

Harvest Thanksgiving Day in Evangelical churches in Croatia

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Abstract

The article explores the custom of Thanksgiving Day in Evangelical churches in Croatia. The first section attempts to find a biblical basis for celebrating this feast. Then we move on to exploring church history in general, in a search for similar traditions and sources of Harvest Thanksgiving. Finally, we use various written and oral sources to explore the Harvest Thanksgiving celebration in Croatian lands.

Key words: *harvest, thanksgiving, celebration, Bible, church, Erntedankfest, Evangelical churches*

Introduction

Every year at the beginning of autumn, some Evangelical churches in Croatia hold special worship services, at which time church facilities, and particularly the front part surrounding the pulpit, are decorated with fruits of nature: pumpkins, grapes, corn, apples, etc. On that day (and it is usually the first Sunday of October) the preacher emphasizes gratefulness to God in his sermon. After the service the believers usually have lunch together and have a chance to enjoy fellowship.¹ This day is known as *Harvest Thanksgiving Day*, and it's been traditionally observed in Evangelical churches with longer traditions, such as the Baptist and Pen-

1 Communal meals are one of the oldest church traditions, which finds its source in the NT accounts of the early church, when they were called "agape" meals (Jude 12, and Rebić 2008, 8).

tecostal churches. In newer movements of Evangelical churches, especially those with a Charismatic background, this custom has not caught on.

This article explores the sources and origins of this custom, and it compares its emphases with those of biblical feasts, customs, and festivals that pertain to the harvest and thanksgiving. Special emphasis will be placed on an historical overview of the development of the *Harvest Thanksgiving Day* in Croatia.

Feasts, harvest, and thanksgiving in the Bible

In the very first pages of the Bible in Genesis, in the account of the creation of the Sun and Moon, there is also an emphasis on the origin of festivals: “*And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.’ And it was so*” (Gen 1:14-15, NIV). It is obvious from this passage that religious festivals were directly correlated with astronomical and climate changes, which served as *signs* for feasts which would have an important role in the history of the Bible and, later on, in the history of the church and civilization.

The Bible narrative is geographically linked to the *Fertile Crescent*, i.e. a Middle East region stretching from Mesopotamia, across the land of Canaan, and to the Egyptian valley of the Nile. This region is rich in grains, the oldest of which is barley, and wheat, a more sensitive type of grain (Alexander 1989, 97). Apart from grains, the region that is described as the homeland of the forefathers of Israel - Isaac and Jacob - is also abundant in Mediterranean fruits, vegetables, and herbs, about which there is a good and descriptive account in the Deuteronomy:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you (Deut 8:7-10).

It is obvious in these instructions which were given to the Israelites after they left the *land of slavery*, i.e. Egypt, that along with their promised abundance and the fertility of the land and food production, part of their abiding will was also to have an ultimately religious dimension of *blessing the Lord*, i.e. giving thanks to God for the fruits and the harvest. This kind of blessing and gratitude was best expressed in Israel through celebrating the feasts, which were commanded by God Himself. The feasts used the appropriate material symbolism to teach important spiritual and historic lessons.

Due to their various natural and material symbolism, the feasts were celebrated in different periods, i.e. seasons. These would repeat in a cyclical and seasonal² manner at approximately the same time each year. Due to the lunar measurement, the celebrations would also have natural lighting at night, because they were planned to coincide with the time of the full Moon³ (Kushner 1997, 87). Apart from the Moon, an important orientation for celebrating feasts was also the condition and the situation in agriculture. In ancient times the Jewish wise men who gathered at the Sanhedrin⁴ would send their emissaries into barley fields before the Passover, in order to see whether the barley would be ripe in time for the feast. If the barley was not ripe enough, the wise men would add another (leap) month to the calendar based on that fact alone (Vamosh 2005, 25).

According to direct instructions from the Torah, Judaism instituted three major festivals, which they not only related to calendar changes, but also to agricultural, i.e. harvest, times as well, and all of that with the purpose of religious and historical symbolism. All three festivals were also pilgrimages. This meant that both the Jews from the homeland and the world (i.e. the diaspora) were obligated to attend them. The main place of gathering for adult men during these festivals was the temple of God in the (holy) city of Jerusalem. Those three festivals are:

Pesach (the Passover) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread - This is the first feast of Judaism. Through the act of calling and delivering the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, God “set apart”⁵ this nation for His purposes. The Book of Exodus talks about the events of the Passover. There we read that, after the long time Israel spent in slavery, God intervened on behalf of this oppressed people. At the same time God punished Pharaoh’s stubbornness through a series of “woes” which befell the Egyptians. God had prepared His people through Moses and Aaron for the final *exodus* from Egypt. The night before the *final reckoning* with the Egyptians, God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb, and to gather for a family dinner. The blood of the sacrificed lamb was to be used to mark all the doorposts of their homes. The blood of the lamb was a sign for the great woe to *pass over*⁶ the homes of the Israelites. After the last woe, which left the

2 The Jewish calendar is lunar, i.e. it is based on the Moon and not the Sun. Every month began at the new Moon, the first ray of light after the dark gibbous Moon, and lasted 29 or 30 days, i.e. the length of time it takes for the Moon to go from the new Moon, over the full Moon, and to gibbous Moon (Kushner 1997, 87; and Alexander 1989, 110-115).

