a biblical term used by the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Greek verb μετανοέω and noun μετάνοια), and examples of people's conversion are found in many accounts in the Gospels and Acts. Conversion involves a turn from a self-willed way of life toward a life under the lordship of Jesus Christ.[10]

3.7. The Identity of God's Children and God's Family

Among many who consider themselves Christians in Croatia, there is a widespread unbiblical opinion that all people are children of God. CRH often emphasize, based on Bible, that all people are *God's creatures*, but only those who are born again of the Spirit of God are *children of God*.[11] Jesus himself declared certain people to be children of the devil (Jn 8:44), from which it follows that they cannot be children of God (unless they repent and are born again as children of God into God's family by faith in him). The apostle John writes: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (Jn 1:12-13, NIV). The apostle Paul writes to

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10 For a more detailed description, see "conversion" in *Leksikon evanđeoskoga kršćanstva online* (eleksikon.hr).

11 See, for example, Riječ Života 2016.; Stolnik 2017, 4; Budiselić 2014, 4.

the Galatians: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Gal 3:26). Therefore, according to the New Testament texts, faith and new birth are necessary for someone to become a child of God, and thus immediately adopted into God's family.

Regarding the father-son relationship between God and his people, Medved observes: "While the fatherhood of God seems to be a minor doctrine in the Old Testament, it becomes a major one in the New Testament, promoted by the Son of God himself…" (Medved 2016, 209), and "The Old Testament longing of God the father to be in an intimate father-son relationship with his people, whom he blesses and who love him and obey him, is fulfilled in the New Testament, through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, creating a new people with a new spirit, relating to God as their Abba" (Medved 2016, 210). Following the biblical texts, believers within CRH consider God as their Father and newborn Christians as brothers and sisters. This identity of spiritual family often becomes stronger than the identity of blood family.[12] As the Lord himself warned, some newborn believers experience persecution from their own blood family precisely because of this radical change in identity. Persecution can be of a lower intensity (opposition, reprimands, etc.) or of a higher intensity (physical attacks, expulsion from the home, renunciation of the person, etc.). Although the Croatian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion as one of the fundamental human rights, persecution can still occur.[13]

3.8. Identity of the Disciples of Christ

Believers in CRH also consider themselves disciples of Christ based on the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. In the Gospels, we read that Jesus called people to be his disciples, and before his ascension, he gave his disciples the command to make disciples of all nations. The term "disciples" for Christ's followers appears frequently in the Gospels and Acts. This term implies that believers follow Christ, learn from him, know his teachings as recorded in the New Testament, practice his teachings, and strive to be like their Master. Also, due to the prevalence of traditional Christianity in Croatia, where many call themselves believers but do not know the teachings of Christ and do not follow Christ, CRH often emphasize that it is not enough to be a believer, but it is necessary to be a disciple of Christ. Therefore, it is not enough to believe in the existence of God or Jesus; it is necessary to know what Jesus taught and take upon oneself the duty of practicing Jesus' teachings in everyday life because the Lord Jesus Christ himself demands it. This is also evident in the mission he gave to his disciples: "Therefore go and make dis-

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12 See, for example, "Molitva za našu duhovnu obitelj." Betel Baptist Church, Sisak 2014.

13 Article 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia states: "Freedom of conscience and religion and free public manifestation of religion or other belief are guaranteed."

ciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20, NIV).

On the topic of discipleship, Budiselić writes: "The text from Matthew 28:16-20 confirms three key elements of the content of discipleship that are unchanging and valid for us today: a) the necessity of knowing and remembering Jesus' teachings; b) the necessity of teaching by example; c) the necessity of making disciples out of converts. Regardless of the cultures, times, customs, and contexts within which discipleship takes place, it cannot be successful and fruitful if any of these elements are neglected" (Budiselić 2020, 22-23). The Cape Town Commitment confirms, "Jesus calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him in the path of self-denial, servanthood, and obedience. 'If you love me, keep my commandments,' he said. 'Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say?' We are called to live as Christ lived and to love as Christ loved. To profess Christ while ignoring his commands is dangerous folly" (Cape Town Commitment 2010, 25).

3.9. Identity of Saints

Believers within CRH accept the identity of saints based on the teachings of the New Testament, which continues the teaching of the Old Testament that God's people are holy – dedicated to God to live according to his will and fulfill his plans. The Lord Jesus teaches, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48, NIV). The Apostle Peter quotes God's statement from Leviticus (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7) when addressing Christians: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy because I am holy.'" (1 Pet 1:15-16, NIV). The Apostle Paul often addresses Christians in the introductions of his letters as "saints in Christ," while in some texts, he explains that Christians are holy because Christ has made them so. Believers within CRH do not base their identity as saints on their righteousness (behavior and works) but on the doctrine of justification by faith, where all sin is forgiven, and Christ's righteousness is attributed to those who believe in Christ (Rom 3 et al.).

The identity of saints is something that Christians receive from God by faith at the moment of justification, as a New Testament reality made possible by Jesus Christ, and is followed by lifelong sanctification, which involves growth in faith, holiness, and conformity to Christ.

> Throughout the New Testament, we find exhortations to imitate or follow in the steps of Christ, Paul and even some other godly people. In the Epistle to the Philippians, we find this exhortation to imitate incorporated into a Pauline theology of progressive sanctification. Sanctification in Philippians is portrayed as a conforming to Christ through the knowledge of Him, which comes

through tripartite means of the Word of God (the Apostolic teaching), the internal work of God's Spirit and the imitation of Christ, the Apostle Paul, and other godly examples (Balint-Feudvarski 2018, 23).

3.10. The Identity of Biblical Christians or New Testament Christians

This identity is based on the fact that a believer in Christ is in a New Covenant with God, as claimed by the New Testament (and, in a broader sense, the Bible), and on the fact that Christians should be guided by New Testament standards (in a broader biblical sense). Since the population in the Republic of Croatia is predominantly of the Roman Catholic faith, to explain their identity to fellow citizens who are not familiar with Protestant-Evangelical, or Reformation, spirituality, believers within CRH often say that they are "biblical Christians" or "New Testament Christians." By doing so, they aim to indicate that their identity, beliefs, and worship are based on what is written in the Bible rather than on traditions that have arisen in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and are not supported by biblical writings. Therefore, they emphasize differences in identity, beliefs, and worship to clarify their own identity. They especially emphasize the New Testament writings as a guide to New Testament Christianity. These are some of the main differences they emphasize: the Bible as the supreme authority for faith and practice, without the addition of later traditions of the Church and folk piety; the priesthood of all believers as opposed to the division into clergy and laity; the veneration of Christ as the sole mediator between God and men as opposed to the veneration of Mary and the saints of the Roman Catholic Church; prayers exclusively to the Triune God, as opposed to prayers addressed to Mary and the saints of the Roman Catholic Church; an emphasis on a personal relationship with God as opposed to a sacramental relationship mediated by a priest. What they emphasize are, in many ways, the emphases of evangelical Christianity.

The following beliefs and practices are common to CRH: "referring to the Holy Scriptures as the sole and final authority for belief and life; emphasizing that God's grace is the only means of salvation which is a gift and is accepted by faith; life of the church as a community of born-again Christians baptized as adults after confession of sin and profession of personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; and, among other things, teaching that each local church has the fullness of church" (Jambrek 2003, 283). These beliefs are based on New Testament statements.

3.11. Identity of God's or Christ's Church

CRH consider themselves the church of God or the church of Christ. Both terms are used in the New Testament. The expression "church of God" occurs several

times (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 3:5), and of particular importance is Paul's statement that also defines the church: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people" (1 Cor 1:2, NIV). The expression "church of Christ" appears in Romans 16:16, and the term "church" is used by itself more than 100 times. To understand this identity, as well as all others, biblical texts are provided for reference.

In the New Testament, the Church is referred to and described as "God's Church (1 Cor 1:2), God's field (1 Cor 3:6-9), God's building (1 Cor 3:9), God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17), God's people (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10), God's house (1 Pet 4:17; Heb 3:3-6 and 1 Tim 3:15), Christ's Church (Mt 16:18; Col 1:15-20), Christ's bride (2 Cor 11:2)" (Jambrek 2019, 50-51). By that, CRH emphasize that the Church is not a physical building, but a spiritual one — God's temple, the place where God dwells—when Christians gather together in a particular place. Therefore, the Church has both a divine component (God's dwelling place) and a human component (the assembly of Christ's disciples).

Furthermore, the New Testament mentions the universal Church and the local church. The universal Church is all those who have been converted, baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, received the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has joined them to his Church (Acts 2:38, 47). The local church is a group of Christ's disciples who regularly gather in a specific place in the name of Christ. The Apostle Paul describes the Church in detail as the body of Christ, where Christ is the head and the believers are the members. This image makes it clear that Christ is the leader and focus of the Church, and the believers, as diverse members, build each other up with the various gifts that God has given them. Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit is essential in the Church because it is he who gives believers the gifts with which they build up the Church (other believers) and who encourages them to act. Jambrek summarizes the identity of the Church as the people of God:

> The New Testament image of the Church as God's people points to a community of believers who are God's property, who are to be separated from the world, in whom God will dwell, who will joyfully testify that God is their personal God, and who will live and serve together according to God's will in the power of the Holy Spirit. These are all those who are consecrated in Christ Jesus, whom God has chosen, called, and declared saints, and all those who in any place call upon the name of Jesus Christ. The Church, as God's property, is a community of people on God's mission. God, as the owner, sent them into the world not to conform to the world but to change the world with the Gospel (Jambrek 2019, 55).

This is precisely a brief description of how CRH sees themselves, and it is based on the New Testament teaching about the Church.

4. Biblical Identity in Practice

4.1. Receiving of Identity in a Local Church

Believers within CRH receive their biblical identity after conversion, using the Bible as the Word of God as their primary source for learning about and adopting a new identity. They are regularly exposed to the Word of God to learn about everything that God gives them as part of their new identity. This is where the authority of the Bible is manifested as one of the fundamental beliefs of CRH. Furthermore, one of the foundations of Christian life in CRH is close fellowship with other believers. After conversion, believers become members of a local church and are expected to be regularly involved in church meetings and activities. This significantly influences the formation of identity, both biblically and denominationally.

What is it in the local church that influences the formation of biblical identity? The following factors are the same or very similar in CRH, so I will cover them together, and I will list the exceptions separately. In local CRH, the following factors influence the identity of believers: personal reading and study of the Bible, small Bible study groups, one-on-one or small group discipleship, worship services, prayer meetings, home groups, spiritual renewal meetings, camps, conferences, seminars, reading Christian books, following Christian content on the Internet, pastoral, teaching and elder's ministry, close fellowship with other Christians.

- CRH encourage believers to read and study the Bible on their own. This time is usually referred to as quiet time and consists of prayer and careful reading of biblical texts. God speaks to a person through the written Word of God, influencing their spiritual formation. The Holy Spirit, who dwells within the believer, is present in this process and influences the understanding of what is read, as well as the formation of the person's beliefs and character.

- Some CRHs practice "one-on-one" discipleship. This means that a person who is older in the faith teaches a person who is new or younger in the faith. They meet regularly by appointment to study the Bible, along with prayer and pastoral care. This relationship fosters a system of accountability that ensures believers are genuinely following Christ and growing in their faith. This can also be in a small group format.

- CRHs often have small Bible study groups where a leader leads a group of believers through a study of a biblical text, either by topic or through a specific book of the Bible or a Bible study guide. Here, the meaning and application of the biblical text are discussed, which in turn influence the spiritual formation of the group members. In small groups, typically within the framework of a specific topic, they discuss their walk with Christ,

challenges, and needs. Believers advise and encourage one another, and they pray for each other, thus fulfilling the need for pastoral care.

- Worship services are the main gatherings of the CRH, typically held on Sunday mornings (can also be in the afternoon or on Saturdays) and consist of prayers, songs, sermons, and occasionally the Lord's Supper (Eucharist). These are songs that praise God and his works or expose the experience of life with God or are taken directly from the biblical text, as is the case with some Psalms. The Lord's Supper (Eucharist) is observed in some local churches at every service, while in others, it is practiced once a month or every three months. All baptized believers partake of both bread and wine as a remembrance of the body and blood of Christ for the salvation of all who believe (Dominić 2014, 5).

- The sermon is a time when a preacher, most often a pastor of the church (but it can also be any believer), speaks a message based on biblical texts for the spiritual edification of believers. The exception is that in some CRH, women are allowed to preach and teach adults. This is the longest part of the service, typically lasting 30-45 minutes, with special attention given to the Word of God and what the Holy Spirit wants to convey to believers.

- Furthermore, weekly prayer meetings influence the spiritual formation of believers through two aspects of prayer: the Holy Spirit changes the inner state of the one praying, and the prayer of one believer influences the formation of other believers. Prayer meetings usually begin with praising God in song and thanking God and continue with asking for God's plans to be realized and presenting human needs to God. In the vast majority of CRH, prayers are not prayed according to learned prayers or prayer books, but each person addresses God with their own words and reflections. Although prayer meetings do not primarily involve Bible study, a biblical text is often read to encourage prayer. Believers strive to pray in accordance with what is written in God's word, and prayer thus contributes to the building of a biblical identity.

- CRH also hold special meetings for spiritual renewal once or more times a year, which are colloquially called "camps" because participants travel to a designated location for two or more days to focus on spiritual renewal. Camps can include the entire local church (families and individuals of different age groups) or be intended for a specific age group, such as summer camps for children. Spiritual renewal has a profound influence on the formation of believers, including their identity, as it is an intense and focused spiritual experience that removes believers from life's obligations, allowing them to primarily focus on praising God, listening to biblical teachings, engaging in continuous fellowship, and mutual edification.

- Conferences and seminars are gatherings of believers organized around a biblical or life theme, where lecturers present their talks based on the Bible, thereby contributing to the growth of believers in their knowledge of the Bible and the application of biblical teachings to specific topics. For example, conferences on discipleship are held to enable believers to learn more about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, as well as marriage seminars that help married believers grow in their understanding of biblical marriage and enhance their marital relationships.
- Reading Christian books also contributes to the development and establishment of identity, whether the books speak exclusively or partly about biblical identity. Using Christian materials on the Internet, such as video materials and written texts, also contributes to the construction of identity.
- In local churches, some ministries contribute to building identity, particularly pastoral ministry, teaching ministry, and elder ministry, which work with the church, groups, and individuals to foster growth in faith. In CRH, close fellowship with other Christians is very important, a belief emphasized by Protestant-Evangelical Christians, who base it on New Testament teachings about local churches. In Paul's letters to the churches, we find numerous commands about what needs to be done to "one another" for a group of believers to be a church and fulfill its mission truly.
- Finally, the baptism of persons who have decided to follow Christ is a unique event that is most often attended by the entire local religious community and which strongly influences the identity of the baptized, as already described in the section "The Identity of the Consciously Baptized."

Everything described regarding the acquisition of a biblical identity is largely the same or very similar in CRH; however, it is worth noting that there are differences not addressed in this article. According to a questionnaire conducted in CRH, the majority of pastors of local churches within different denominations, marked with a medium or high score on a scale of 1-10, the question of steadiness in discipleship, apostolic teaching, fellowship, singing, and worship of God, prayers and the Lord's Supper (Jambrek 2022). This suggests that there was a significant steadiness in the construction of biblical identity in the period in question.

4.2. Identity According to Membership

The questionnaire used to collect data on CRH (Jambrek 2022) asked the question, "What does it take to become a member of a church?" The answers reveal identity factors. A review of the answers given by Evangelical Pentecostal Church, Baptist Churches, Churches of Christ, Church of God, Full Gospel Church, and

the Word of Life Churches shows that the requirements for membership include repentance, conversion, personal faith in Christ, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, being born again, baptism of believers, manifestation of the fruits of conversion, that is, the fruits of the Spirit, living according to biblical standards, regular attendance at church services, involvement in church activities, and acceptance of church doctrine. Based on the answers, it can be concluded that the collected information confirms the common biblical emphases of CRH, which have already been described in this article, such as conversion, personal faith, being born again, the baptism of believers, and following Christ.

4.3. Deviations from Biblical Identity

Deviations in building a biblical identity have occurred to a greater or lesser extent in every local church and denomination of the CRH. Namely, building an identity is a demanding and long-term process, and various non-biblical influences can appear in this process. Therefore, deviations have occurred due to the following factors: partial adoption of biblical identity; adding to the Bible (from culture, philosophy, other religions, new age movements, etc.); taking away from the Bible or neglecting of biblical teachings (e.g., elevating nationality above biblical identity); wrong priorities (e.g., putting denominational doctrine before biblical doctrine); following a certain leader and his interpretation of the Bible instead of the teachings of Jesus Christ, etc.

Sometimes denominational identity (Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, etc.) can become dominant over or replace biblical identity. This happens in at least two ways. The first way is when denominational identity becomes a substitute for biblical identity. Namely, CRH emphasize a personal relationship with God for salvation, but being a member of a CRH does not automatically guarantee salvation or a relationship with God. Therefore, denominational identity cannot replace or be a substitute for biblical identity.