3 Usually on the 15th day of the month.

4 The Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish religious (judicial) body in Israel before the destruction of the temple, and it was comprised of 70 members (Alexander and Alexander 1989, 95-96)

5 Separated - hadosh - Hebr., i.e. holy.

6 That is the meaning of the word, “Pesach”.

Egyptians without their first-born sons, Pharaoh finally relented and allowed the Israelites to go at midnight, under the light of the full Moon. In the hurry of their sudden departure, there was no time to make bread; instead, the Israelites baked thin unleavened bread made from flour and water, which is also called “matzah” (Kuschner 1997, 116).

In memory of this event, the Passover celebration was instituted at the beginning of spring. By that time, the weather was already mild enough for young lambs to be born and for the new wheat to start becoming ripe. It is therefore interesting to follow the biblical symbolism before and during the Passover. There was a command to “clean the home”⁷ prior to the Passover. On that occasion, the Israelite homes were supposed to be cleaned from all yeast (Hamec⁸), i.e. all leavened, rotten, and moldy things. Since that was the time when the old wheat supplies were about to run out and become moldy, the “home cleaning” turned out to be the ideal opportunity to clean the barns from the old wheat and to prepare them for the new wheat. Otherwise, the “old leaven”, i.e. mold, would contaminate the fresh grain, making it moldy.

Up until today the festival is celebrated for seven days at the beginning of spring. There is also some meaningful symbolism tied to it: During the supper (Seder), as a symbol of the *pass over*, lamb is eaten, as well as bitter herbs, which grow about that time and symbolize the bitterness of the (Egyptian) slavery. During the supper, the seating order is important, because it also bears a lot of messianic symbolism (Marinović and Marinović 2008, 327).

Leviticus 23:9-16 also commands a special festival that is connected to the Passover. It is the so-called *omer offering*. An omer, or a sheaf, is a measure of wheat measuring about 25 liters. Part of the first sheaf of barley (i.e. omer) would be taken to the temple as a sacrificial offering, or more precisely, the “*wave offering*” to God. After the destruction of the temple, the practice was continued in the synagogues. After the beginning of Passover week, a countdown began which would end in fifty days. On that day, a new festival called Shavuot would begin.

Shavuot – It is also called *Feast of the Harvest* (Ex 23:16), or *Feast of the First Fruits* (Num 28:26), and is also known as Pentecost (*Pentekostes* - Greek). It is a one-day festival (two days for the diaspora) which is a remembrance of the day when, fifty days after leaving Egypt, the Israelites received the Ten Commandments at the foot of Sinai mountain as the central part of the Torah, i.e. the first

7 “Home” implies a living space and farm buildings (granaries and stables).

8 Hametz refers to every food that is considered leavened, i.e. made from plain flour and pasta, beer, yogurt, and the like (Marinović and Marinović 2008, 327).

five books of the Bible⁹. In Exodus the commandment says, “You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, that is, the first fruits of the wheat harvest” (Ex 34:22).

The festival is celebrated during the ripening of the first summer fruits, and when the wheat is finally ready for harvest (end of May or the beginning of June). It was traditionally believed that, when Israelites received the commandments at the foot of the Mount Sinai, the foothill became green, i.e. fertile. In memory of this, the synagogues would be decorated with various greenery. At that time the farmers would offer crops to God: two baskets of fresh bread made with the flour from the summer harvest (Deut 6:9-12). A *prayer of thanksgiving* would be prayed then, because the Israelites, who were descended from slaves, now owned their own land, which enabled them to provide for their families (Kushner 1997, 120-121). During this particularly joyful festival, the Jewish believers read from the Book of Ruth.¹⁰ The events of the book take place at harvest time in the town of Bethlehem. People feast on the refreshing meals of cheese and dairy products at communal tables.

Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles is the third pilgrimage, which lasts for seven days (eight in the diaspora). As early as in Exodus, the feast was described as the harvest feast at the end of the Jewish calendar year (Ex 34:22). Later on it was described as “the feast of tabernacles” (Lev 23:34-44).

The festival is held early in autumn, and it reminds the Israelites of their time in the desert during their journey into the *Promised Land*. As a memory of living in tents (tabernacles), believers build small cottages (tabernacles) in their yards. They spend the day in the tabernacles with their families and have a few meals there (Marinović, Marinović 2008, 328). During the Thanksgiving ceremony in the synagogues people would offer crops and herbs which grew in the *land of Israel*. So this festival has the symbolism of thanking God for good weather and for the *roof over their heads*. In hope and prayer for future abundance, believers are reminded of the frailty and transience of earthly life, and the need to perform their duties – i.e. to harvest the crops—“in time.” That is why the rabbinic tradition decided that the Book of Ecclesiastes (Kohleth) should be read during the festival.

The last day in the week of Sukkot is the so-called “*day of joy*” in the *Torah* (Simhat Tora). That is the end of the annual round of the public reading of the *Torah*, and after the last verses of Deuteronomy are read the reading begins again with the beginning chapters of Genesis. At that time community members dance joyfully in the synagogue, carrying the scrolls of the *Torah* in their hands (Kush-

9 The biblical account (Ex 19) does not provide us with the exact day of receiving the Ten Commandments, which is why the date was determined later by rabbinic tradition (Vamosh 2005, 24).

10 Ruth was converted to Judaism and she became the great-grandmother of the future King David, from whom came the line of the future Messiah.

ner 1997, 113-115). Sukkot is a very joyous festival even in the contemporary state of Israel, to which Jewish people from all over the world began to return during the twentieth century.

In these three major Jewish festivals, which are celebrated in various seasons, we notice some important common elements:

- a) Thankfulness to God for the harvest and the fruits of nature,
- b) worship services and believers eating together,
- c) appropriate symbolism seen in decorating the place of worship.

All these elements are present in the celebration of *Harvest Thanksgiving Day* which is celebrated in Evangelical churches in Croatia, even though Sukkot is most similar to it in terms of the calendar and the crops. Jewish (biblical) tradition is, therefore, the older source and the most authentic example for celebrating this day in churches of today.

Now we come to the question: how and when did this tradition come into the churches that stemmed from the Reformation, and when did this celebration get its name? Also, why does *Harvest Thanksgiving Day* not have the same significance as other holidays in Christianity? In order to find this out, we need to explore the development of harvest festivals and celebrations throughout the history of Christianity.

Integration of Jewish traditions into the Christian church¹¹

The first community of believers of Jesus Christ was made up almost exclusively of Jews. As such, it honored traditions, ceremonies, and festivals that were prescribed in the Jewish law, and according to the Gospels, they were frequented and celebrated by Jesus of Nazareth Himself. The church also added baptism as a sign of conversion to these ceremonies, as well as the celebration of the Lord's Supper (i.e. Eucharist) as two new forms of faith.

During the second half of the first century a major influx of foreigners¹² came into the early church. The gospel message comes after the persecution in the city of Antioch, where Jesus' disciples are called *Christians* for the first time (Acts 11:26). This important missionary community was no longer predominantly Jewish, which is precisely why the issue¹³ regarding observing Jewish laws and ce-

11 Church is a name for a community of believers who have been set apart for God's purposes, and it comes from the Greek original, *ecclesia* (ἐκκλησία) - a gathering.

12 I am using a milder term for non-Jewish peoples here, instead of a common and somewhat pejorative term "pagans" (Hebr.: Goyim).

13 Church history calls it "The Antioch Dispute."

remonies came up, which included the festivals we have mentioned. An agreement regarding this important issue was reached at a gathering of the general assembly under the leadership of Jesus' apostles in Jerusalem. After a fervent debate, the assembly reached the conclusion that was laid out in the so-called *apostolic letter*. The letter says, "*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell*" (Acts 15:28-29).

The written conclusion was carried through the ancient world by the apostle Paul, who was firmly opposed to imposing the obligation of obeying Jewish laws and ceremonies upon the non-Jews. He is also the author of the passage in Galatians which says, "*You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain*" (Gal. 4:10). It is important to note that the apostle is criticizing the usage of Jewish law, especially circumcision, ceremonies, and festivals, as a prerequisite for salvation. He is by no means canceling their existence, or the historic memory, or their symbolism. Paul himself diligently went on pilgrimages to Jerusalem for major (harvest) festivals.

Even though the church became significantly separated from its Jewish roots as time went on, it still integrated some important elements of worship from the synagogues and Jewish festivals into its tradition, and it gave them an altered, Christian meaning. Thus, the major Jewish weekly holiday of Sabbath was replaced with the first day of the week, i.e. Sunday. But still it kept its purpose as a day that is separated for rest and for worshipping God. Some other parts of worship, such as singing Psalms and reading and interpreting the Scriptures, were also quickly integrated into the early church in the form of singing hymns and preaching.