The second way is elitism – when a particular church group believes that they are the only true Christians with correct faith and practice. Such a spirit of elitism can lead individuals or local churches to separate themselves from other CRH because they consider them to be wrong in one or more points of correct biblical faith. As a result of such beliefs, such churches can be intrusive and exclusive towards others and build their identity by being against others.

Churches influenced by the "faith movement" have often been led astray by the teachings of certain American teachers and founders of that movement. Based on the account of creation in the book of Genesis, they falsely teach that believers are "little gods" (that God reproduced according to his kind) and that by speaking

words, they shape reality and circumstances around them. This is often accompanied by the doctrine of prosperity, i.e., success, health, and wealth of believers.[14]

A deviation that often occurs among nominal Christians in the Republic of Croatia is the creation of identity by bonding together religion and nationality, ignoring biblical texts that openly write against such behavior for several reasons: God is not partial, Christ's sacrifice is valid for everyone who believes, and all people are sinners in need of God's grace. CRH place biblical identity above national affiliation, based on Jesus' teaching on dealing with enemies (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27; Lk 10:25-37), and on the apostolic teaching that our homeland is in heaven (Phil 3:20), that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world (1 Pet 2:11), and that we are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). CRH believers are thus taught that there is no partiality with God, and they generally do not fall into the trap of nationalism. They see their earthly nation as people who need to be served and evangelized, not exalted above others. However, even in CRH, some believers manifest nominal Christianity, which means that they intellectually agree with reformation and evangelical principles but do not live by them.

Conclusion

Since CRH follow the Protestant-Evangelical view of the Bible as the supreme authority for belief and life, biblical identity in the period from 1990 to 2020 was largely built on the truths that describe the new identity of a person who has accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord and are found in the texts of the New Testament. Such persons are converted, born again, saved, consciously baptized according to their faith in Christ, children of God accepted into God's family, disciples of Christ, saints by faith in Christ, hold biblical (especially New Testament) doctrine, consider themselves biblical or New Testament Christians, and belong to God's, i.e., Christ's church. They received and built their identity by adopting biblical truths, mostly in the context of local churches, through numerous gatherings and activities. The most important thing for biblical identity was identification with the person of Jesus Christ, to be in Christ, and to follow him. In the construction of the biblical identity of believers, deviations also occurred, such as false doctrine and wrong priorities, following a certain leader or denomination more than correct biblical doctrine, and elevating denominational identity above biblical identity.

Since the Bible is the supreme authority for the CRH, this means that it was the most important source of identity for the believers of the mentioned churches. However, the most important did not mean the only one. What we have not dealt with in this article is the fact that biblical identity was not built in isolation from

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14   A separate article will deal with theological influences on CRH.

other sources of identity (historical, theological, cultural, social, etc.), nor the fact that biblical identity for CRH believers did not mean that each church interpreted the Bible in the same way. Therefore, although the CRH used the same New Testament terms (such as "converts," "saints," "disciples of Christ," etc.), this did not mean that the practical expressions were identical. A separate article within the project "Churches of Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020" will address this issue, building on this article and exploring the diversity of theological influences in CRH.

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The Role of Water Baptism in the Discipleship Process: A Proposal[1]

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Abstract

This article focuses on how evangelical churches in general, notably in Croatia, view the role and position of water baptism in the discipleship process. However, the relationship between baptism and discipleship will serve as an opportunity to examine other aspects of the discipleship process, primarily the link between evangelism and discipleship. Hence, in the first part of the article, we will briefly discuss and examine some key elements of the Great Commission to get a sense of it and see different interpretations and understandings of that text. Second, based on the Gospels, we will see how Jesus' followers would understand and define discipleship based on their experience with Jesus and how that experience shaped their understanding of the Great Commission. Third, we will discuss the relationship (or, better to say, current dichotomy) between "evangelism" and "discipleship" and argue for an understanding of these two activities that is, I would suggest, more faithful to the NT texts. Finally, we will discuss the role and position of water baptism in the discipleship process. Since the purpose of this discussion is to evaluate the theology and practice of evangelicals regarding a better understanding of water baptism and, consequently, the discipleship process in general, four things are proposed: 1. Adoption of a definition of discipleship that in its core, has relationships and not a method or program or activities; 2. Revision of

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1   This article was written as part of the Zagreb Biblical Institute research project: "The Concept of Discipleship Among Evangelical Churches in Croatia."

understanding of the relationship between "evangelism" and "discipleship"; 3. A reminder that the purpose of evangelism is to make "disciples" and not "converts"; 4. Restoration of the biblical position of water baptism as a person's response or their saying "yes" to the gospel message.

Keywords: *discipleship, baptism, evangelism, the Great Commission, evangelical churches*

Introduction

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. *Go* (πορευθέντες) therefore and make disciples (μαθητεύσατε) of all nations, *baptizing* (βαπτίζοντες) them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* (διδάσκοντες) them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (NRSV, emphasis mine).

It is well-known that Matthew 28:19-20 contains one main verb, "make disciples," and three participles, and "baptizing" is one of the three participles. Since for evangelical Christians in Croatia, such as Baptists and Pentecostals, water baptism is something that a person does *after* one's salvation, baptism is considered an outward act of already existing faith and an opportunity to give testimony about one's faith to others. Accordingly, this article focuses on how evangelical churches, notably in Croatia, view the role and position of water baptism in the discipleship process in general.

However, the relationship between baptism and discipleship will serve as an opportunity to examine other aspects of the discipleship process, primarily because baptism is one link in the chain of discipleship. Hence, in the first part of the article, we will briefly discuss and examine some key elements of the Great Commission to get a sense of it and see different interpretations and understandings of that text.[2] Second, based on the Gospels, we will see how Jesus' followers would understand and define discipleship based on their experience with Jesus and how that experience would shape their understanding of the Great Commission. Third, we will discuss the relationship (or, better to say, current dichotomy) between "evangelism" and "discipleship" and argue for an understanding of these two activities that is, I would suggest, more faithful to the NT texts. Finally, based on previous analysis, we will discuss the role and position of water baptism in the discipleship process. The purpose is to evaluate the theology and practice of evangelicals and determine whether our evangelical heritage is beneficial or hinders us

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2   We will not discuss the fact and significance of Jesus' authority to give this Commission or the potential meanings of the expression "all nations."

from adequately understanding water baptism and, consequently, the discipleship process in general.

1. General Outlook on Baptism of Evangelical Churches in Croatia

If we were to enter into any evangelical church in Croatia that does not practice pedobaptism and ask some mature believers there to explain to us how one can become saved, what evangelism and discipleship are, what baptism is, and why it is important, we might hear the process of salvation described like this:

1. First, we share the gospel with someone, and this part is usually called "evangelism."

2. Then, the person responds to the gospel message by repentance and conversion, and this moment is usually demonstrated through the "sinner's prayer."3

3. Then, this person, as someone who is already saved, is baptized after a certain period of time. In the meantime, the person goes through some form of teaching or mentoring to prepare for the baptism

Furthermore, evangelicals would more than likely make a distinction between "evangelism" and "discipleship" in the sense that working with a person prior to their conversion is viewed as "evangelism." In contrast, *after* a person is converted

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3 For example, in the book *Experiencing God* (in Croatian: *Iskusiti Boga: znati i činiti volju Božju* (1997). Zagreb: Savez baptističkih crkava u Hrvatskoj), authors discuss how to have a saving relationship with God. They say that a person should confess (agree with God about) his sins and ask Jesus to save him. I presume that when they say "ask," they think about the sinner's prayer because they do not mention baptism, but instead, they talk about "making this important decision" (Blackaby, Blackaby, and King 2008, 4). The tract "Ovo je bio tvoj život" (Chick Publications s. a.) advises the reader that after the prayer of salvation and the beginning of a new life with Christ, a person should read the Bible every day, talk to God every day in prayer and be baptized. The tract "Jesi li čuo za četiri duhovna zakona?" ("Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?") tells the reader that Christ can be received by faith through prayer, but after receiving Christ, the tract does not advise the person to be baptized. The church Riječ života (s. a.), on their website, has one short article called "Sinner's Prayer" or "Molitva spasenja," which says that salvation is based on personal faith in the risen Christ. For this purpose, they offer a short text of the sinner's prayer. After praying this prayer, a person is advised to read the Bible, especially the New Testament, to pray in their own words, and to become a part of a biblical church. The Baptist church from Umag (s. a.) on their website also has instructions on how to pray the sinner's prayer to receive salvation. If a person prays this prayer in faith, they are saved and encouraged to join the church. Kristova pentekostna crkva (s. a.) on their web site has a tract called "Odabir." The last page of the tract says that to receive salvation, one has to pray the sinner's prayer. After that, a person is advised to read the Bible daily, pray, be baptized, fellowship with other Christians, and talk to others about Jesus Christ. The proponents of sinner's prayer to support their view use biblical texts such as Romans 10:9-10, 13; Luke 18:9-14; Revelation 3:20, etc. See, for example, Thyster 2011, 17; De Courcy 2023; Southers 2008, 181-183.

or saved, the process of discipleship begins. Dwayne Eslick (2019) very nicely captures this intention and tension:

> For years, I was like most modern North American Christians. I saw evangelism as the process of sharing the good news with those who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus the Messiah. Discipleship is viewed as the process of helping those who have a relationship with Jesus grow and mature in that relationship. Evangelism is for the lost. Discipleship is for the found.

Similarly, Lindesay Fooshee (2012) says that for years, she thought that evangelism and discipleship were two different things. Evangelism meant sharing the gospel with an unbeliever through handing out gospel tracts, going door-to-door in a college dorm, or creatively communicating the gospel on the streets of a foreign country so that people would become Christians. Discipleship meant helping someone who was already a believer walk out the life of faith through a small group Bible study, a conversation across the table with another woman, or an accountability group.

Furthermore, regarding the view of the relationship between discipleship and water baptism, among evangelicals, we would probably encounter two views: a) discipleship begins at the moment of conversion, and baptism is part of that discipleship process (conversion – discipleship – baptism – continuation of discipleship); b) discipleship begins with water baptism (conversion – baptism/discipleship). In that case, water baptism is a mark that a person truly wants to follow Christ as a disciple and the first step of discipleship.

A. Discipleship begins between conversion and water baptism				
1. Evangelism	2. Conversion	3. Discipleship	4. Baptism	5. Continuation of discipleship
B. Discipleship begins after water baptism				
1. Evangelism	2. Conversion	3. Baptism: the mark of a genuine commitment to Christ		4. Discipleship

Those who view that discipleship starts after conversion and prior to baptism will usually associate this with the fact that before a person is baptized, he or she will go through some sort of discipling, teaching, or preparation[4] in order to establish that a person is truly converted and has a proper understanding of the act of baptism and its significance (sort of a vetting process). Hence, when a person is baptized, he or she is already in the process of discipleship.

For those who will argue that water baptism is the first step of discipleship or the initial act of discipleship, the following argumentations or explanations can be used: a person does not have to be baptized in order to be saved, but once the

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4   See, for example, *Glas Crkve* 2018, 21.

unbeliever accepts Christ, he is also subject to the commands of the Great Commission and must show obedience by being baptized. Hence, baptism is the first step of discipleship and follows the event of repentance and confession of Jesus Christ as Savior (Pickard 2009, 141). Similarly, one can argue that baptism marks only the first step of discipleship, and the second requirement is to teach believers to obey everything that Jesus commanded (Hubbard 2009, 100). Pope similarly argues that water baptism for a believer at the age of accountability is the first step of discipleship and that true discipleship involves teaching people to obey everything Jesus commanded. However, he notices: "Today in America, there are multiplied millions of people who say they believe they have experienced being born-again. Too many of them have not been water baptized and are not in fellowship in a local church" (Pope 2016, 108).

So, if we would summarize in general how evangelicals approach the issue of salvation, baptism, and discipleship, the matrix or outlook is evident and straightforward: a) *evangelism* is working with the lost, *discipleship* is working with the believers; b) person hears gospel message, believes it, becomes saved and then latter is baptized; c) discipleship begins either after conversion or after baptism. The consequence of this outlook is the following:

a) Baptism is not connected to the beginning of salvation because a person is saved and then baptized.

b) Discipleship is something that starts after salvation, which supports this distinction between evangelism and discipleship.

c) The byproduct of this approach is that we will likely make converts who later have to be "converted" into disciples.

2. The Great Commission Matthew 28:18-20

Regarding the text of what is known as "the Great Commission" in Matthew 28:18-20, Jeremy Bohall (2019, 192) notices that many scholars view this passage as the "summary," "manifesto," or "climax" of Matthew's entire gospel, and argues that how one interprets this text has substantial implications for how one reads Matthew, the other gospels and the rest of the Bible, and has significant ramifications for the church today. So, what do we find in this text, and how can we interpret it?

The general observation is that participles "baptizing and teaching…further specify what is involved in discipleship" (France 1985, 420), or as J. Knox Chamblin (1995, 760) notices, "Jesus explains what it means to make disciples by the two participles which follow—baptizing and teaching. Discipleship entails both becoming a Christian (being baptized) and being a Christian (obeying Jesus' teaching)." However, this grammatical construction is the subject of theological debates. As Douglas Finkbeiner (1991, 23) argues: "A key to understanding 'make

disciples' is to determine the relationship of the accompanying participles to the main verb."

Speaking about the relationship of the two present participles ("baptizing" and "teaching") to the main verb "make disciples," one view is that the two participles are circumstantial, describing the manner or means of "making disciples." Hence, France (2007, 1115) would say that "baptizing" and "teaching" spell out the process of making disciples, and Ferguson (2009, 137) claims that "the two participles subsequent to the verb are circumstantial, describing the means of making disciples, with the 'teaching' accompanying the 'baptizing' (make disciples by baptizing them and [at the same time] teaching them)."

Another view is to see them as coordinated imperatives following the activity of making disciples. Accordingly, "the baptizing goes with making disciples and the teaching all things as a subsequent activity is subordinate to making disciples by baptizing" because "teaching" here refers to "the post-baptismal teaching of how to live after one has become a disciple of Jesus and not the teaching involved in making disciples" (Ferguson 2009, 137).

D. A. Carson (1984, 597) says that "[t]he syntax of the Greek participles for 'baptizing' and 'teaching' forbids the conclusion that baptizing and teaching are to be construed solely as the means of making disciples." Accordingly, "baptizing and teaching are not the means of making disciples, but they characterize it." Carson's argumentation is based on the reasoning that the main verb "to make disciples" "entails both preaching and response" and that "the response of discipleship is baptism and instruction" (Carson 1984, 597; cf. Finkbeiner 1991, 26).

Finkbeiner (1991, 23-24) notices that the aorist participle πορευθέντες "going" is usually understood in four basic ways: 1. as a parallel command to the main verb, that is, as a technical term for mission, 2. as a pleonastic participle with little or no significance, reflecting verbal redundancy from Semitic influence, 3. as a circumstantial participle with no imperatival force, in a sense "having gone" or "while you go," 4. as a preparatory participle that contains imperatival force and should be translated, "go make disciples," and he opts for the fourth option (Finkbeiner 1991, 25).

From this brief overview, we can notice that baptism can be viewed as a means of making someone Jesus' disciple or as a characteristic of someone who is already a disciple because it has responded to the gospel. Whatever approach we take, evangelical Christians consider Matthew 28:18-20 as one of the key texts for the life and work of their churches, for their view and understanding of discipleship and, consequently, water baptism that I briefly presented in the first section. In the sections below, I will address two standard convictions or beliefs among evangelical Christians: the validity of the distinction between evangelism and discipleship and the understanding of baptism as a post-conversion activity.

3. Evangelism and Discipleship

Is it valid to see evangelism and discipleship as two activities with different "target groups?" To answer this question, we will first examine who Jesus' disciples were and then analyze the biblical view of evangelism and discipleship.

3.1. Discipleship Based on the Gospels – Discipling Unbelievers

The Gospels are the documents that describe a unique and non-repeatable context. However, within that context, we read about Jesus' life and ministry and those who first became his disciples. That being said, it is important to note that we cannot read the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, which is devoid of the rest of Matthew's gospel. The crucial hermeneutical "rule of thumb" is to try to understand how those eleven disciples would understand Jesus' command about making disciples. In other words, if "I" was one who walked with Jesus for a few years, how would "I" understand this Commission?