The Passover and Shavuot in the early church

Because of intensive persecution of Christians in the first three centuries, the churches did not have any specially built worship buildings, and the liturgy was simple, with singing together, preaching, and the Eucharist¹⁴ as the center of worship. The celebration of the Passover on the 14th day of the Jewish month Nisan during the full Moon also continued. The traditional Jewish symbolism was enriched by the mentioning of the death, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the ultimate *Lamb of God* who was slain. From that time until this day, Christians in Romanic nations have used a word for Easter that originated from the

14 The Eucharist also has a source in Passover, as well as the traditional Jewish custom of breaking bread together (Vamosh 2005, 14-15).

term “Passover,”¹⁵ and similar phrases exist in the Netherlands, as well as in some Scandinavian countries.¹⁶

Along with the Pesach, Shavuot also gained importance along with its Jewish significance, since that was the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the gathered believers in Jerusalem, as the promised Comforter who has the strength to proclaim the Good News (Acts 1-2). In those early days, Sukkot was not considered as significant, especially after the complete destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD.

Constantine’s edict

Circumstances began to change significantly for the church in the Roman Empire after the issuing of Emperor Constantine’s edict in 313. The persecution of Christians stopped, and Christianity became an acknowledged religion in the Empire (*Religio Licita*). Aside from the freedom to profess its faith, the Christian church also got the opportunity to come out of private homes and catacombs and to move into new church buildings, which were becoming increasingly impressive architecturally.¹⁷

However, the public acceptance by the Roman government had its dark side as well, because Christian worship was now under the influence of the imperial protocol or, as it was so eloquently stated by church historian Gonzalez, “*Frankincense, which was burned in honor of emperors, began to spread its aroma in churches as well*” (1984, 125). This is the time when ministers (the clergy) started separating themselves from the “common” believers, who were increasingly losing their active role in worship. All of these things resulted in increased opportunism among the clergy (and indignation among true believers), who started looking for a way out in a separated and reclusive (i.e. monastic) lifestyle.

Changes were visible in the church calendar and holidays as well. Sunday, partly as a pagan “festival of the Sun,”¹⁸ now became officially Christianized and was declared to be a free day in the entire Empire. This facilitated the massive attraction of the church basilica. Memorial days for martyrs and saints of the church became incorporated into worship services, and the cult of worshipping the blessed virgin Mary and angels grew stronger. The church year was divided into three major seasons: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Easter, which up until that time was celebrated during the Passover, and Pentecost, which was cele-

15 The Italians call Easter *Pasqua*, the Spanish call it *Pascuas*, the French call it *Pâques*, and in Portuguese it is *Páscoa*

16 <http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/easter.htm>, seen on February 25, 2016

17 Basilicas were built and styled after governmental and imperial palaces at the time, which reflected the new power and influence that the church now had in society.

18 The name remained in English Sunday, and in German Sonntag.

brated during the feast of Shavuot, were still held to be important festivals with Jewish roots. Christmas was added to them, as a Christianized pagan festival. Even in early Christianity, Sukkot did not get an adequate Christian alternative like these festivals did.

After the Church Council in Nicea in 325, the church became even more separated from Judaism. That was when the dogma of the Holy Trinity was declared, and the Jews simply could not accept it. During the same Council, a decree was made that Easter would no longer be celebrated at the time of the Jewish Pesach, but on a Sunday of the first full Moon in the spring, which falls between March 21st and April 25th (Rebić 2007, 62). In the upcoming centuries, the gap between the church and Jewish traditions increased, and the ideas from Ancient Greece and popular culture more and more infiltrated Christian teaching and worship. Christian antisemitism also originated around that time, which remained a dark stain on the history of the Christian church, with varied intensity, up until the 20th century.¹⁹

The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages are strongly marked by a major church division into Eastern and Western Christian traditions in 1054. Since Harvest Thanksgiving is quite prominent in the tradition of Western Christianity, our further exploration will be aimed at the historical development of the festival in the West. By the 15th century the number of holy days and feasts had multiplied significantly in the Western church. The church calendar had been filled with 300 more new memorial days, holy days, and festivals, and there were many more of them on local levels. Many of those were dedicated to saints and were marked by customs that were taken from popular piety. Such inflation of memorial days was followed by the worship of various relics, pilgrimages, and special festivities.

Although there was no specific mention of Harvest Thanksgiving Day even in the medieval church calendar, surely there were some festivities that were related to the harvest. Most of the European population lived in villages and worked in agriculture, and for the purpose of giving thanks (or penance in the case of disasters) at harvest and fruit-picking time they would organize events, which Beyhl calls “*covenant fairs*” (Votivmessen). Churches would then bless the harvest gift (i.e. the fruit-picking gift) followed with an appropriate thanksgiving mass and the celebration of *Te Deum*²⁰ (Berger 1993, 162).

19 After the Holocaust and the establishment of the Israeli state, there was an emergence of stronger movements for the renewal of fellowship between Christianity and the Jews. Evangelical churches post *II Vaticanum* have been leaders in this, as well as many Catholics.

20 *Te Deum* - “We Celebrate you, God,” appropriate thanksgiving mass and worship services, where solemn thanksgiving hymns are sung (Berger 1993, 162).

Reformation

As a primarily religious, i.e. Christian, movement for the renewal of doctrine and life in churches in Europe in the 16th century (Jambrek 2007, 327), the Reformation had a huge impact on changes and reductions in the church calendar. In an overall theological reconsideration, there was a renewed view of Christian holy days, memorial days, and festivals. Some theologians, like Martin Butzer, even wanted to exclude Christmas from the church calendar, because there is no sufficient basis for it in the Scriptures (Beyhl 2007, 105). Even though this did not happen, holy days dedicated to saints and Mary were excluded from Protestant church calendars. Everything was reduced to a few major holy days: Easter and Pentecost as movable holy days, and Christmas as an immovable major holy day. Then, in the order of importance, followed the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th; Trinity Sunday (Trinitatis) - a week after Pentecost; the Ascension of Christ - fifty days after Easter; as well as memorial days for the apostles and the archangel Michael (September 29th). Since the Reformation, the Lutheran Reformation tradition has divided the church year into the following seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and the season after Trinity Sunday (Trinitatis).

The tradition of medieval covenant fairs (Votivmessen), which did not have any saintly characteristics but only involved thanksgiving for the fruits of nature, managed to fill the void that was made by the Reformation's "cleansing" of the church calendar. The practice first began in the regional German Protestant church, which introduced Harvest Thanksgiving Day, though not as a holy day, but merely as a festival. So, at the middle of the 16th century we find the festival of Harvest Thanksgiving in the church ordinaries of Hamburg, Lübeck and Osnabrück, as an opportunity to thank God for the harvest and fruit-picking. The exact time of the festival had not yet been determined, and the festival was celebrated at various times up until the 18th century (Beyhl 2007, 106).

As time went by, apart from the October 31st Erntedankfest the Lutheran tradition included in its calendar, as a memorial day for Martin Luther's publishing the 95 theses on that day in 1517.

Determining the date of the *Harvest Thanksgiving*

The first time the date of Harvest Thanksgiving was determined in the church calendar is recorded in Evangelical Prussia in 1773, when the date was set as the first Sunday after the festival of the archangel Michael (Michaelis, September 29th). By the beginning of October in Germany the harvest and fruit-picking had already been finished and the weather was very pleasant for spending time outside. Soon church services were combined with the festivals, when the village and city squares would be aptly decorated. Food and drinks were served, and processions wo-

uld be held. At the center there was a big crown made out of hollies and summer fruits (Erntedankkröne). In the middle of the 19th century (1852) the Lutheran Synod decided to decorate church altars with fruits of nature (Beyhl 2007, 106). From that time on Harvest Thanksgiving Day was officially introduced into the Lutheran church calendar in German-speaking regions. Upon checking church calendars from other major Protestant churches (Reformed, Anglican), we find no data which would indicate that they adopted this custom. The Roman Catholic Church only adopted it after the II Vatican Council, and only in Germany as a catholicized version of the same Lutheran and folk custom.

This October Sunday is celebrated in a ceremonious and joyous way, in fellowship and usually in German-speaking regions. In terms of the calendar, it overlaps with celebrating the biblical harvest festival of Sukkot, which is also a festival of thanksgiving, joy, and decorating.

The American Thanksgiving tradition

On the other side of the Atlantic another day of thanksgiving for crops and harvest began to emerge in the 17th century. It also has a religious source in Puritan Protestantism.²¹ I am referring to *Thanksgiving Day*, which commemorates the first harvest of the *Pilgrim Fathers* after their arrival in the then uninhabited colonial areas of so-called New England, which is today the state of Massachusetts.

After the arduous travel to New England on the ship *Mayflower*, the first settlers encountered many hardships and challenges. Due to insufficient knowledge of agricultural techniques necessary for farming in the new land, as well as a dismal winter, almost half of the settlers did not survive until the Spring of 1621. The natives (i.e. the Indian tribe of Abenaki) taught the settlers about the efficient way of farming the land and hunting and raising animals, so after the first successful harvest the pilgrims decided to prepare a celebration as a sign of their gratefulness to God. The celebrations, to which the natives were invited, included a worship service and a communal meal made from the fruits of the new land (Bowker 2005, 587).

The tradition of giving thanks for the harvest, which stemmed from this festival, gradually entered the American culture and was accepted by the new United

21 The Puritans (from the word “purity”): Members of a faction of the English Reformation who believed that reforms should continue in the Anglican Church, with the purpose of “purifying” all the “remnants of Rome.” Groups which did not agree with the religious policy and state of affairs in England (non-conformist Puritans) voluntarily immigrated to the colonies, with the purpose of obtaining the freedom to profess and practice their beliefs. On their way to America on the *Mayflower*, they set the foundation for the future (godly) society, and were thus called the *Pilgrim Fathers* (Cairns 1996, 328-336, 358).