From the outset of his Gospel, Matthew clearly and openly presents to his readers Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the son of David, and the son of Abraham (Mt 1:1). Yet, the disciples who will begin to follow Jesus in chapter 4 onward do not have this advantage. For them, Jesus is a well-known rabbi whom they follow. So, they are his disciples even before they fully understand who Jesus is (Christology). Hence, this poses the question of when precisely those Twelve disciples were converted or saved. The Gospel of Matthew is silent about that (and, for that matter, other gospels as well) in the sense that it does not use specific terminology such as "conversion" or "salvation" in relation to the Twelve. To make things even more complex, the Gospel of Matthew neither mentions that the Twelve were baptized in water. However, they *were* his disciples.[5]

This process of discipleship in Matthew is primarily presented as a process of walking with Jesus and gradually discovering who Jesus truly and fully is. In other words, Jesus' initial disciples were on their way to discovering whom they were following, and they learned how to obey his teaching. However, we have no

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5   Even though Synoptic gospels do not mention that some of the Twelve were disciples of John the Baptist, in the Gospel of John chap. 1, we read about two of his disciples (Andrew being one of them) who started to follow Jesus as their rabbi. We may assume that being the disciples of John, they were baptized by John (they have certainly not been baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:20)), and from John 3:22 and 4:2 we see that Jesus and his disciples were doing baptisms, but also John the Baptist continued to baptize people. Based on this, we can pose at least two questions: 1. Why did John the Baptist continue to baptize people now when Jesus was active in his ministry? 2. Since Jesus/Jesus' disciples were baptizing people, what kind of baptism was that? The Bible does not provide us with clear answers to these questions. However, it is worth noticing that John 4:1 links baptism with discipleship: "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing *more disciples* than John'" (NRSV, emphasis mine).

record of them being baptized in water or their "conversion"/"salvation." That is why I have pointed out that the Gospels are documents that describe a unique and non-repeatable context. Moreover, because of this, we are tempted to interpret the Great Commission from a post-factum perspective or, more specifically, from our contemporary context, whatever this context may be.

However, if we were forced to define discipleship based solely on Matthew 1:1-28:15, we would not be able to determine whether Jesus' disciples were baptized, nor when the point of their conversion or salvation occurred. We can argue that discipleship is a process of following Jesus and gradually discovering who Jesus really is and what it means to follow him. Accordingly, what evangelicals would define as "evangelism" the Gospels view as "discipleship."

3.2. Biblical View of Evangelism and Discipleship

The nouns "evangelism" and "discipleship" are not found in the Bible. Instead, we have verbs that describe *activities* of evangelizing and making disciples. We already noticed that among evangelicals, there is a tendency to view these activities as two separate activities: we "evangelize" unbelievers, and we "teach/disciple" believers. However, R. T. France (2007, 1115) notices one important thing: "The commission is expressed not in terms of the means, to proclaim the good news, but of the end, to 'make disciples.' It is not enough that the nations hear the message; they must also respond with the same whole-hearted commitment that was required of those who became disciples of Jesus during his ministry (see, e.g., 8:19-22; 19:21-22, 27-29)." The significance of his observation is that activities of evangelism and baptizing are not stand-alone activities, but part of the more significant task of making disciples. Hence, the Bible views "evangelism," "baptizing" or "teaching" as activities that are aimed to make disciples.

For example, the verb εὐαγγελίζω "to proclaim the good news" is coupled with the activity of διδάσκω "teaching." In Luke 20:1, Jesus is in the temple. He is doing διδάσκω, and εὐαγγελίζω which means that Jesus addressed both his disciples and those who were not his disciples, and as Marshall (1978, 724) notices, "Luke characterizes the teaching as preaching the gospel," and Bock (1994, Lk 20:1-8) says that "Jesus is teaching the gospel." The same couple also appears in Acts 5:42, where it is said that "every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to 'teach' and 'proclaim' Jesus as the Messiah," and in Acts 15:35, describing the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch. Acts 14:21 is significant because the verb μαθητεύω6 that appears in Matthew 28:19 appears in pair with εὐαγγελίζω. There we can see that evangelism resulted in making others Jesus' disciples.

Διδάσκω is used for teaching both Jesus' disciples and people in general. For example, Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 describe Jesus as "teaching" and "proclaiming

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6 Μαθητεύω ("to make disciples") appears only four times in the NT: Mt 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21.

the good news" in synagogues in Galilee. In the "Sermon on the Mount" (which is not a sermon at all), Jesus is teaching his disciples (Mt 5:2, 19), but in the end, the crowd is amazed at his teaching (Mt 7:28-29). Matthew 11:1 says that after Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities, and in Matthew 13:54, we see Jesus again teaching in the synagogue. Jesus also taught in the temple crowd in general (Mt 21:23; 26:55, etc.), and so did his disciples in the Book of Acts (4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, etc.). We could use other examples from the Gospels, but these are sufficient to see that discipleship is an activity equally applicable to believers and unbelievers.

Based on this, we can conclude that Jesus's apostles, who observed how their rabbi was preaching and teaching both them, other disciples, and people in general, would not have in their minds this division between evangelism and discipleship that many modern evangelicals have. Accordingly, Bobby Harrington (s. a.) claims the following:

> Evangelism is a disrespected word now among many Christians. It may be a good thing. Jesus told us to preach "the gospel" (Mark 13:10), but he never commanded just evangelism. He commanded us to "make disciples." He gave his command to make disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. Two subordinate phrases describe how we make disciples. The first part of making disciples is when a person comes to faith in Jesus. Matthew 28:19 sees that process being made concrete through baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We commonly think of this as evangelism. The second part of making disciples is "teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded." We commonly think of this second part as discipleship. But the second part is no more discipleship than the first part. Evangelism and discipleship (as it is commonly understood) are really the front and back sides of the same coin. The coin is discipleship. Evangelism is simply pre-conversion discipleship.

Similarly, Roy T. Edgemon (1980, 540) claims that in the Great Commission, Jesus did not separate evangelism from discipleship. Hence, "[t]he one imperative in Matthew 28:19-20 is *matheteusate* (make disciples), which surely includes the entire process of winning persons to Christ and helping them to grow in their Christian life."

In this article, I would like to suggest three changes we must make if we want to be more faithful to the biblical record or definitions of evangelism and discipleship. First, we should stop using the label "evangelism" to reach the lost. Given the fact that we have this heritage of separation between discipleship and evangelism, our primary task should be to recover the true meaning of discipleship and embed all other activities (preaching, baptizing, and teaching) into discipleship. Concretely, "evangelism" in the Bible is primarily *an act of proclamation of the gospel*, but as we pointed out, this is not some stand-alone activity. And what

matters is how we do it: are we merely preaching the good news to the people, or are we doing discipleship, and as part of that, we preach the good news? Furthermore, "discipleship," properly understood, is a label that covers both spectrums: a) leading someone to salvation; b) working with a saved person after salvation. So, "evangelism" can be used for the activity of preaching, but it does not make sense to use this label to reach those who do not know Christ precisely because it supports this false division.

Second, we should "evangelize (proclaiming the gospel) *as* disciples." Our usual method of evangelism is increasingly through social networks, but if we are in contact with other humans, we usually try to deliver or proclaim the message. We would like to be Peter in Acts 2, standing in the temple, or Paul in Acts 17, standing among the wise men in Athens, and proclaiming the message. And yes, there is a time and place to do that, but "evangelizing as disciples" means inviting others into our lives so they will come to know Christ. Furthermore, "evangelizing as disciples" should also enrich the ways in which we share the gospel. If Jesus reached unbelievers (or evangelized them) through preaching and teaching, and if we would in our "evangelism use more "teaching" in a way that Jesus did (speaking in parables, asking questions, offering examples, etc.), I am positive that this would have a greater impact on people's lives. After all, teaching includes teaching by example. Edgar Guest (s. a.), in his poem "Sermons We See," captures this note very well:

> *I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;*
> *I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.*
> *The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,*
> *Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;*
> *And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,*
> *For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.*

Third, our goal is to make disciples, not converts that have to be later "converted" into disciples. But evangelism that is devoid of discipleship and shaped by preaching the gospel messages that do not produce disciples (cf. Allen & Monroe 2023) cannot or hardly can produce disciples. It will produce converts that have to be converted into disciples. Although conversion is part of the process of becoming a disciple, in our day and time, evangelical churches can operate under the premise (consciously or unconsciously) that one can be a "Christian" and not a disciple, a "believer" and not a disciple, a "convert" and not a disciple. On that note, Dallas Willard (2006, 4) says the following:

> For at least several decades, the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. Contemporary American churches in particular do not require following Christ in his example, spirit, and teachings as a condition of membership—either of enter-

> ing into or continuing in fellowship of a denomination or local church…. So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, *discipleship clearly is optional.*

Willard (2006, 5) continues to lament that the best current literature on discipleship states or assumes that a Christian may not be a disciple. Because of things like that, "[v]ast numbers of converts today thus exercise the options permitted by the message they hear: they choose not to become—or at least do not choose to become—disciples of Jesus Christ." The reason for this, according to Willard, is that Jesus's Great Commission to make disciples of all nations has been converted into "Make converts (to a particular 'faith and practice') and baptize them into church membership."[7]

4. Baptism

The problematic dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship is also reflected in the theology and practice of water baptism. As stated before, in evangelical churches that do not practice pedobaptism, a person responds to the gospel message and is baptized after some time. In this way, baptism becomes a "symbolic" and/or "testimonial" event (a person publicly declares *already* existing faith, hence = testimony). As Cecil W. Stalnaker (2022, 202) notices, instead of water baptism as a means of professing Christ, "[i]n the evangelical world, we often speak of some outward gesture like the raising of a hand, saying 'a sinner's prayer' aloud, or walking an aisle to the front of a church to make a profession of faith."

For example, in the document that provides the foundational teachings, beliefs, and practices of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia (Balog 2009, 56), baptism is defined as "the public ritual through which an adult believer, *after* repentance and conversion, identifies with Christ's death and resurrection in faith, thereby becoming part of the Body of Christ" (emphasis mine).[8] The document states that baptism happens after a person's repentance and conversion, but it does not specify how much time should pass between repentance/conversion

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7 "American evangelicalism, the branch of Christianity most enthusiastic about the Great Commission, often reduces the Great Commission to 'salvation' by 'accepting Christ.' This divorces evangelism from the Biblical call to 'make disciples who obey.' This diminished view of salvation and discipleship is without support in Scripture but has become a common form in many churches. Worse, in many congregations, 'joining the church' has become the goal of evangelism, with discipleship relegated to voluntary participation in Sunday School" (Scruggs 2023).

8 "Each person who has repented for their sins and previous sinful life and confesses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior can be baptized in water. In doing so, they publicly and symbolically demonstrate their surrender to God, their death to their former worldly and sinful ways, and their resurrection with the Lord Jesus Christ for the beginning of a new life with Him, in Him, and through Him" (Balog 2009, 56-57).

and baptism. It is also worth noticing that this document views baptism as a "public" and "symbolic" event. From the research by Eric Maroney, who analyzed the significant trends in conversion among Croatian Baptists between 1970 and 2010, we have insight into the length of time that usually passes between conversion and baptism. According to Maroney, before 1990, nearly two-thirds of Croatian Baptists took more than three years from first hearing the gospel to their conversion. However, during the 1990s, nearly two-thirds of Croatian Baptists converted within three years of first hearing the gospel, and nearly one-third converted the same year that they first heard the gospel. Since the 1990s, the average has been evenly divided above and below the three-year mark, Maroney concludes: "In general, the second half of the conversion timeline has remained steady throughout the four decades. Nearly half of Croatian Baptists are baptized the same year as conversion, and the majority of the remaining individuals are baptized in the first few years following" (Maroney 2016, 74).

Such ideas about baptism that were just presented would probably be puzzling to the disciples who originally received the Great Commission. Even though we do not have a record of the Twelve being baptized by Jesus, the Jewish context of the practice of baptism is very informative: "Baptism was an act of initiation and conversion (see comment on 3:6), so this text suggests that we initiate people into the faith, introducing them to Jesus' lordship" (Keener 1997, Mt 28:16–20). Also, "[b]ecause baptism was an act of conversion (used for Gentiles converting to Judaism), it means initiating people to the faith" (Keener 2014, 125). The language of "initiation" and "conversion" would mean that baptism should be viewed as a response to the gospel message. Hence, R. T. France (2007, 1115-1116) says about the two participles, "baptizing" and "teaching," is very informative:

> The order in which these two participles occur differs from what has become common practice in subsequent Christian history in that baptism is, in many Christian circles, administered only after a period of "teaching" to those who have already learned. It can become in such circles more a graduation ceremony than an initiation. If the order of Matthew's participles is meant to be noticed, he is here presenting a different model whereby baptism is the point of enrollment into a process of learning which is never complete; the Christian community is a school of learners at various stages of development rather than divided into the baptized (who have "arrived") and those who are "not yet ready."[9]

If we combine what Keener and France say and compare it with the Book of Acts, we will notice that in the Book of Acts, people who responded to the gos-

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9   "Very early the church abandoned this practice in favor of a delay in baptism for catechetical instruction that included both doctrine and ethics. In making this move, the post-apostolic church changed the symbolic meaning of baptism from confession of faith to endorsement of moral and intellectual accomplishment" (Umstattd 2018, 6).

pel message did not wait for an additional period of teaching to be baptized.[10] In other words, people *responded* to the gospel message *by* undertaking water baptism.[11] Furthermore, if we study NT epistles, we will observe that baptism is not connected to the language of testimony/witness. However, it is embedded in *soteriological* language/terms.

βαπτίζω	βάπτισμα	βαπτισμός
Romans 6:2-3 (NRSV) How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized (βαπτίζω) into Christ Jesus were baptized (βαπτίζω) into his death?	**Romans 6:4 (NRSV)** Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism (βάπτισμα) into death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.	**Colossians 2:11-12 (NRSV)** In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism (βαπτισμός), you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.
1 Corinthians 12:13 (NRSV) For in the one Spirit we were all baptized (βαπτίζω) into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.	**Ephesians 4:4-6 (NRSV)** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (βάπτισμα), one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.	
1 Corinthians 15:29 (NRSV) Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism (βαπτίζω) on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?	**1 Peter 3:21 (NRSV)** And baptism (βάπτισμα), which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.	
Galatians 3:25-29 (NRSV) But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized (βαπτίζω) into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.		

10 "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned'" (Mk 16:15-16). This text represents strong evidence for an argument that the biblical way to respond and accept the gospel's message is through water baptism and not the sinner's prayer or anything else.

11 Acts 2:37-41 – people on the day of Pentecost; Acts 8:5-13 – people in Samaria; Acts 8:36-38 – Ethiopian eunuch; Acts 9:17-19 – Saul; Acts 10:47-48 – Cornelius' household; Acts 16:13-15 – Lydia; Acts 16:27-34 – Philippian jailer; Acts 18:5-8 – people in Corinth; Acts 19:1-5 – disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus.

In Romans 6:3-4, baptism is connected with death to sin and being raised to the newness of life. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, baptism is connected with receiving the Spirit and becoming part of the Body. 1 Corinthians 15:29 is a strange text, but it demonstrates that some people in Corinth received baptism on behalf of the dead. The question is, why would they do that if they thought that baptism does not have soteriological connotations? In Galatians 3:27, being baptized into Christ means being clothed with Christ. In Ephesians 4:5, baptism is on the list with other things that are connected with the adjectives εἷς, μία, and ἕν with the meaning of "one." Hence, baptism is in the group with terms such as "body," "Spirit," hope of calling," "Lord," "faith," and "God and Father of all." 1 Peter 3:21 is connected with the verb σῴζω "to save." This text is complex to explain,[12] but nevertheless, the text somehow connects baptism with salvation and inner change in a person's life.[13] Finally, in Colossians 2:12, baptism is connected with spiritual circumcision, that is, putting off the body of sin and being raised into new life.

I am suggesting that the presence of soteriological terms in connection with water baptism results from water baptism being a biblical way of saying "yes" to God. However, by separating water baptism as a way of responding, accepting, and submitting to the gospel message, evangelicals have found themselves in an

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12 "The author does not here impart any miraculous instrumentality to the water. Passing through the water to the appointed place was what saved them. The author's design is not to elaborate how water saved Noah, but rather to set the stage for his next assertion. 'They were saved through water which is also a pattern for you. Now baptism saves!' With this clear statement the author has reached the climax of his homily. In his opening section (i 3-12) he carefully articulates the foundations of salvation for the new converts. He then moves to an expansion of this using the model of the Exodus-Covenant to give a sense of identity and destiny to the new converts (i 13-ii 10). Then he merges two strains of thought, Christ the grounds of salvation and Christ the model of Christian conduct, and moves deliberately towards baptism as he continues to enhance the role of Christ (iii 13-22). Then in one succinct story (iii 18-21) the role of Christ reaches its full measure just at the moment that baptism bursts into the thought complex. Baptism summarizes and dramatizes all that he has been saying. Being fully aware of the source of salvation, the one who is the object of faith, the demands to obedience, the challenge of the model for conduct, a convert comes to the moment when he is consciously aware that these are the things appropriate to a right relation to God. This is his salvation. This is the moment when he is baptized, for baptism is 'a declaration of an appropriate awareness toward God.' That is the convert's salvation!" (Brooks 1974, 304). For a good discussion about the meaning of "conscience" in this text, see Willis 2018.

13 "*An appeal to God for a clear conscience* is another way of saying 'a request for forgiveness of sins and a new heart'. When God gives a sinner a clear conscience, that person has the assurance that every sin has been forgiven and that he or she stands in a right relationship with God (Heb. 9:14 and 10:22 speak this way about the cleansing of one's conscience through Christ). To be baptized rightly is to make such an appeal to God: 'Please, God, as I enter this baptism which will cleanse my body outwardly I am asking you to cleanse my heart inwardly, forgive my sins, make me right before you.' In this way, baptism is an appropriate symbol for the beginning of the Christian life. Once we understand baptism in this way, we can appreciate why 'Repent, and be baptized … for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:38) was an evangelistic command in the early church" (Grudem 1988, 171-172).

awkward position: on the one hand, they introduced some new techniques of responding to the gospel message (such as the sinner's prayer), and on the other hand, baptism is turned into testimonial event – an activity that we never found associated with the baptism in the Bible.[14]

Conclusion

Focusing on the question of how evangelical churches, notably in Croatia, view the role and position of water baptism in the discipleship process served as an opportunity to address and evaluate the theology and practice of evangelicals regarding evangelism, conversion, and discipleship in general. As a result, several key points emerged that need to be emphasized in this conclusion.

First, evangelicals in Croatia should be careful to adopt and keep an old (biblical) definition of discipleship that, at its core, has relationships and not just a method, program, or activities:

> Ironically, evangelicals' penchant for methodology has both guaranteed statistical success and undermined spiritual life. "What is destroying Christianity is the marketeering of Christianity," said Houston. But disciple-making is not about replicable, transferable methods, but about the mystery of two walking together. Methods treat discipleship as a problem to be solved, but mentoring treats discipleship as a relationship to be lived (Editorial 1999).

However, focusing on the proper method is not the only problem. The problem is also if and when we focus on programs as a means of making disciples. Programs are good, but *more* programs and activities alone will not create disciples as Jesus envisioned.[15]

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14 "For a significant part of evangelical Christianity, so-called 'sinner's prayer' is considered as a moment where a person surrenders himself to Christ (being saved), and water baptism is then 'outside declaration and confirmation of already existing faith'" (Budiselić 2020, 23).

15 Greg Ogden (2003, 42-43) is here on the spot: "The second cause of the low estate of discipleship is that we have tried to make disciples through programs. The scriptural context for growing disciples is through relationships. Jesus called the Twelve to be with him, for through personal association, their lives would be transformed. Proximity produces disciples. The apostle Paul had his Timothies who were ministry partners, for in this side-by-side ministry, leaders could be trained to carry on after his departure. Disciples are made in 'iron sharpens iron' intentional relationships. In today's church, we have replaced person-centered growth with programs as the means of making disciples… All of these programs can contribute to discipleship development, but they miss the central ingredient in discipleship. Each disciple is a unique individual who grows at a rate peculiar to him or her. Unless disciples receive personal attention so that their particular growth needs are addressed in a way that calls them to die to self and live fully to Christ, a disciple will not be made. Since individual, personal investment is costly and time-intensive, we have put programs in its place…. In other words, programs can make it look like we are growing disciples, but that is more illusion than reality, and we know it."

Second, evangelicals in Croatia have to revise their understanding of "evangelism" and "discipleship."[16] Evangelism has to do with the proclamation of the gospel. However, Jesus did not separate evangelism from teaching, and in this article, I tried to argue that we should "evangelize as disciples." Accordingly, discipleship does not begin after conversion but rather prior to it. Based on this, I think that the original Jesus' disciples would not reserve discipleship only for the believers. After all, they observed how their Master called them and others to follow him, and in that followship, they gradually discover who he truly is and what it means to follow him.[17]

Third, the purpose of evangelism is to make disciples and not "converts," let alone "church members." I know that, in theory, most agree with this statement, but in practice, many churches do not follow this approach. The measuring test is this: are we reducing the Great Commission to "salvation" by "accepting Jesus"? If yes, this divorces evangelism from the biblical call to "make disciples who obey" and diminishes the biblical view of salvation and discipleship (cf. Scruggs 2023).

Fourth, evangelicals in Croatia have to revise their view of baptism and restore it to its biblical position. If the gospel message is about Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and second coming, is there any better way to say "yes" to all of that, if not by submitting to baptism?

The changes suggested in this article are not unique to the Croatian context because there are voices in the church and academia worldwide who see the need for this. Moreover, even though our heritage is diverse and rich, our heritage ("I'm doing/believing this because this is how we always…" or "…because this is our tradition…") should not hinder us from a proper understanding of the biblical truths. After all, we are called to be Jesus' disciples…not disciples of *anyone* or *anything* else. But, the challenge of change is that "we love what we know." Additionally, evangelicals in Croatia are living as a significant religious minority, which adds to the challenge of change.

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16 "In the Great Commission, Jesus says to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey all that Jesus commanded. Which part of that is making disciples? The going part? The baptizing part? The teaching to obey part? The reality is that evangelism and teaching are among the elements of discipleship. Making disciples involves multiple steps, one of which is evangelism. So rather than trying to determine is we should spend our time making disciples or evangelizing, we can spend our time making disciples which includes evangelism" (Fellowship Church 2014).

17 Matthew Fretwell (2018) significantly says: "Disciple-making was always (and is) about continually making disciples from unbelieving people groups for salvific reconciliation harmony with God and a sanctifying journey through life to exalt Christ (Matt. 28:18–20)" and then he makes this bold statement: "*Therefore, all Christians are disciples*, but not all disciples are Christians."

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Ervin Budiselić

Uloga krštenja vodom u procesu učeništva: prijedlog

Sažetak

Fokus ovog članka je na tome kako evanđeoske crkve, posebice u Hrvatskoj, općenito gledaju na ulogu i položaj krštenja u vodi u procesu učeništva. Međutim, odnos između krštenja i učeništva poslužit će kao prilika za istraživanje drugih aspekata procesa učeništva, posebice odnos između evangelizacije i učeništva. Stoga, u prvom dijelu članka ukratko ćemo raspraviti i ispitati neke ključne elemente

„Velikog poslanja" kako bismo stekli uvid u poslanje te vidjeli različita tumačenja i razumijevanja tog teksta. Na temelju Evanđelja, drugi dio članka istražuje kako bi Isusovi sljedbenici razumjeli i definirali učeništvo na temelju svog iskustva s Isusom, i kako bi to iskustvo oblikovalo njihovo razumijevanje Velikog poslanja. Treći dio članka bavi se odnosom (ili bolje rečeno dihotomijom) između „evangelizacije" i „učeništva" u svrhu postizanja razumijevanja ovih dviju aktivnosti koje je više u skladu s novozavjetnim učenjem. Posljednji dio članka posvećen je ulozi i položaju krštenja u vodi u procesu učeništva. Budući da je svrha ove rasprave procijeniti teologiju i praksu evanđeoskih kršćana u pogledu ispravnog razumijevanja krštenja u vodi i posljedično tome, procesa učeništva općenito, predlažu se četiri stvari: 1. Usvajanje definicije učeništva koja u svojoj srži ima odnose, a ne metodu, program ili aktivnosti; 2. Revizija razumijevanja odnosa između „evangelizacije" i „učeništva"; 3. Podsjetnik da je svrha evangelizacije stvaranje „učenika", a ne „obraćenika"; 4. Obnova biblijskog položaja krštenja u vodi koje bi trebalo predstavljati odgovor osobe, tj. njezin „da" na poruku evanđelja.

Jesus Demonstrated an Intentional, Relational Model of Disciple-making: Why Haven't We Followed It?[1]

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Abstract

By reading the Gospels, we can see that Jesus demonstrated an intentional, relational model of disciple-making. In his desire to reach the crowd, Jesus focused on a small group of people with the goal of making disciples who would make more disciples—for at least two valid reasons: internalization and multiplication. Within the context of close-knit relationships, Jesus sought to, in a way, multiply himself through the Twelve. But the question is why the church, to a great extent, did not follow that discipleship model. The article suggests two possible reasons: the first reason is this: We have been preaching a non-discipleship, forgiveness-only gospel. The second reason we have failed to follow the biblical model we observe in the Gospels is that we tend to substitute programs for Jesus' intentional, relational approach. By contrasting program with relationship, the article offers two provocative conclusions: 1. If we could have made disciples by preaching to people, the job would have been done long ago. 2. Even the greatest preacher who ever lived—Jesus himself—did not rely on his preaching to make disciples. He relied on his personal association.

Keywords: *discipleship, relations, internalization, multiplication*

Introduction

As part of the conference on discipleship, I am exploring two questions: 1. Who or what is a disciple according to Jesus? 2. Jesus Demonstrated an Intentional, Relational Model of Disciple-making: Why Haven't We Followed It? Why have these questions been so important to me? I suppose our deepest convictions and pursuits come out of our personal experiences. This was true for me. Let me introduce this session with a brief sketch of my spiritual journey that serves as the background motivation for these talks.

I am a native Californian, born on the West Coast of the US. By age, I am a cutting-edge baby boomer born right after World War II. Why is that important? Following WWII, there was a religious boom in the US. Church buildings could not go up fast enough? But by and large families outsourced Christian formation to the church. It was not practiced in the home. This was the home I was brought up in. Yes, we said prayers of thanksgiving at family meals. But in retrospect, I could not rely on my parents either to lead me to Jesus or to nurture my faith. In my parents' minds, that was the church's job. Like many families in that era, parents outsourced the formation of religious faith to the church.

The Lord interceded through the church to bring me to my initial faith in Christ. At a troubled time as a 12-year-old, I was invited to a weekend church. My problem was fear and anxiety. I was very young for my grade level and, therefore, behind in my emotional development. I feared failure in school, felt alone in relationships, and was challenged in athletics. There were times when I would even break down crying at school. How embarrassing! At this weekend's church camp, I heard the good news of Jesus' gospel. Jesus loved me and wanted a relationship with me. The speaker of the weekend offered an invitation through the words of Jesus, "Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). I responded to the invitation to yield my life to Christ and ask him to take up residence in me. And wow, did he come in. I had an overwhelming experience of the love of God. I told my camp counselor I had decided to ask Christ into my life, or whatever the proper language was. I had not yet learned how to speak Christaineze. All the instruction I recall receiving that weekend was, "If you have become a Christian, you should read your Bible." Had I ever read my Bible on my own? Had my family ever had some form of home devotional Bible reading? No. I did not have a clue what to do. And apparently, "my church" did not either. I heard from no one. I did not know whether I was supposed to ask what was next.

Therefore, I drifted back to my peripheral connection to the church until the summer before my last year in high school. That summer, I followed my sister's example and went on the Glendale Educational Tour. This was a six-week tour of the historical high spots of the US with 70 other high school students in two busloads. As the Lord would have it, a subgroup of 4-5 fellow students met regularly

for Bible study. They were from the same church that I sporadically attended. They invited me to join them. I remember consciously thinking, "They must have had a similar experience of encounter with Christ, but they knew what to do with it." After that summer tour, I was invited into the high school church youth group. It was a community of love and joy that would leave a lasting, transformative impact on my life.

I started to grow in this flourishing environment. This painfully shy kid started coming out of his shell. So rapid was my growth that I started assuming leadership roles in the church. Then, as I was going into my second year of college, I would receive a phone call that would change the entire course of my life. Don was on the other end of the connection. Don was a seminary student who had started an outreach ministry to young adolescents. He had 130 students showing up at the church facility every Wednesday night. He needed help. He asked me if I would join fellow college students to minister to these kids. It was a raucous group. Every Wednesday, I would get a group of 7th grade boys. Here is the irony. What I didn't get in 7th grade when I came to Christ, now I could provide, at least in some form, to these 7th graders. The Lord had closed the loop. Don constantly challenged us to get involved in these students' lives beyond Wednesday nights. I would pick them up in my red VW Bug after school, play basketball, get some ice cream, or even visit them in their homes.

But I also received a bonus. Periodically, Don would call up and ask to get together one-on-one. Often, we met at the tennis court. After playing tennis, we would sit on the bench next to the court, and Don would pull out his New Testament. He would share with me some Scriptures that impacted his life. He did not just read me a passage and leave it at that; he would take me into his heart and thoughts to show me how the truth informed and even exposed his weak spots. As we sat next to each other on that bench, there was a transaction that took place. I liked what I saw in this man. "If Don wants to follow Jesus, then so do I." So, my first model of how disciples were made came from Don. To influence people, you need to get close to them and stay with them over time. I had picked up along the way the model that Jesus gave us. Jesus selected a few to be with him and, through intimate personal association, prepared them to take over his ministry when he returned to his Father. My early impression was that discipling was walking with an individual in a one-to-one relationship, assisting them in growing toward maturity in Christ with the hope that they would do the same for others.

But in the mid-1980s, I had what I call two epiphanies that radically changed my paradigm of an effective way to make disciples that reflected Jesus' intentional, relational approach. After practicing the one-on-one approach for several years, I was pretty frustrated with my inability to help anyone else adopt a disciple-making lifestyle of personal investment in others. I suppose that this underlying frustration was gnawing away at me. Then, I had my first epiphany. Late one afternoon, I

was jogging around a high school track, as was my custom. It helped me clear my head at the end of the day. I was not consciously thinking about how to solve this problem when, out of the sky, it seemed pretty literally, I had what I have called an arrow go through my body. One moment, disciple-making was the farthest from my consciousness; the next moment, in my mind's eye, appeared the format of a disciple-making tool. I saw the first sections that would make up each chapter, which you can find in my book *Discipleship Essentials* today. The initial page is a Core truth, the theme, or the Big Idea in a catechism, question-answer format. The second page is a Scripture memory verse or verses articulating biblical core truth. The third page is an Inductive Bible Study that focuses on another scripture that elucidates the core truth. Then, finally, the fourth section is a Reading, which is a contemporary discussion of the eternal truth being considered. I remember going home that day, bursting with energy and a sense of call to write a disciple-making tool. We had a vacation near the horizon, so I asked my wife's permission to get started on this project. We had a young daughter then, so my request was to block out the morning, and they would have me the rest of the day. This fledgling start later became *Discipleship Essentials*, which was initially published at the end of 1998. To this day, it is still a best seller for InterVarsity Press.

The second epiphany occurred within the following year. I was completing my Doctor of Ministry at Fuller Seminary and needed a final project to cap it off. By this point, I had written a beginning version of what I just described. My faculty adviser suggested I turn this into a project by using it in different settings and then comparing the results and dynamics with each. We decided to do what I had done in a one-on-one discipling relationship, a small group of ten, and quite casually, she suggested a group of three. A young man, two years out of college, had approached me with a request for me to mentor him. I had no idea what that meant, but I said, how about if you are one of my guinea pigs for this group of three. We will find a third and dig into this material I have written. The three of us met over lunch at a restaurant that was equidistant from all of our workplaces. We laid our notebooks out on the table and started sharing our lives and insights into God's word and applying the truth personally to right where we lived. I was stunned. The increase in energy level was the first thing I noticed. The interaction was dynamic. I also noticed that I was a member of the group, not the center of the group. We were on a journey together. I quickly discovered that this was a far more effective way to deepen our maturity in Christ, provide loving accountability for life change, and challenge each other as needed to make the changes that the Holy Spirit was identifying. From that moment, I have not looked back. We now call these little groups of three or four "MicroGroups" in contrast to the more traditional small group size of 6-12.

To bring these two epiphanies together, I would say that when you put the content of a biblically based curriculum, such as *Discipleship Essentials*, in the context or container of a highly relational environment of a MicroGroup, you are in the

"Hot House of the Holy Spirit." You will hear me use the term MicroGroup a lot. By that, I mean a group of three or four people, including the one who initiates by calling people personally and individually to join together on a journey toward maturity in Christ; a significant part of the commitment is to begin one's group in a replicative process.

1. Intentional, Relational Model of Disciple-making

With that as the back story to my motivation, let's jump into our second theme: "Jesus Demonstrated an Intentional, Relational Model of Disciple-making: Why Haven't We Followed It?" or "How can Jesus' model of disciple-making inform us about how to make disciples who make disciples?" Fortunately, we have the model right before our eyes in the Gospels for how to make reproducing disciples.

When I was a student in seminary studying to become a pastor, I went to a workshop at a local church taught by a pastor with a reputation for training disciple-makers. One of the things he said that stuck with me was that the Bible was not only a *message book* (the content of the gospel) but also a *method book*. It shows us how, primarily through the model of Jesus, we can disciple others to maturity and reproduction. In Luke 6:12-13, we come to a critical turning point in our Lord's ministry. Luke tells us that Jesus spent all night in prayer. It is as if Luke is shining blinking lights, saying, "Pay attention, this is important." What is so momentous? Jesus is going to select those who would be a part of his inner circle: "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when the day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (Lk 6:12-13).

It is estimated that at the moment of Jesus' all-night prayer, he is about six months into his public ministry. Jesus has a more extensive group following him than just the Twelve. We know from earlier incidents recorded in Luke that Peter, James, and John had joined Jesus after Peter's great catch of fish (Lk 5:1-11); Levi (Matthew), the tax collector, was also among the followers by now (Lk 5:27-28). Jesus' all-night prayer, before selecting the Twelve, is an instructive model. Frankly, this is one of those moments when I would have loved to hide behind a rock, overhearing what was on Jesus' heart as he conversed with his Father. So, let us do a little speculating. What might we have heard if we had been there listening in on Jesus' conversation with the Father on the eve of Jesus' calling of the Twelve?