States of America. The godly president, Abraham Lincoln, officially declared it to be a national holiday in 1863, during the Civil War. It was then decreed that the holiday should be celebrated on the last Thursday in November. In this way, Thanksgiving Day became a tradition in the USA as well. Today it is celebrated as a national holiday, regardless of one's religious affiliation. The holiday is characterized by solemn processions and family gatherings around the festive holiday dinner table with turkey, potatoes, cranberry jam, pumpkin pie, corn, etc.²² In this holiday churches and believers recognize and emphasize the religious foundations of American society, and through the activities of American Christian missionaries, and especially through the mediation of media pop-culture, this holiday has now become globally known and has overshadowed any other harvest thanksgiving tradition.

Harvest Thanksgiving Day tradition in Croatia

The Protestants in Croatian regions

Although the Reformation came to the Croatian region in its initial phase, it was unable to take a stronger hold in Croatia due to the strong counter-reformation. Croatian Protestants were forced to emigrate,²³ and Protestantism only managed to survive in the regions outside of the jurisdiction of the Croatian Viceroy and Parliament.²⁴

It was around the middle of the 19th century (in 1859) that religious tolerance²⁵ was accepted and Protestant churches could be built in Croatian regions. Lutheran churches of the Augsburg confession were founded by German and Slovak immigrants.²⁶ They moved to Croatian regions drawn by the economic

22 <http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/history-of-thanksgiving>, seen on March 7th 2016.

23 The Croatian contribution in Germany is noticeable through the activities of Matija Flacius, and the Uraška group led by Baron Johannes Ungnad, etc. More in Jambrek 2013.

24 E.g. in areas which were under the Osman power, such as Slavonija, where the Reformed tradition of the Reformation was active.

25 Croatia and Slavonija were the last countries in the Habsburg monarchy where religious freedom for Lutherans took hold. Thanks mostly to help from the churches in the Austrian part of the empire, parish communities were opened and established very quickly.

26 As early as the 18th century, there were Protestant enclaves - Stara for Slovaks and Nova Pazova for Germans - which had limited freedom of action (Jambrek 2003, 36).

possibilities. For the most part, the Germans came as farmers from the German region of Baden-Württemberg. Their settling came in several major migration waves, called Schwabenzug.²⁷

German Lutherans in Croatia and the harvest thanksgiving tradition

New Lutheran assemblies in Croatia and Slavonija were founded in Zagreb (1859), Bingula Erdevik (1867), Antunovac (1867), Hrastovac (1868), Beška (1872), Osijek (1872), Surčin (1879), and Mitrovica (1892). When it came to the building of buildings and initial projects, the churches had the support of bigger churches in Austria-Hungary,²⁸ Germany, Switzerland, and the society of Gustaph Adolf. The clergy was mostly educated in Germany, but theological education was moved to Hungary later on because the Lutheran churches were under the jurisdiction in Hungary, and until the very end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire they did not succeed in their plan to found an independent Lutheran church of the Augsburg confession.

Apart from their faith, German Lutherans also brought in a specific work ethic²⁹ and customs related to farming. Harvest Thanksgiving Day connected all three things in a particular way: agriculture, ethnicity, and religious affiliation.³⁰ In order to find another historic confirmation for these theses, we need to follow the written trails, i.e. religious publications, of the day.

27 After the German region of Schwaben (today parts of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria). This is an area with a strong Lutheran tradition, where Croatian reformers were also active at the time. Although the settlers were coming from other parts of Germany as well, a somewhat pejorative name “Švabo” remained in the South-Slavic speaking regions as a name for all Germans.

28 Most (90%) Protestants in the Danube monarchy – ca. 3 000 000 of them - lived in the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire, two thirds of which was made up of believers of the Helvetic (i.e. Calvinist) confession, and a third were believers of the Augsburg (i.e. Lutheran) confession. Also, the ruling Hungarian and revolutionary aristocracy belonged to the Calvinist church (Gross 1985, 359).

29 Due to their work discipline, the Germans were economically above average as an ethnic group in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Geiger 1997, 22).

30 Unlike the Roman Catholics, Germans Lutherans placed more emphasis on the ethnic community, which made them somewhat cloistered. The reason for this is found in the fact that Germany is both Luther’s homeland and a place where the Reformation started.

***Kirche und Volk* – a unified publication of the German Lutheran Church of the Augsburg confession**

By establishing Lutheran churches in Slavonija, Srijem, Bačka, and Banat, a rich cultural and publishing work for German Lutherans began. By the end of World War I there were two Lutheran publications present in Croatian region, *Grüss Gott* and *Neues Leben*,³¹ coming from different publishers, mostly in Vojvodina.