Was Jesus still finalizing his list of 12 before the Father? Perhaps Jesus had a list of 15 and needed to eliminate three to get down to 12. Was he contemplating the personalities that he would have to spend intimate time with on their itinerant journeys? Matthew, the tax collector (Roman collaborator), and Simon the Zealot (insurrectionist against Rome) were ripe for conflict. Peter could be a little annoying. Every thought that passed through Peter's mind seemed to come out of

his mouth. Did he question the wisdom of including Judas Iscariot, knowing he would have a traitor in his midst?

I have to believe that when Jesus came to this moment, he had a settled conviction about who the Twelve were to be. When he called them, he could do so with the sense that they were appointed. I suspect that on that night, Jesus was praying for them by name. Jesus realized there was a lot of work ahead to mold these raw recruits if he was going to get them ready to be the vanguard of a world mission. John 1 appears to be a window into the earliest meeting with Jesus at the seeker stage before Jesus issued the call, "Follow me." Andrew, Peter's brother, brings Peter to Jesus, saying, "We have found the Messiah." From the moment Jesus saw Peter, he understood what he would become. Jesus said to Peter, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)" (Jn 1:41-42). We know that Cephas (Aramaic) and Petros (Greek) both mean "rock." Jesus visualized in prayer what Peter would become, but he certainly was not a "rock" at that moment, nor in many other moments, unless you see a rock as being dense. He certainly was that.

But the more important question is, why did Jesus focus on a few? Of the many valid reasons for Jesus' investment in a few, two seem most directly related to Jesus' goal of making self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers:

1. Internationalization
2. Multiplication

1.1. Internalization

Jesus invested in a few because it was the only way to transfer his message, manner, and mission into the lives of his core followers. We might immediately object. If Jesus was trying to reach as many people as possible, why not allow the crowds and his popularity to grow so that his increasing number of followers became a mass movement? If you were to read the text immediately after the Twelve were named, you would see that the people were clamoring after Jesus. Luke tells us that a "great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people…came to hear him and be healed of their diseases" (Lk 6:17). He had them in the palm of his hand. He was riding high.

Yet we see that Jesus had a healthy skepticism of the masses. Jesus was aware that people were drawn to the shiny object of his presence, which was spotlighted by miracles. The apostle John gives us insight into Jesus' understanding of human nature: "Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. [But note Jesus' caution] But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person" (Jn 2:23-25).

Jesus knew those who flocked to be near him were vacillating, fickle. As soon as he articulated the demands of discipleship, his fan club would dwindle. What would have been the outcome if Jesus staked the future of his ministry on the loyalty of the crowds? Jesus' popularity seemed to have reached a crescendo on Palm Sunday. Jesus rode into Jerusalem amidst the adoration of those awaiting a military Messiah with shouts of "Hosanna, Glory to God in the highest!" But as soon as the hopes that Jesus was a conqueror were dashed, perhaps the same people five days later were howling, "Crucify him, Crucify him."

Jesus knew that it required nothing to be a fan or admirer. You had to get out of the crowd or out of the pew to be in a relationship in order to be formed into a follower. Discipleship is fundamentally a relational process over time. You can't make disciples by just speaking to people in crowds. "Disciples cannot be mass produced. We cannot drop people into a program and see disciples emerge at the end of a production line. It takes time to make disciples. It takes individual personal attention" (Eims 1978, 45).

Close personal association with his disciples in real-life situations provided opportunities for Jesus to speak into their lives. James and John approached Jesus secretly to secure a position on his right and left hand when Jesus sat on the throne of his kingdom. This allowed Jesus to turn their understanding of true greatness and power on its head. Of course, the sons of Zebedee's attempt to do an end run around the other 10 disciples did not sit well with them. "And when they then heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John" (Mk 10:41). Jesus told them that they were acting just like pagans "who lord it over others." This was not to be their way. The genuinely great would-be servants of all. They would follow Jesus' example, "who came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:35-45). A. B. Bruce (s. a. 14) sums up Jesus' means of internalizing his life in his followers: "This careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured the teacher's influence on this world should be permanent; that His kingdom should be founded on the rock of deep and indestructible convictions in the minds of a few, not on the shifting sands of superficial impressions in the minds of the many." The legacy that Jesus wanted to leave behind was the transformed lives of ordinary men who could carry on his work after he returned to the Father. Internalization occurred through intense association. There was a second primary reason Jesus focused on a few: the multiplication of his disciples.

1.2. Multiplication

We might ask, then, with Jesus' focus on a few, was Jesus unconcerned about the multitudes? In one study on the gospel of Mark, the authors found that Jesus spent 49% of his time with the Twelve, and even a more significant percentage of that time as he set his face to go to Jerusalem and the cross. Was this evidence that

the masses were receding from Jesus' vision? Absolutely not! Jesus did not think like we do. We believe we need to organize events that draw crowds to reach the multitudes. We equate vision with the size of our audience. Jesus had a vision of a different sort. He had enough vision to think small. Was he just focused on this inner circle? No, Jesus' heart broke for the multitudes. He saw them as lost sheep wandering in the wilderness, sheep without a shepherd. He prayed to the Lord of the harvest that he would raise up workers to bring in the harvest. In this context, Jesus sent out the 12 into the harvest.

Eugene Peterson (1982, 182) humorously captured Jesus' vision, "Jesus, it must be remembered, restricted 9/10 of His ministry to 12 Jews because it was the only way to reach all Croatians [fill in your own national origin]." Now, that is a real vision. In other words, we are followers of Jesus today, because Jesus staked his ministry on a few, not on the whims of the crowds. George Martin (Watson 1982, 53), an Episcopal Rector, translated Jesus' strategy into a way that pastors might apply it to ministry today:

> Perhaps today's pastor should imagine that they are going to have three more years in their parish as pastor, and that there will be no replacement for them when they leave. If they acted as if this were going to happen, they would then put the highest priority on selecting, motivating, and training lay leaders that could carry on the mission. The results of three sustained years of such an approach would be quite significant. Even revolutionary.

Of course, this is the way Jesus thought about his mission. Jesus lived with the urgency of a three-year timeline. With the cross before him, he knew he had to prepare the Twelve to carry on his mission. Each day meant he was closer to the reason he came to earth and, therefore, closer to the time his ministry would become theirs. Jesus' strategy was to expand the leadership base so that instead of one, there would be Twelve (OK, even Jesus lost one).

Jesus was now extending himself through the lives of the Twelve, who were being prepared in Jesus' presence to carry on in his absence. Here is the relevance for us: The reach of our ministry is in direct proportion to the growth of our leadership base. His strategy was designed to touch the whole world by multiplying carefully trained disciples. A leader is not evaluated by what they can do themselves. Their value now depends mainly on what they can get done through others. Robert Coleman (1964, 21) sums up Jesus' approach with a turn of a phrase, "Jesus' concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men, the multitudes would follow." If you want to go wide, then you first must go deep. So, why did Jesus focus on a few?

- *Internationalization:* He needed to get himself into their life. You do not do this at a distance. As much as we are thankful that we have Jesus' teaching, he

did not rely on his teaching of the crowds to make disciples. He prioritized his inner core.

- *Multiplication:* The second major reason Jesus focused on a few was to multiply himself through the Twelve. He was growing leaders. There is an unbreakable principle: our ministry can only have an impact to the extent that we increase our leadership base. In other words, we must make disciples who make disciples. We must produce self-initiating, fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who will lead others to become the same.

In my book *Transforming Discipleship*, you will find a chapter on what I call "Jesus' Preparatory Empowerment Model" of disciple-making. Time does not permit me to describe four recognizable phases or stages through which the disciples are moved to prepare them to take over Jesus' ministry after he returned to the Father and from which the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' substitute presence and empower his followers.

2. Why do we not Follow Jesus' Model of Disciple-making?

But I want to explore an important question: If Jesus' disciple-making model is so clear, why haven't we followed it? Let me illustrate: Suppose I asked 100 pastors what mission Jesus gave his church. At least 90 pastors might reference the Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations." If I were to ask these same pastors, can you name Jesus' Twelve original disciples? Again, I would suppose we might be able to get ten out of the Twelve: Judas, son of James, and James, the Son of Alpheus, might escape us. But if I ask these same pastors, can you name your disciples? We might have many of these pastors staring at their shoes.

Why have we missed Jesus' model of relational, intentional disciple-making? What has caused us not to see and practice what is right before our eyes in the Gospels? The first reason is this: We have been preaching a non-discipleship, forgiveness-only gospel. Do you recall the woman who said, "Why do I have to be a disciple?" She had heard a non-discipleship, forgiveness-only salvation message that called her to relinquish her life. She did not understand Paul's powerful statement, "Your life is not your own; you have been bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

The second reason we have failed to follow the biblical model we observe in the Gospels is that we tend to substitute programs for Jesus' intentional, relational approach. Let us define our terms: What do we mean by program? Programs are structured group methods we use to herd groups of people through systems. If I were to ask the same 100 pastors mentioned above, how do you make disciples at your church, the most likely response would be for them to list their church pro-

grams, starting with what you do in worship: 1. Weekly, we preach through the Bible; 2. We offer a variety of Bible studies for men and women; 3. Small groups meet in homes to deepen a sense of community; 4. We have outreach programs like Alpha to introduce people to the gospel; 5. There are opportunities for service, etc.

Programs begin with a broadcast message to the whole church inviting them to join our 10-week discipleship program. There is no personal warmth, no eye contact, and no sense of being singled out. Your individuality is not considered. The individual in a program must adjust to the system. You are not known for your unique personal journey of faith, challenges or hurdles to faith development, current life circumstances, etc.

Whereas Jesus' relational approach is rooted in the power of personal invitation. This is the critical difference between Jesus' method and the impersonal programmatic offerings in most churches. Our biblical reference point for Jesus' model is rooted in Luke 6:12-13. We noted that Jesus spent all night in prayer to the Father, and then the next day, he chose the Twelve from the larger group of disciples to be in his inner circle of apostles. The first step of disciple-making is prayer. Jesus did not call his disciples to join him on day 1. he prayed until he was settled on the Twelve who would be with him. As Jesus modeled, we need to pray until we have a settled conviction as to whom the Lord has put on our hearts to invite to join us on this disciple-making journey. This should not be rushed. Sometimes, it can take weeks or even months for you to feel comfortable that you have an assured conviction.

Once Jesus had inner confirmation, he brought the larger group of followers together, and then by name, he called them to himself. In following Jesus' model, we approach individuals, looking them in the eye and asking them to join us in a disciple-making journey. The invitation could sound something like:

> I have been praying about something I would like you to consider. I am putting together a new group whose purpose is to help each of us become better followers of Jesus. I would like to invite you to meet with me and at least one other person (preferably two) so that we can become all that our Lord intends us to be. My role is to be on this journey with you. I need a group like this for myself. As I was praying about these new relationships, the Lord kept putting you on my heart. Would you be willing to prayerfully consider joining with me and one or two others as we grow together to become better followers of Jesus?

Jesus offered a personal, individual touch; programs are designed to push people through a process. Let's now drill down more specifically and contrast the program with the relationship.

(1) Discipling relationships are marked by intimacy, whereas programs tend to be focused on information

Programs focus on information transfer. This assumes that more information on the Bible and doctrine will lead directly to transformation into Christlikeness. I served a church where the practice was to hire theologically trained pastors and have them teach correct doctrine in a classroom setting. The whole approach was to get people to ascend to core beliefs, such as justification by faith alone. If people indicated an understanding that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, we thought our job was done. In other words, intellectual assent to essential doctrine was the goal.

John Ortberg has mused over the fact that two people with the same doctrinal beliefs can have widely divergent characters. One person can be loving, kind, gentle, and gracious, whereas another can be judgmental, rigid, brittle, and prickly. They both say they believe the same things. What is the difference? One has absorbed biblical truth that has impacted their character in a Christlike fashion; the other has compartmentalized truth that has not impacted their character.

In contrast, the relational approach creates what Alicia Britt Chole (2007, 63-64) calls this "purposeful proximity." She says, "How easy it is to substitute informing people for investing in people, to confuse organizing people with discipling people. Life is not the offspring of a program or paper. Life is the offspring of life." Scripture comes alive in us when we are relationally open with others, allowing the Truth to penetrate the inner recesses of our being. As a college student, a seminarian impacted me because I saw a man wrestle with the Word in a way that addressed the specifics of his life. Head knowledge without heart knowledge is useless information.

(2) Discipling relationships involve full, mutual participation, whereas programs are one or a few who prepare content for the many

Programs generally tend to rely on the expert to deliver the content. The classic context is preaching at our weekend services. A pastor has been alone for 15-20 hours a week putting together a 30-minute predigested teaching. The congregation sits silently, picking and choosing what is allowed into their minds and hearts. This is a passive experience. What is required of someone to sit in a worship center to listen to a message? Very little. No advanced preparation. No personal investment. Usually, there is not even a quiet moment at the end of the service to ask the Lord to speak a truth that we need to take with us. By the time you hit the patio to have a conversation or to leave for home, over 90% has been lost. Here are my two provocative conclusions:

1. If we could have made disciples by preaching to people, the job would have been done long ago.
2. Even the greatest preacher who ever lived—Jesus himself—did not rely on his preaching to make disciples. He relied on his personal association.

By contrast, in a relational setting, all the participants come together having prepared their insights in a scripturally based curriculum to share. Each is responsible for their preparation, self-disclosure, and life-change accountability. There is no one teacher. The biblically-based curriculum and the Holy Spirit are the teachers. The learner and teacher can vary momentarily in the give and take of three or four people sharing their insights and applying the Scriptures to their lives. At one moment, you might be sharing thoughts that others find quite helpful, and at the next moment, you will hear other people's insights that impact you. I was recently in a group with a 26-year-old and an 18-year-old. I was regularly in awe of the truth they saw and the application of the word. I took notes on their insights.

(3) Discipling relationships are customized to the unique growth challenges of the individuals, whereas programs emphasize synchronization and regimentation

Programs generally do not consider the uniqueness of an individual's story and journey. You announce a new discipleship program that will run for 10 weeks and be done. If you have more than five people, you will march through the curriculum synchronized, covering content but with little time for deep personal application. Everyone must be at the same place and same time. There is little time to share how the biblical truth applies to their challenges and life circumstances.

But in the small size of a MicroGroup, we can risk self-disclosure and become known. We are known in the context of our spiritual journey—the ups and downs of our lives. The MicroGroup allows for customization: we are known deeply and uniquely in our journey. Let me tell the story of one MicroGroup.

- Billy was in his early 30s when we started the group. A month after our first group meeting, Billy got married. Nine months later, a child was born. He told us later that initially, he was not happy that he was in a group of men so much older than he was until he was married and had a child. Billy found our group a great outlet to share the relational challenges of a new marriage, and when a child entered the picture, he had others who were further down that road.
- Ron was in his 40s. His discipleship challenge was believing that God could be his loving Father. Ron was the eldest of 6 children. His father was a mean drunk. He beat his mother. As a result, Ron hated his father. His discipleship challenge…how could he ever trust God to be a loving father

when his model at home was a father he detested? Ron needed a profound breakthrough to allow his loving Father in Heaven to reparent him.

- Dave was in his 50s and a highly respected, mature follower of Jesus. In mid-life, Dave wondered if the insurance business was all that his life would be. He had a longing for more profound significance. A new life direction was birthed as he took a big faith step to give up the business he knew to lead a ministry for Christian business owners who desired to run their companies Christlike. It was a big leap of faith because he had to give up a steady income while building something entirely new. We had the opportunity to prayerfully see something new birthed in Dave's life.
- I was the eldest in the group. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer during our time together. The initial reports were a bit frightening because I had a very aggressive form of cancer. Like the men carrying the paralytic to Jesus, the men in my group prayerfully carried me through surgery into recovery. I am still here 15 years later, in no small part due to these men's loving and prayerful attention.

This is what I mean by customization of our growth challenges in a MicroGroup. Programs have a prescribed length; discipling relationships do not. Relationships adjust to the needs of the participants, which can be done in a MicroGroup. It is living life together.

(4) Discipling relationships focus on accountability around life change, whereas programs focus accountability on program content

Discipleship is not filling in answers in a disciple-making workbook. What we are after is life-change. What is the biblical word for change or even growth in Christ? Repentance. We come to a place of repentance when God's word reveals those areas of our life that are not honoring God, and we are convicted to turn our hearts in another direction. This is what the apostle Paul means when he says that the God-breathed word is profitable for "rebuking" or "reproof" (2 Tim 3:16). This will require introspection or self-examination. It is in this last element of life-change accountability that we get to the pool's deep end—mutual confession.

What, then, is the difference between a relational approach to making disciples and a program approach? In sum, it is the level of commitment. The program approach requires very little of the participants in a program. You can come to the program without prior preparation. You may be a passive member of an audience. There is little to no accountability for what you are learning. The relationships with others in the program are often short-term and, therefore, not very intimate or self-revealing.

A relational approach requires a big step up in the investment of your life. You enter a longer-term mutual covenant with your partners to deeply share life. The expectation is that you will come having completed a biblical study and ready to share your insights and application of the Scripture to your life. The journey can take at least a year to a year and a half, meeting regularly. You are also learning as part of the process to be able to create a similar experience with a MicroGroup for others.

Conclusion

The ministry I have the privilege of leading, Global Discipleship Initiative, is focused on answering the question, HOW? How do we make disciples? How do we take Jesus' relational model and make it work today? Our answer is the Micro-Group as the container or context to grow disciples. We call these groups the "Hot Houses of the Holy Spirit." What is a "hothouse," also known as a "greenhouse"? A "hothouse" is a controlled environment that combines just the right conditions to maximize growth. I first thought of the "hothouse" when my wife and I traveled to Alaska in the summer of 2000 and heard tales of pumpkins becoming 500 pounds in a few months or dahlias the size of dinner plates. In Alaska, the sun barely sets from mid-May to the end of August. You have the sun for 24 hours. Thus, things grow very rapidly.

I thought this was precisely what I saw when I brought 3 to 4 people together for a year to a year and a half in a high-trust center, engaging God's word together. The core element that makes the difference is transparent trust. When we tell our story, warts and all, mutually confessing our need while having Scripture speak to the right where we live, we are being transformed into Christ's likeness. At the same time, we are not doing this just for our own sake alone, but we are being equipped to do this for others. You start as a participant, focused on your disciple-ship, then providing for others what has been provided for you. Over time, you have an organic reproducing disciple-making effort that infuses a whole new way of living into a church community. I sum up this profoundly simple approach this way: "When we place the content of a biblically based foundational curriculum (*Discipleship Essentials*) in the context of the transformational environment of multiplying MicroGroups, you have the means for growing a disciple-making movement."

Let me conclude by bringing this home with a personal story. I "retired" or, as I like to say, "redeployed" from my profession as a pastor in 2012. The last church I served was in the Western Suburbs of Chicago. The church was very generous with its pastoral staff by providing interest-free loans for housing assistance. As I approached the retirement date, I heard that our trustees had generously decided to forgive the loan to help financially set my wife and me up for our retirement

years. I requested an opportunity to thank the Board for their generosity. That night, I could not contain my tears of gratitude as I looked the men and women in the face who had been so kind to my wife and me. Within a couple of days of that meeting, I received a note from one of the board members who had been there that night.

> Greg, your heartfelt remarks to the Board last night prompted me to reflect on your significant impact on my life, something I have not shared with you. Gathering around *Discipleship Essentials* was a turning point for me, transformational in impact and life-changing. Awakening God's call led me to confront my drinking problem, save my marriage, and renew numerous broken relationships. Thank you for being true to God's call on your life. It has changed mine. Blessings!

Disciple-making means getting into the trenches with others, as Jesus did with his disciples. It is in this journey together, with God's word central, that we are reshaped into a Christlike image.

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Greg Ogden

Isus nam je namjerno pokazao model učeništva koji počiva na odnosima - zašto ga se nismo držali?

Sažetak

Čitajući Evanđelja, možemo primijetiti kako je Isus namjerno i sa svrhom prakticirao učeništvo koje počiva na odnosima. U želji da dosegne mnoštvo, Isus se usmjerio na malu skupinu ljudi s ciljem stvaranja učenika koji će stvarati učenike i to iz barem dvaju valjanih razloga: internalizacije i umnažanja. U kontekstu bliskih odnosa Isus je htio sebe na neki način umnožiti u njih dvanaest. No postavlja se pitanje zašto Crkva u velikoj mjeri ne nasljeduje takav model učeništva? U članku se navode dva moguća razloga: prvi je taj što propovijedamo evanđelje koje sadrži samo oproštenje, no ne i učeništvo, a drugi je razlog taj što smo Isusov model učeništva koji počiva na odnosima zamijenili programima. Uspoređujući razlike između programa i odnosa, u članku se donose dva provokativna zaključka: 1. Da smo mogli učiniti učenike propovijedajući ljudima, taj bi se posao davno već obavio. 2. Čak i najveći propovjednik koji je ikada živio – sâm Isus – nije se oslanjao na svoje propovijedanje da bi činio učenike. On se oslanjao na osobnu povezanost..

Paul the True Prophet: Synkrisis in Acts 27

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Abstract

The links between Acts 27 and Jonah's story and, more specifically, between Jonah and Paul have been recognized. There are more, but I will only list six similarities and six differences between the two protagonists, Jonah and Paul, respectively. This contrasting type of comparison is known as synkrisis. By comparing the two stories and the two protagonists, this paper will demonstrate how Acts 27 portrays Paul as God's reliable and obedient prophet as opposed to Jonah. Finally, Richard Hays' seven criteria of intertextuality will be listed, and the synkrisis will be evaluated according to them.

Keywords: *Paul, Jonah, Jewish prophet, Acts of the Apostles, presentation in the Acts of the Apostles*

Introduction

The links between Acts 27 and Jonah's story have been recognized, not verbal links but rather motifs common in both narratives.[1] Witherington (1998, 756) claims that Luke "is much more indebted to Greek traditions of historiography than to Roman or even to Jewish ones." Then, in a footnote (1998, 756, n. 7), he adds, "Paul is not being portrayed here as the reluctant prophet that Jonah was. To the contrary, he seeks to rescue his pagan fellow travelers by, among other things, good advice and prophecy." The treatments by Roloff (1988, 360) and Pervo (2009, 652; he highlights the allusion to Acts 27:19 in Jonah 1:5, 659) are similar. Keener (2015, 382) considers the Jonah typology "a very minor Jonah subtext in Luke-

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1   E.g. Bruce 1990, 508, without elaboration though.

Acts." In the *Commentary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, discussing chapter 27, Marshall does not even refer to Jonah (2007, 599).[2]

This short overview indicates New Testament scholarship's judgment of whether or not Acts 27 alludes to Jonah. Keener (2015, 382-383) aptly represents the state of affairs. He wavers as to whether Acts 27 alludes to Jonah. If it does, "it could belong to a larger subtext" (2015, 382). Then, he lists six possible parallels, noting that they "are not very compelling if we are trying to demonstrate Jonah as the narrative's single literary grid, since many of the parallels fit sea scenes in general" (2015, 383). He concludes, "There may be some value, however, especially in contrasts, so long as we do not make a literary imitation of Jonah Luke's primary purpose" (2015, 383). In his 2020 commentary, Keener does not refer to Jonah.

There is, however, more to the stories when compared than commentaries and individual studies have realized. This essay argues that Luke presents Paul as God's reliable and obedient prophet as opposed to Jonah witnessing God's mercy. In his commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Luke Timothy Johnson (1992, 458-459) views the apostles as prophets and discusses how Paul is depicted as one of them. Paul speaks in prophecies which are fulfilled; this portrays Paul as God's spokesman amongst others (Acts 27:10, 21, 24-25, 34, 44); sees God in a vision, in which he offers assurance; Paul serves this God (Acts 27:23-25); encourages others by sharing this assurance with them and witnessing to God's saving power (Acts 27:24-37); is intent on reaching Rome to bear witness to the gospel (Acts 27:24). More recently, David Moessner analyzed Paul's portrayal in Acts. Tellingly, Moessner's chapter is titled "Paul Uniquely Parallels and Completes Jesus's Calling as 'the Prophet like [but greater than] Moses'" (2016, 262). Moessner emphasized how Luke uses various motifs of Jesus's transfiguration when depicting Paul's calling (2016, 263-264). He has demonstrated several parallels between the ministries of Paul and Jesus and their respective fates as rejected prophets (2016, 262-269).

In what follows, I shall compare Jonah and Paul as seen in Acts 27, then focus on some characteristics of prophets before briefly revisiting the broader context of Acts 27.

1. A Comparison of Paul and Jonah

1.1. Why Jonah?[3]

Arguably, Paul can be compared to other ancient heroes, such as Odysseus, who was also shipwrecked. Luke draws the parallel between Jonah and Paul because,

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2   Nor do Marshall 1980; Johnson 1992; Barrett 2004; Pelikan 2005; Schnabel 2012; Dunn 2016; Cho and Park 2019.

3   Comparing Paul and Jonah may seem obvious, still this aspect has been missing in studies. Several links between Jonah and Acts have been noticed, see e.g., Oxley 2004. One may ask

for him, Paul, as a prophet, is of importance. He uses Jonah as a person of comparison because he is depicted in the Old Testament as the most successful (cf. Ackerman 1997, 238-239) and, simultaneously, the most disobedient prophet.[4] I am not aware of a commentary seeing Jonah differently. Just a sample of views will hopefully illustrate this.

Allen (1976, 194) speaks of "Jonah's meanness and malevolence." Stuart (1987, 431) views Jonah as "an ardent nationalist, pro-Israel and anti-foreign; at least, anti-Assyrian. […] also capable of being peevish and stubborn, even against God." As for the book's message, "On one level, the message of Jonah is simply 'Do not be like Jonah'" (Stuart 2012, 463). "All around him, the Israelite prophet Jonah sees pagans acknowledging G—d, but he, a prophet of Yhwh who presumably has more immediate contact with and understanding of G—d, has difficulties in coming to terms with Yhwh's demands and actions," Sweeney observes (2000, 326). Timmer claims that, as for his prophetic role, "Jonah first avoids the role entirely (chs. 1–2), then performs it perfunctorily (chs. 3–4). More striking still is how the book consistently portrays him as a prophet who delivers Yahweh's words while being fundamentally in conflict with him." He adds, "As a result, the reader is encouraged to consider Jonah's role in the book that bears his name as a representative of unrepentant Israel" (Timmer 2011, 62).

1.2. Similarities

Although there are more, I will list six similarities and six differences between the two protagonists, Jonah and Paul, respectively. This contrasting type of comparison is known as *synkrisis*, which designates "parallelisms or contrasts between protagonists in a narrative" (Sciberras 2015, 55).[5] The most apparent examples of similarity between Paul and Jonah are:[6]

1. The protagonist departs with a mission.

    In both voyages, the protagonist is charged with a mission. Jonah is ordered to "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wick-

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whether this comparison of the apostle and the prophet through the similarities and differences were intended by the author. My answer would be in the positive. But one should bear in mind that narratives have their own lives; cf. Paul Ricoeur's famous dictum, "A literary work is the orphan of the author, adopted by the reading community."

4   In addition, the New Testament often compares its characters to Old Testament forerunners, see, e.g., Jesus and Moses, Jesus and Samuel, or John the Baptist as the voice calling in the desert.

5   Wall (1987, 84) calls narrating against the backdrop of an OT precedence "comparative midrash".

6   For more parallels, see Yates 2016; Wittkowsky 2020, 95-96. Beresford (2016) suggests that as early as in Paul's time, the book of Jonah was recited on the day of Atonement, referred to in Acts 27:9, which was an obvious point of reference.

edness has come up before me" (Jon 1:2), while Paul is encouraged not to be afraid for "you must stand before the emperor" (Acts 27:24).[7]

2. The destination is the conqueror's capital.

As the quotes above indicate, both of them are to travel to the empire's capital (Jonah, by a detour). Note that Nineveh in the 8th century BC and Rome in the 1st century BC conquered the Jewish capital, Samaria and Jerusalem, respectively.

3. A storm threatens the life of the hero and those aboard.

A storm threatens the mission, the ship, and all aboard. Both ships' cargo is jettisoned (Jon 1:5; Acts 27:18).

4. Voyage on the Mediterranean.

Even though there are different suggestions as to the location of Tarshish,[8] Jonah's voyage was clearly on the Mediterranean. The ordeal Paul and the company went through also took place in the Mediterranean.

5. The protagonist's fate is decided by others, but he initiates the good outcome.

In both stories, the people on the ship determine the protagonist's fate. The sailors of Jonah's ship "cast lots" and then ask Jonah, "What shall we do to you?" before, at Jonah's suggestion, throwing him into the sea, causing it to cease raging (Jon 1:7, 11, 15). Despite Paul's advice to the centurion, the pilot and the owner of the ship decide to sail on (Acts 27:10-11); then later, "The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners […]; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul [having witnessed to the rightness of Paul's view and behavior], kept them from carrying out their plan" (Acts 27,42-43). Both protagonists contribute to a fortunate outcome with their respective suggestions.

6. The protagonist nearly perishes but is saved.

The sailors reluctantly agree to throw Jonah overboard, but he is subsequently saved by a big fish sent by God. Due to the centurion's decision, Paul's life is threatened but saved by God's miraculous assistance (Acts 27:24, 44) and the

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7   Bible quotes are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. Unattributed Bible references are to Acts. It is noteworthy that whereas in the MT of Jon 1,9, Jonah responds, "I am a Hebrew" (heb. *ibri anoki*), the LXX reads, "I am the Lord's servant." The original Hebrew of this reading, *abdi jhwh anoki*, and its implication (a servant fleeing from his deity) is a more dramatic and understandable cause for the sailors' consternation than what the MT implies (see Börstinghaus 2010, 197-198). In Acts 27:23, Paul, too, introduces himself as the Lord's servant.

8   Modern research has suggested that "Tarshish" might refer to Tartessos in Hispania, Tarsus in Cilicia, or to Sardinia (based on the Nora Stone).

centurion's action (Acts 27:42-43), so he is declared innocent.[9] Both Jonah (Jon 1:14-16) and Paul (Acts 27:34-36) give God credit for the rescue.

1.3. Differences

To be sure, there are differences between the two protagonists, Jonah and Paul as well that highlight the correspondence even more:

1. Jonah brings storm and calamity – not heeding Paul's warning brings storm and calamity.

   In reaction to Jonah's decision to head in the opposite direction (Jon 1:3), God sends a storm which nearly sinks the ship (Jon 1:4). Since the voyage is dangerous at that particular time of the year, Paul warns the centurion, who does not heed the warning (Acts 27:9-11); the ship is endangered in the subsequent storm (Acts 27:14-41). Paul is instrumental in God's saving act (Keener 2015, 383).

2. Jonah does not want to reach the capital and thus flees. The sailors throw him into the sea to save the ship (Jon 1:15). On the other hand, Paul wants to reach the capital, the destination of his mission (Acts 27:24), and is nearly killed by the soldiers (Acts 27:42-43).

   Both are instructed to travel to their respective capitals (Jon 1:2 and Acts 27:24). Paul obeys (Acts 27:1-44), while Jonah does not (Jon 1:3).[10]

3. Jonah is selfish and concerned only about himself, with the only exception being his suggestion to be thrown overboard.[11] For a prophet, he demonstrates startling indifference to the sailors and his mission – Paul intends to have everyone saved, including the selfish sailors, to fulfill his mission.

   This aspect demonstrates most clearly the difference between the two prophets. In his selfishness, Jonah displays anger but never anguish, to the extent that Jonah's portrayal is the caricature of a prophet. In contrast, Paul demonstrates great care for all those on the ship. Jonah is challenged to call on his God to bring deliverance (Jon 1:6), but we do not read of him doing it. We are told that Paul prayed (27:23-24) without specifying what he prayed for (Keener

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9   Yates (2016, 451) discusses the ancient belief that gods punished evildoers, murderers in particular (cf. Acts 28:4), on sea voyages. Through his escape, Paul was declared innocent in Julius's eyes. Yates (2016, 452-453), citing ancient sources, interprets the reference to the ship's name, Dioskyroi, protectors of innocent seafarers, as highlighting this motif.

10 "And of course part of Luke's point is precisely that Paul is *not* Jonah; he is not running away; he is being faithful to his calling to preach in the great imperial capital to which he is bound," Wright notes (2008, 228; his emphasis).

11 This might be just another instance of his selfishness though – he wants to die, to exit (cf. Jon 4:8).

2015, 383). Indeed, Marshall claims (1980, 410) claims that Paul was praying for those aboard, and Acts 27:24, "God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you," is a response.[12] Even though the text cannot substantiate Marshall's interpretation, it is typical of the apostle: he does his best to save all lives on the ship. From the story's beginning, he is portrayed as a caring person.[13]

4. Jonah waits for Nineveh's destruction outside the city – Paul is on the ship during the whole ordeal and wants to see all those aboard saved.

    Jonah's selfishness and aversion are shown by going outside the city (Jon 4:5), where he can watch Nineveh's destruction from a safe distance. In contrast, Paul stays on board throughout, throwing in his lot with all the voyagers in danger; his concern is not to save his own life (as would be the instinct of everyone) but of all those on the ship.[14] While Jonah demonstrates his angry and merciless attitude toward Nineveh, Paul shows compassionate concern and God's mercy.

5. Jonah delivers a message of doom – Paul proclaims God's saving love, *soteria.*

    We are not told what Jonah is supposed to proclaim, but his sermon is terse: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" As opposed, when "all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned" (Acts 27:20), Paul announces to them the angel's encouragement (Acts 27:24), "God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you." I shall presently elaborate on this.

6. God loves everyone: that causes Jonah's distress – and it compels Paul to save others.

    The books of Jonah and Acts are about God's saving love proclaimed to the nations, the respective ruling empires in particular. Jonah's angry reaction to that message is startlingly contrasted to that of Paul, who embodies the message through words, actions, and behavior. To the message, I shall now turn.