Not long after the declaration of the Yugoslav state (SHS), a German seniorate was established first, and then the German Lutheran Church of the Augsburg confession, with its bishopry in Zagreb. Soon all the existing publications were merged into one, which started in 1934 under the title, “*Kirche und Volk- Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für Jugoslavien*,” i.e. “*Church and the People - a Publication of the Lutheran Community in Yugoslavia*.” The first editor in chief was pastor Heinrich Lebherz from Sombor, where the magazine was first published. Later on it moved to Nova Pazova and continued its publication until 1945. At first it was a monthly publication printed in German Gothic script, and its ten pages included: reports from events in the Church at large and in local parishes, various announcements, theological reviews, and biblical deliberation, as well as poetry that was Christian in character. Occasionally, there were also articles which pointed to political currents of the time in the country and the world, as well as reports from the travels of bishop Dr. Philipp Popp. The topics in the *Kirche und Volk* magazine often dealt with current holidays and memorial days in the German Lutheran Church.³² That is why the newspapers are the best source for researching the continuity of *Harvest Thanksgiving Day* in our region. The National Academic Library in Zagreb keeps all these newspapers under the signatures 87.017 and 89.273. In regard to holy days, every Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost was diligently celebrated, and there is also mention of Reformation Day. We can see the way Harvest Thanksgiving Day (Erntedankfest) was celebrated in the following issues and articles:

In the very first year, on September 15, 1934, in issue #9 we can see the festive theme: namely, on the front page we see the sermon entitled, “*Was erntes Du?*” - “What are you sowing?” The sermon is signed by pastor Johann Lang, who says at the beginning: “*At the time of harvest celebration, there are those who are happy, and those who are not. The grateful are happy, while the unhappy ones are ungrateful - the ungodly.*” Later on the parson reviews the 150 years of the church

31 “Greeted be God” and “New Life”.

32 The German Lutheran Church of the Augsburg confession in Kingdom of Yugoslavia had around 120 000 members: 100 000 Germans, 16 000 Slovenes (Prekomurian Vends), and 4000 Hungarians (Merkle 1985, 22).

in Torschau³³ and he emphasizes selflessness and reminds us of the bible passage, “For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Gal 6:7).

The next (10th) issue, from October 15th, in its final pages reports from parish communities from different cities and towns. In the report about the events in a relatively new parish in Slavonski Brod, the magazine writes: “*Two significant events happened in our community in September,*” the first report being about the visit by the Leipzig cantor and professor Thomas, who had visited Yugoslavia at the time; and another event, “*a special worship service on the occasion of the Harvest Thanksgiving Day (Erntedankfest) on September 30.*” The author (M.) specifies that this was the first celebration of Harvest Thanksgiving Day in their parish, and he continues:

The altar was richly adorned with flowers, fruit, and vegetables. The harvest festival liturgy (Erntedankfest) consisted of performing two choir songs by the choir, which has been convening since the month of May. The songs were, Praise the Lord by J. S. Bach, and the composition by Paul Gerhardt, I Sing to You With My Heart and Mouth. After this, our children were rejoicing at the children’s worship service, with the rich gifts from our God on the altar. Their joy was magnified due to a baptism which was performed before the children’s worship service. In the afternoon, the choir went to Bosanski Brod to celebrate the Harvest Thanksgiving Day there as well.

On the same page, there is mention of two reports from the church in Zagreb, which was especially important as the headquarters of bishop Popp. The first report talks about the visit and a special concert held by the choir from the Church Music Institute of the Earth Conservatory in Leipzig.³⁴ The concert was attended by ministers from the Royal Court in Belgrade and the German Consul in Zagreb (Dr. Freundt), and his wife. Newspapers in Zagreb published excellent critiques of the concerts, which were conducted by Dr. Thomas. The second article, *Harvest Festival* (Erntefest), states that on September 30th “this year’s Harvest Festival was celebrated. The altar of the wonderful House of God³⁵ was tastefully decorated and filled with various fruits. The festive sermon was held by Dr. Schubert, a member of the Consistory (Konsistorialrat). After the worship service, a number of members who are in need were presented with groceries.” The report was unsigned.

On October 15, 1935, there was a report from the parish in Osijek, where a

33 Today, Savino Selo in Vojvodina (Serbia).

34 The Leipzig Institute has a great musical history and significance, because one of its Cantors was Johann Sebastian Bach, one of the greatest musicians of all time, and a devout Lutheran.

35 This is an impressive building of the Lutheran Church of *Christ the King* on Gundulićeva street in Zagreb, which was designed by the renowned Zagreb architect, Hermann Bolle.

festive celebration of Harvest Thanksgiving Day was held on October 6th at 10 a.m. During the worship service, Senior Andalter³⁶ preached on the topic of the *meaning of this day (festival), and its connection to the ceremony, which is celebrated in the Homeland - the mother of Reformation - (Mutterlande der Reformation) at the same time.* There was also an emphasis on the need for thankfulness and honoring God. In the afternoon, the festival continued, and children played an important part in it.