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12 It is tempting to consider Jonah as a *homo apathetikos*, Paul a *homo sympathetikos* with reference to Heschel (1962, 395). He, however, uses the terms describing the prophet's consciousness of God's pathos, i.e., a rather vertical aspect.

13 To the extent that in Acts 27:21 Paul must have appeared to the sailors at least as speaking incompetently, indeed, self-importantly. Cf. Schnabel (2012, 2311) who claims that Paul's words "should not be understood as those of a smart aleck who insists on having been right, but as establishing his credibility (*ethos*), which was a standard feature of speeches."

14 The potential significance of this aspect is not diminished by the fact that Paul is not free, he cannot leave the ship at will. Solidarity is not dependent on circumstances but on making the decision of sharing the fate of others even when it is dangerous.

2. The Prophet's Message

In his narrative, Jonah makes little effort to accomplish his mission but does his best not to fulfill it: he flees God and disobeys his order by finding a ship heading in the opposite direction (Jon 1:3); in the storm, he lays down and manages to fall asleep in a ship tossed by the waves (Jon 1:5).[15]

Jonah is portrayed as distinct from the Gentiles. In the storm he caused, he is in the ship's hold, fast asleep while the sailors try to save the ship (1:5). Upon arriving at Nineveh, Jonah preaches the city's doom (3:4), "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Having accomplished his mission, he leaves the city waiting at a distance for its judgment to come (4:5) – he does not want anything in common with the Ninevites nor to share their fate.

It would be quite different had Jonah proclaimed, "Repent, for forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Jonah 3:4 is a summary of the prophet's message, giving a sense of its main thrust. However, seeing it as a message "faithfully transmitted" (Timmer 2011, 97) can only be done by ignoring Jonah's characterization, i.e., even though he obeys God and goes to Nineveh, his attitude is not transformed. Timmer (2011, 97, n. 23) qualifies his remark by saying "that Jonah was not terribly willing to elaborate on the topic of repentance, but was more than willing to emphasize God's holiness, justice, and power against the offending city." As we have it in the text, the prophet seems not to have preached repentance nor referred to God's attributes but only announced Nineveh's doom. "Jonah hardly preaches at all," McConville (2002, 192) aptly remarks.

Jonah's persisting unwillingness to obey God and preach repentance may be seen in the sequence of reported actions. God tells Jonah (3:2), "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." This time, Jonah obediently does what he was told (3:3): "So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." Then, 3:4 summarises his message, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" The narration suggests that Jonah follows God's word, in contrast to 1:3, only when entering the city. What he proclaims does not seem to be "according to the word of the Lord" – it is a curtailed message of doom (similarly Walton 1992, 54). But what Jonah wants to see is doom. The Ninevites' repentance (3:5-9) is the more astounding.

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15 Apart from Jonah, this has been possible probably only by Jesus in recorded history (Lk 8:23). Having mentioned the story of calming the storm (Lk 8:22-25), there are a number of verbal parallels between that and Jonah 1: ἐμβαίνω "to step into" (Jon 1:3 – Lk 8:22), πλοῖον "ship" (Jon 1:3 – Lk 8:22), καταβαίνω "to go down" (Jon 1:3, 5 – Lk 8:23), κινδυνεύω "to be in danger" (Jon 1:4 – Lk 8:23), κλύδων "rough water" (Jon 1:4 – Lk 8:24), φοβέω "to fear" (Jon 1:5, 10, 16 – Lk 8:25), προσέρχομαι "to come" (Jon 1:6 – Lk 8:24), ἀπόλλυμι "to destroy" (Jon 1:6 – Lk 8:24) and interestingly ἀνάστα "to arise" (Jon 1:6) which word might be reflected in ἐπιστάτα "master", a Lukan phrase in the New Testament (8:24).

Seeing Nineveh's repentance and God's relenting, Jonah gets angry (4:1). God disagrees with him (4:4), "Is it right for you to be angry?" As mentioned above, Jonah never demonstrates anguish, only anger. "If we are to understand prophetic criticism, we must see that its characteristic idiom is anguish and not anger. The point of the idiom is to permit the community to engage its anguish, which it prefers to deny," Brueggemann claims (2018, 81; drawing on Heschel 1962, *passim*). Brueggemann's concern here is more with the audience and the community than with the proclaimer and the prophet. My concern is instead with Jonah, an angry prophet without anguish. He accomplishes his mission against his will and through God's extraordinary grace.

Paul's attitude and message are different from those of Jonah. The apostle is surrounded by Gentiles. He travels aboard a crowded Mediterranean ship. In the storm, he takes action and the initiative. Indeed, in his effort to have everyone saved, he seems to take charge of the ship (27:10, 21-25, 31, 33-34).[16] Even though Paul is not portrayed as anguished, but rather as determined and in control, his solidarity with his fellow believers authenticates his message and person.

His message starts with a somewhat unnecessary reminder of who was right (Acts 27:21). Then, he urges them "to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship" (Acts 27:22).[17] The most crucial information everyone around him must be eager to hear is that there will be no loss of life. This, however, needs substantiating – how does Paul know? So, he presents his credentials: it was a messenger/angel of the deity of Paul "to whom I belong and whom I worship" (Acts 27:23), assuring him (Acts 27:24), "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you." The assurance is essential for his audience because it implies that Paul's deity will keep him safe so that he can reach his destination. This means he is innocent of the charges against him and is no threat to those with him.[18] Indeed, Paul's guardian God is concerned not only about Paul but also with everyone aboard the ship. "The focus here is clearly on Paul's safety, but there is benefit to the others who are traveling with him" (Witherington 1998, 769). Paul rounds off his message with a personal note of encouragement and more specific detail of what awaits them (Acts 27:25-26), "So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island." The gist of Paul's message is that God will deliver all on

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16 "Paul, by now, seems to have more or less taken charge" (Wright 2008, 229).

17 Paul is quite specific in foretelling that each and every person on board will be saved, but the ship is lost. I do not think this last remark or that of 27:26, they will "crash on some island," is bad news (so Johnson 1992, 449). These qualifications serve to specify Paul's encouragement to authenticate it.

18 Cf. Schnabel (2012, 2288) who claims that demonstrating Paul's innocence is no major emphasis.

board. Despite the danger they all face, "During the voyage, Paul never speaks of death but only of salvation" (Sciberras 2015, 55; see Acts 27:24, 26, 34).[19]

Note also that Paul's words come true as God grants "safety to all those who are sailing with" him (Acts 27:24; cf. 27:34). Paul is thus portrayed as a prophet who conformed to and by his mission's message. Jonah's words, in contrast, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jon 3:4), come to nothing, marking him as an unreliable prophet.[20] He dislikes his mission, hence his disobedience and unreliability. He does not fulfill his prophetic role of being an intermediary between God and humans (see Petersen 2000), while Paul does an excellent job in this respect.[21]

3. Broader Context

Here, I will limit my discussion of the broader context of Acts 27 to only a few general remarks. At his call, Paul is said to be "an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (9:15-16). In chapter 27, he is on his way to bring God's name to the Gentile emperor. The very voyage is a demonstration of "how much he must suffer" for Christ's sake. "It is a passion that provides salvation to all on board the ship, similar to Jesus' passion providing salvation to all humankind, albeit a different kind of salvation" (Sciberras 2015, 55). In this way, another *synkrisis* is introduced. The Gospel of Luke reaches its climax in Jesus's passion narrative where Jesus dies – to save humanity. Paul, too, appears in a savior role in Acts 27:23-24 (see Sciberras 2015, 55; Pervo

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19   The story emphasizes both the hopeless situation, the sailors' futile efforts to save the ship, and divine rescue, especially in vv. 20, 31, 43-44 (see Wright 2008, 233). Needless to say, *soteria* and related words refer to any sort of help and rescue. Suk Fong Jim (2022, 237) argues that Greeks expected their gods to provide rather this-worldly *soteria* like well-being, deliverance, immediate help, protection. As opposed, the Christian notion was eschatological, other-worldly. Here, I cannot give a thoroughgoing critique of her book. *Soteria* in chapter 27 is definitely of the Greek type but the Christian concept, though eschatological, is all-embracing, not just after-life oriented (see the works of, e.g., N.T. Wright). So, I wonder, if *soteria* was understood in these very different senses in early Christianity, how on earth the Christian message could appeal to Greeks. In this context, Praeder (1984, 700) rightly remarks "that the losing of life and the saving of life are at the heart of the concerns of Christian existence and Christian community."

20   "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quieten down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you," Jonah says (Jon 1:12), which might be his only true prophecy (cf. McConville 2002, 190).

21   After listing and critiquing different definitions of what a prophet/prophecy is, Petersen (2000, 41) suggests that the most essential characteristic of prophets is that they are intermediaries between God and human beings.

2009, 664). An angel who appears to Jesus in Gethsemane strengthens him (Lk 22:43-44).[22] Similarly, in Acts 27:23-24, an angel encourages Paul.[23]

Johnson (1992, 12-14) discusses the prophetic structure of Luke-Acts. In the Gospel, Jesus is depicted as a prophet like Moses (cf. Deut 18:15-18). "The Gospel is the time of the first sending of the prophet. The Book of Acts continues the story of the prophet's second and more powerful sending to the people, with the offer of a second chance at accepting 'God's visitation,' and thereby salvation" (1992, 13). Thus, at the very end of the book, Paul is seen as an apostle and prophet "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31).[24] Like Johnson, Moessner (2016, 28-33) argues that the Book of Acts follows the Gospel of Luke, each consisting of five scenes. In Acts, Paul's fate parallels his Savior's in the Gospel.

4. Hays's Criteria Applied

In his ground-breaking monograph, Richard Hays (1989, 29-32) suggests that exegesis is no "exact science" but rather "a modest imaginative craft" (1989, 29). As for the NT references to the OT, there are varying degrees of certainty in identifying them. For testing claims about intertextuality, or "echoes," Hays proposes seven criteria, "tests," or "rules of thumb." Even though in his book, Hays applied his criteria to Paul's letters only, they have come to be applied to other NT books. Let me now list Hays's criteria and, one by one, briefly evaluate the *synkrisis* suggested above.

1. *Availability.* "Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author and/or original readers?" We can respond in the affirmative to this question, as the canonical books of the prophets had long been used as scripture by the time Luke penned his work.

2. *Volume.* The volume of intertextuality "is determined primarily by the degree of explicit repetition of words or syntactical patterns, but other factors may also be relevant." In Acts 27, the volume of intertextuality is primarily not determined by "explicit repetition of words or syntactical

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22 Johnson (1992, 449) and Pervo (2009, 649) refer to Lk 22:43 even though the two verses probably are later interpolations by scribes. See also Moessner (2016, 203): "Paul undertakes a final journey to Jerusalem toward the end of his prophetic call that both recalls and imitates Jesus's final journey to receive the 'prophet's reward.'"

23 Moessner discusses 19:21–28:31, Paul's longest journey section "in which a number of extraordinary parallels to Jesus's passion journey have long been noted" (2016, 264; for further bibliography, see n. 71 there).

24 Ho (2022, 108) argues that, by the end of the sea voyage, the centurion comes to believe in Paul's God.

patterns." Instead, parallel or contrasting motifs are used to create the *synkrisis* between Paul and Jonah as I studied them.

3. *Recurrence.* How often does the author "cite or allude to the same scriptural passage?" In Luke's Gospel, Jesus refers to Jonah's sign (11:29-32). Therefore, references in Acts 27 to Jonah come as no surprise (see more under #4).

4. *Thematic Coherence.* "How well does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument" that the author is developing? Acts narrates how the apostles, particularly Paul, fulfill Jesus's initial command to be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the end of the world (Acts 1:8). For Luke, it is essential to portray Paul as a faithful witness to God's life-giving gospel and plan of redemption. To drive home this portrayal, this *synkrisis* comes in handy.

5. *Historical plausibility.* Could the author "have intended the alleged meaning effect? Could his readers have understood it?" As I argued above, Luke intended to portray Apostle Paul in contrast to Prophet Jonah, recounting Paul's mission as faithful and blessed. Luke's readers, arguably familiar with Jonah's story, had no difficulty seeing the comparison between the apostle and the prophet.

6. *History of interpretation.* "Have other readers, both critical and pre-critical, heard the same echoes?" I am not aware of pre-critical interpretations drawing attention to the *synkrisis*.[25] I have, however, referred to modern interpreters who have seen the intertextuality between Jonah and Acts.

7. *Satisfaction.* "With or without clear confirmation from the other criteria listed here, does the proposed reading make sense? Does it illuminate the surrounding discourse? Does it produce for the reader a satisfying account of the effect of the intertextual relation?" In my view, my proposed reading makes sense and illuminates Acts 27 as a whole, Apostle Paul's mission, and some of the motifs in the book. Satisfaction, however, must be experienced by the reader of my interpretation.

Conclusion

I have tried to point out both the similarities and the differences between the prophets in the Jonah story and Acts 27 before discussing their respective messages and the broader context. As many commentators have noticed, the length of Paul's story seems out of proportion to that of the book.[26] In contrast to Jonah, Luke's depiction of Paul as a true prophet may partly explain this.

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25 Note though that pre-critical interpretation used very different methods and means from those of the modern era.

26 E.g., Marshall 1980, 401.

In the shipwreck episode, Paul acts as God's faithful and obedient prophet, proclaiming not judgment but rather, as Christ's ambassador to the nations, God's saving act, redemption: "There will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship" (Acts 27:22) because "God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you" (Acts 27:24). Like his Master, Paul does not make accusations but accepts suffering, thus witnessing to God and eventually saving his fellow travelers. All this contrasts startlingly with how the prophet Jonah acts and speaks. He is reluctant, to say the least, to reach the destination of his mission, and because of his hatred of Assyria, we may have legitimate doubts about whether he delivers God's entire message to Nineveh. Jonah stands for Israel, his failure for that of Israel – Paul represents the messianic movement's obedience and God's rescue and blessing.

To Luke, preaching the gospel to and including the Gentiles is paramount. To make his point, he uses Jonah as the backdrop character against whom to portray Paul as the reliable prophet. "Paul is a prophetic figure whose words convey God's assurance of survival and whose actions demonstrate the grace of God" (Schnabel 2012, 2289). "On the way, he manages to save many other lives through his obedience and prayer to the true God" (Keener 2015, 378).

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Tamás Czövek

Pavao, pravi prorok: *Synkrisis* u Djelima 27

Sažetak

Novozavjetni stručnjaci uočili su neke poveznice između Djela 27 i Jonine priče te, konkretnije, između Jone i Pavla. Iako postoje i neke druge, namjeravam navesti samo šest sličnosti i šest razlika između ta dva protagonista, govoreći najprije o Joni, a zatim o Pavlu. Ovaj kontrastni tip usporedbe poznat je kao synkrisis. Uspoređujući dvije priče i dva protagonista, ovaj će članak pokazati kako Djela 27 opisuju Pavla kao Božjega pouzdanog i poslušnog proroka koji stoji u suprotnosti s Jonom. Na kraju ću navesti sedam kriterija intertekstualnosti Richarda Haysa te na temelju njih procijeniti synkrisis.

BOOK REVIEWS

Yevgeny Ustinovich
Overcoming the World: Glory and Shame in the Gospel of John
Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2024, pp. 126

In his book, *Overcoming the World: Glory and Shame in the Gospel of John*, author Yevgeny Ustinovich points to the Fourth Gospel as a means of encouragement for Christians "who struggle with their identity in cultures where Christianity is less than welcome" (p. 1). The author's background as both a biblical scholar and a Ukrainian refugee lends him credibility in his endeavor to show how John's Gospel speaks to current issues of identity, suffering, and exile. Ultimately, Ustinovich presents a compelling argument for how even these uncomfortable realities in the lives of Jesus' disciples ultimately bring glory to God.

The book is divided into two parts: "Not of the World" and "In the World." This division immediately gives the reader a glimpse into how the author interprets and incorporates various elements of paradox and irony in John's Gospel into his writing. The first part addresses Christians' new, God-given identity, which John describes as "not of the world." In the second part, the author discusses how those who find their identity in Christ are to function as they are sent into the world. Throughout the book, Ustinovich constantly shows how each discussion aspect is connected to God's glory.

One of the key concepts for Ustinovich is being "torn." In Chapter 1, he shows how the Old Testament describes the "torn nation" of Israel. It's in this state of tension that we can understand how Jews can both be praised and criticized in the Gospel of John. The prophets, in their calling to identify with God's people while communicating God's truth to them, are "torn" individuals who ultimately point to the "torn Savior" to come. The "world," according to John, is God's creation currently "torn" between light and darkness, God's glory and its glory.

Ustinovich, in Chapter 2, argues that Jesus' disciples are called out of the world to be sent back into it. This paradox is resolved by understanding Jesus' exhortation to abide in him. Disciples of Jesus find their identity as adopted children of God in the context of a community of resurrection, forgiveness, and hope – the Church. Therefore, a "disciple's proper response to the world's hostility is neither self-isolation nor compromising with the world's values, but, rather, courageous witness" (p. 34). Christians keep their God-given identity as they are sent into the torn world because they abide in a torn Lord.

In Chapter 3, the author mentions that the disciples of Jesus move in the direction of God's glory. He uses the blind man (John 9) to demonstrate how bearing

witness to the truth is one of the chief ways to give glory to God. Jesus' crucifixion, uniquely portrayed in the Gospel of John, is not ultimately a tragedy but a way of glory. This is a perspective Jesus' disciples can, and ought to, use in their own time and context.

This is why Ustinovich spends Chapter 4 looking at how some have eyes to see God's glory, while others do not. "[John] shows that on the cross of Jesus, God's glory was revealed in a visible, tangible way and made public and universal. Yet this was not obvious, which is why those who did not seek God did not see this glory" (p. 63). Readers of the Fourth Gospel have the advantage of understanding Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection from a "post-resurrection perspective." Here, the author makes a strong connection to our current situation. If we can read John from this perspective, we can also interpret our torn experiences as a means to glorify God. For the author, applying this perspective does not stem primarily from faith in Scripture, but rather from wisdom and experience in living as a disciple of Jesus.

Chapter 5 takes the reader on a brief tour through the biblical locations of God's glory—from the Tabernacle and Temple in the Old Testament to Jesus and his community of disciples in the New Testament. As long as disciples live for God's glory, they will overcome the world. The problem from John's perspective is that the world seeks glory for itself. According to the author, this comes in two forms: arrogance and people-pleasing. In the most personal section of the book, Ustinovich finds the path to God's glory through mistreatment, destruction, and persecution rather than seeking one's glory.

This is a theme with variations in Chapter 6. If suffering brought glory to God through the crucifixion of Jesus, it was also true for his first disciples and today's Church. As Ustinovich asserts, "God's plan was fulfilled not just despite that rejection, but through it" (p. 106). Ultimately, Jesus' disciples in all times and places are sent to the "torn world." Because they identify with the "torn Savior," they are equipped to bring God glory amid conflict, suffering, and humiliation. Because of Jesus' victory, his disciples were also conquerors. The thesis of the book is summarized toward the end: "The path to God's greater glory is through suffering and humiliation…The disciples are torn people sent into the torn world, but they will overcome the world if they live for God's glory" (p. 94).

Ustinovich's combination of biblical literacy, authenticity, and real-life experience commends this book to any disciple of Jesus Christ. Suppose readers find themselves in a torn situation — whether war, persecution, or other forms of suffering — *Overcoming the World* offers encouragement and hope. Those who may not currently be experiencing conflict can receive insight into the world of much of the suffering that the Church has endured throughout history, helping us gain perspective and empathy.

Overcoming the World offers a helpful resource in multiple contexts. Its accessibility and relevance would make it ideal for a Bible study series in a local church or an up-to-date companion to *The Cost of Discipleship* in a seminary course, for example. Those seeking a biblically informed perspective on the war in Ukraine may find value in reading this work alone or in a group discussion setting. In the end, through faithful study of the Gospel of John and genuine fervor, Ustinovich has achieved his goal of offering encouragement to disciples from various backgrounds who identify with the torn Savior.

Jeremy Bohall

Kevin J. Vanhoozer
Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically
Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024, 424

"Hermeneutics" is a scholarly, and somewhat technical term for interpretation. While its precise use may vary among the scholars who employ it, a book that includes the term in its title would appear to most observers at first glance to be either a technical methodological manual, textbook, or perhaps an abstract philosophical discourse on interpreting texts. However, the primary aim of the author, leading evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer, is quite different. While he no doubt considers interpretive methods and reflects on the philosophical underpinnings of interpretation, his major aim is to help Bible readers–whether scholars, clergy, or lay Christians–to "read rightly," that is, not merely for "intellectual assent but wholehearted consent to God's communicative intentions" (p. 21). This is evident in the introduction where Vanhoozer lays out what the Bible is, what it is doing, and what it is for, before then presenting who readers are in relation to the Bible: "answerable persons," what they are to do with the Bible: "bear faithful witness," and what the purpose of reading scripture is, "communion with God and training in godliness." These words reflect Vanhoozer's understanding of the Bible as a divine speech act, and readers as those to whom that speech act is addressed, who are therefore responsible to "follow the way the words go" for their understanding, including self-understanding, and discipleship.

Part 1, chapters 1–3, of Vanhoozer's three-part treatise deals with the historical divisions of biblical interpretation. As a systematic theologian who has also been one of the foremost proponents of the resurgence of theological interpretation, Vanhoozer recognizes the "ugly ditch" that emerged between scholarly exegesis and theology at the advent of the critical period. While he affirms important gains

and insights of the historical-critical approach to biblical interpretation, he asserts that a Christian hermeneutic cannot be limited to a merely historical frame of reference, and within an immanent and secular "social imaginary."1 But Vanhoozer does not restrict his critique to historical-critical Biblical scholarship, lamenting that modern theologians too are complicit, often adopting frames of reference "from somewhere other than the biblical text" (p. 92). Division over how to interpret the Bible did not begin in the critical period. Even in pre-critical Christian interpretation, there were competing approaches: the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools in the patristic period, monastic and scholastic approaches in the medieval period, and of course the differences that unfolded at the reformation– though Vanhoozer is keen to point out the agreements between the reformers and their "premodern forebears" (p. 75). Vanhoozer's intention, however, is not to provide a full-fledged history of exegesis, but rather to focus on two "polarized reading cultures," biblical scholarship and theology. He calls for reform in both reading cultures "insofar as in the one, biblical studies, theology comes too late, while in the other, systematic theology, Scripture figures too little." The title of the book thus encapsulates the hope of reconciliation of such disparate interpretive approaches, Mere *Christian Hermeneutics*, a phrase that recalls C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, and refers, according to the author, "to those basic principles espoused by all Christians, everywhere and at all times, for reading the Bible as the church's scripture." West and east, premodern and modern, exegetical and theological, ecclesial and academic are all opposing "reading cultures" Vanhoozer hopes to call for reform and reconciliation into one reading culture, "the one holy, catholic and apostolic church," marked by a "reformed catholicity" (p. 24, 179).

It should be reiterated that Vanhoozer does not suppose by this to offer an exhaustive and overarching hermeneutical method. After all, he proposes a "mere" Christian Hermeneutics, one that, like Lewis's "mere" Christianity, supposes a commonality that does not suppress the uniqueness of times, cultures, denominations, traditions, and people groups, "it takes many exegetical methods, and many interpretive communities from different times and different places to achieve a plenary understanding of scripture" (p. 181). Even so, the unifying goal of the project remains ambitious, but it is a goal worthy of pursuit, a pursuit rooted in scripture itself.

Crucial to the author's project in part 2 (chapters 4–5), wittily entitled "Figuring Out Literal Interpretation," is to examine the "criteria for right reading" by parsing out the meaning of "literal sense" and "literal interpretation." The idea of literal interpretation is, of course, fraught with misconceptions and misappli-

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1 Vanhoozer appropriates Charles Taylor's (*A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007], 539) concept of the secular social imaginary to explain the immanent frames of reference for biblical interpretation in the modern world. Taylor's social imaginary is defined as "the set of storied assumptions that underlies our shared understanding of reality and undergirds our everyday practices" (p. 80).

cations, especially when readers are taken aback by seemingly bizarre premodern allegorizing or blatant forms of contemporary *eisegesis*. However, reactions to irresponsible allegorizing and *eisegesis* might unfortunately engender a "literalistic" approach that sees only the letter without recognizing what it signifies. Vanhoozer thus warns that such a literalistic interpretation must also be distinguished from a proper literal interpretation. For Vanhoozer, "the literal meaning of Scripture is the meaning of the letter, viewed as a human-divine authorial discourse when read in canonical context with an eschatological frame of reference" (p. 178).[2] What should be clear from this definition is that for Vanhoozer, literal interpretation may go beyond the initial historical context within the framework of the entire biblical canon and its eschatological promise.

By this point in the book, Vanhoozer has already explained the importance of frames of reference and how diverse frames of reference characterize opposing reading cultures. He has also helpfully distinguished between sense and reference. "While *sense* is 'what someone says,' the *reference* is that about which that something is said" (p. 123). This distinction is important because it allows for interpretation within a widening, transcendent, and future-oriented frame of reference without departing from the grammatical *sense* of the letter. So, Vanhoozer's proposed "grammatical-eschatological frame of reference" within a sacramental or scriptural social imaginary is quite different from a merely historical frame of reference whose social imaginary is immanent and secular (pp. 128-129). The grammatical-eschatological frame of reference thus allows for spiritual or figurative interpretation that extends the literal sense of a text toward its already-not-yet eschatological-christological meaning, an extension necessitated by the Bible's divine authorship. This is what Vanhoozer calls the "trans-figural literal sense," where "trajectories *cut across* ("trans") times and testaments, linking biblical persons, places, and events ("figures")" (p. 24). Such "trans-figural interpretation thickens, extends and deepens the literal sense, precisely by following the way the words go, from figure to what is figured" (p. 170). Later, he states the same idea from the other direction: "Scripture's literal sense necessitates a properly *theological* interpretation and hermeneutical strategy that aims to follow the divine figuration where it leads" (p. 180). It most often leads to Christ, what Vanhoozer prefers to call a "Christoscopic" focus. It seems to me that there is much overlap with typology, a kind of figurative interpretation that Biblical scholars find to be most prevalent within the scripture. Vanhoozer's view of typology is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, he seems to include typology with other figurative approaches like allegory (pp. 160-167), while later it is affirmed as a biblical figuration in the way many biblical scholars have asserted (p. 168). In any case, Vanhoozer stresses that it is not the kind of figuration that is most important, but rather whether it is a good or bad figuration:

2   Throughout this review, italics are original to the author.

> My claim is that what people often refer to as the spiritual sense (i.e., "good" figuration) is actually the *eschatological fullness* of the literal-historical sense. It is not the bare historical but the historical-eschatological frame of reference that enables the literal sense to come into its own—or rather, into all its glory (p. 168).

Vanhoozer calls this *trans-figural* literal sense the "formal principle" of mere Christian hermeneutics. The use of the term *trans-figural*, of course, is also a wordplay on the transfiguration of Jesus, a wordplay that will make the most sense to English Bible readers. But it is not just a wordplay, because the author finds in Jesus' transfiguration in the synoptic Gospels the climactic narration of "the 'material principle' of mere Christian hermeneutics: the light of Christ, or, more expansively, the knowledge of God in the face of Christ" (p. 194), building on Jerome's likening of the spiritual sense of interpretation to ascending Mount Tabor to see Jesus transfigured into his shining appearance (p. 226). And so, in part 3 (chapters 6–9), entitled "Transfiguring Literal Interpretation" the author pursues and tests this material principle through several biblical texts: the creation of light in Genesis 1:3, the synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-10; Lk 9:28-36), Paul's interpretation in 2 Corinthians 3 of the fading radiance of Moses' face in Exodus 33–34; and Jacob's wrestling with God in Genesis 32:22-32, which is under the chapter 9 heading "Transfiguring the Reader." In the concluding chapter, Vanhoozer attends to a transfigural interpretation of the Song of Songs.

In Part 3, Vanhoozer provides a fitting capstone to his three-part work by practicing the trans-figural interpretation he preaches in the earlier sections, combining historical-grammatical exegesis with canonical-theological insight in conversation with interpreters from across church history and traditions. In chapter six, his aim is twofold: to give a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:3 where God speaks "let there be light," and "in so doing, to illuminate literality. The passage in question is more than fitting for Vanhoozer's explorations of literal interpretation since the narration of God speaking provides an excellent test case for the literal sense, and because the image or concept of light will be crucial to his idea of transfigural interpretation.

Vanhoozer explores the question of whether God *literally* speaks or takes action. Here is a good example of literal versus literalistic interpretation. A literalistic understanding of "speaking" would require that God had a mouth, lips, and vocal cords. Vanhoozer goes on to cite philosopher William Alston, who argues that God's speaking is a "literal but analogical claim," but "not a metaphor, because the performance of illocutionary acts belongs properly and primarily to God and only derivatively... to human creatures."[3] As Vanhoozer aptly puts

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3   Vanhoozer, 204, citing Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 96.

it, "God's 'speak-acting' is less an anthropomorphic description of God's agency than a theomorphic description of ours" (p. 204). God's speech is action, because through it "God forms and enacts intentions, thereby making a difference outside himself" (p. 204).

Vanhoozer then considers light, the object of God's spoken act of creation in Genesis 1:3. He asks, is the light physical or spiritual? A canonical reading also generates the question of how created light differs from "God's own uncreated light" (1 Jn 1:5; 1 Tim 6:16; Jn 8:12, cf. Isa 60:19; Rev 21:23). Vanhoozer distinguishes being God's intrinsic light, *ad intra*, meaning that God is the source of his own being," and his creation of light, *ad extra*, as "an external publication of the internal perfection God is" (p. 219). Light illumines, making both itself and other things known. Thus, Vanhoozer's understands the creation of light, *ad extra*, as "literally about divine action, namely, the creation of conditions of intelligibility, actualizing the possibility of *creaturely knowing and God's making known*" (p. 222). This "economy of light" becomes a framework for biblical interpretation pointing ahead to the transfiguration of Christ.

Chapter seven on the transfiguration of Jesus is the pivotal chapter of the book. The transfiguration is, in Vanhoozer's words, "arguably the most important event between creation and consummation in the biblical story of light," relating soteriology and eschatology, and heaven and earth, a "space-time preview of end-time consummation" (p. 227). Vanhoozer delves into the extensive exegesis of the synoptic transfiguration accounts, highlighting the important exegetical question as to the nature of the transfiguration itself, that is, what happened to Jesus? Three exegetical possibilities are offered: (1) a change of nature (myth); (2) A preview of future status (apocalypse); and (3) A revelation of present status (epiphany). Vanhoozer concludes that both the second and third options are at once true in accord with the already-not-yet eschatology of the New Testament witness so that the transfiguration overcomes both the present/future temporal divide and the earthly/heavenly spatial divide (p. 239).

An important implication of this understanding is that Jesus does not change but rather reveals his glorious light (*ad intra*), which is both what is already true of himself, and also the future glory that will be made manifest in the eschaton. Further, Vanhoozer understands the transfiguration, based partially on the presence of Moses and Elijah as representatives of the law and prophets, and Jesus as the living Word, to "suggest an analogy between the human body of Jesus and the letter of the biblical text." So, in the same way, the transfigured Jesus is still the human Jesus, though revealed in the transfiguration in full glory, so too transfigural interpretation "does not change, but, rather, glorifies the literal meaning," so that "transfigural reading discerns the splendor of the literal sense" (pp. 268-269).

After practicing transfigural interpretation and parsing out its implications through additional biblical texts in chapters eight and nine, the author concludes

the study by circling back to his beginning concerns and reflecting on the need to transfigure reading cultures, namely, that of the church and seminaries. He concludes that "transfiguring biblical interpretation refers both to a *transfiguration of the process* of biblical interpretation… and to *an interpretive process that transfigures*" readers and reading cultures. Vanhoozer reiterates many of his most important points including the necessity of exegesis and theology working in partnership using historical, literary, and eschatological frames of reference, retrieval of the reading practices of earlier Christians, and the need to practice a set of practices (mere Christian hermeneutics) that have been held by "large swaths" of the historic Christian tradition. Vanhoozer finds this commonality grounded and exemplified by the transfiguration of Jesus. In short, "to read the Bible theologically is to bear witness to the light of Christ in the letter of the text," and a reading culture that participates in the economy of light, "is a means by which God's word and Spirit are even now overcoming the darkness, transfiguring the world" (pp. 370-371).

Summarizing this work is not an easy task, but that is not meant as a negative comment. Rather, there is a richness to the book that will require readers to be fully immersed in its logic and transfigural persuasiveness. In addition, multiple terms and concepts are either freshly formulated by the author or used distinctly. Thankfully, there is a helpful glossary at the end of the book that will assist the reader in understanding these carefully nuanced ideas (i.e., the difference between "trans-figural interpretation" and "transfigural interpretation").

For which readers is this book most relevant? While the author hopes to impact reading cultures in both church and academy, at least an intermediate level of hermeneutical and theological background is essential. Scholars, theologically trained pastors, and students will be both challenged and encouraged to their benefit. Certainly, there will not be wholesale agreement or clarity on the entirety of Vanhoozer's proposal. Biblical scholars may still struggle with a perceived lack of controls for contemporary interpreters, even if "transfigural" interpretation is understood to extend the literal sense. Nevertheless, Vanhoozer is convincing in demonstrating that much of the so-called spiritual interpretation thought to be detached from the literal sense of the text can often be shown to emerge and be extended from the literal reading. His tracing of the "economy of light" is convincing in that regard. Perhaps a more and closer exegesis of premodern biblical interpretation will find further confirmation. Vanhoozer has helpfully provided the language and sets of practices that can help shape Bible reading cultures from "across the whole communion of saints and scholars" and this book should prove to be a trustworthy and encouraging resource for those saints and scholars for generations until, as he concludes, "the great transfiguration yet to come" (p. 372).

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