Boys and girls read some verses, after which the church choir conducted by the organist Edgar Walter sang a few appropriate harvest thanksgiving songs. After this, the celebration was continued outside of the church (in the parish courtyard) with people rejoicing, where the school children wore a specially decorated Harvest wreath (Erntekranz). The congregation of believers was gathered in the parish courtyard. The women carried small festive bouquets of flowers that they made themselves, and which could be purchased for a small price. On the tables there were small refreshments which were financed through offerings, which were later used for the needs of the Gustav Adolph Society (GAV³⁷), and the Martin Luther Alliance. Socializing continued until evening.

At the same time, similar decorated celebrations were held in Velimirovac (near Našice), where a new beel was delivered to the church, as well as in Ciganka and Sobjanska Ada,³⁸ with decorated altars, which has been reported on briefly.

Issue #9 of *Kirche und Volk* from September 15, 1936 has an article named *Erntedank*, signed by Lebbherz, on the front page. The article covers the topic of fruitful thanksgiving for the 150 years of living in the (new) "homeland." Along with Bible passages that talk about thanksgiving and charity (Ps 25:10; 66:4; 106:1; and Heb 13:16), the author warns that the *farmers' fruits are intended for the whole nation, especially for the close people from the nation, who are in need (widows, the poor...).*

At the beginning of October, 1937 the front cover of *Kirche und Volk*, which changed its publication schedule to twice a month (on the 1st and the 15th), features the title "*Erntedankfest*" - Celebration Of The Harvest Thanksgiving by F. R. The sermon focused on the second verse of Psalm 103, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits,*" followed by the message that, where God is being blessed, people become closer to one another.

After the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the formation of NDH, *Kirche und Volk* was published in Nova Pazova. Although that time was marked with numerous difficulties and the irregularity of publishing due to the

36 Last name illegible. There was a senior Walter at the time, but it is also possible that he was perhaps a guest from Germany.

37 Today: GAW.

38 East Srijem, which is part of the Republic of Serbia today.

war, this research can benefit from looking at the front cover from October 15, 1941. The author of the titular article (Rometsch) analyzes the biblical account of the “mad rich man” (Lk 12:16-20). Throughout the article, he looks back at the bountiful harvest that was given to man, and for which man was not showing God due gratitude. Because of this, the author concludes that Harvest Thanksgiving (Erntedank) is more than just giving thanks; it also means turning our attention from ourselves to God and our brothers, who must not be forgotten.

From this we see that Harvest Thanksgiving Day was regularly celebrated among German Lutherans in a very festive manner, with the participation of the entire congregation of believers. The festivities reached their peak in the sermon that was held in church, which was especially decorated for the occasion. The sermons were aimed at giving thanks and blessing God, and after the worship service ceremonies there were special meals, patterned after the German and Lutheran homeland.

The main emphases were: thanksgiving, mutual solidarity, and giving God praise for all the good He is doing. There was no similar festivity marking the end of harvest in the Reformed tradition of Lutheran churches (of the Helvetic confession) in Croatian regions.

Renewal movements among German Lutherans

In the time after the Reformation, a strong renewal tradition was developed in a Lutheran faction of Protestantism known as Pietism.³⁹ It emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries as a reaction to the theological challenges and spiritual sterility in German Lutheranism. The characteristics of Pietism include the believer’s personal devotion and discipline⁴⁰ and studying the Scriptures in small house groups, which quickly expanded throughout German regions. The movement gained particular momentum in Dresden, Leipzig, and Halle, i.e. Prussia (where Harvest Thanksgiving Day was first instituted). Due to its *warm attractiveness* (Collins and Price 2000, 161), as opposed to the frequent liturgical coldness of formal Lutheranism, Pietism spread rapidly in all Lutheran areas in Germany, and consequently among the Lutherans from Württemberg, who came on the Danube in the 18th century to settle in the regions around the Pannonia basin and the Croatian areas of Srijem, Slavonija, and central Croatia.

In principle, pietist groups from the German Lutheran diaspora did not be-

39 This form of expressing faith was also called *Collegia pietatis*, which is why the followers of this movement were called “Pietists.”

40 Some sociologists classify it as so-called “ascetic Protestantism” (Weber 1989, 70).

come separated from the parish community, i.e. the official Church, which also included celebrating holy days together. In the Srijem region, members of such pietist movements were known as “Stundists,” from the German phrase “Stunde leiten,” which translates as “having (Bible) lessons/hours.” Later on, Pentecostal churches⁴¹ came from this movement, and they are one of the Reformation-heritage churches in the Republic of Croatia today, which will be dealt with later on (Marinović, Marinović 2008, 163).

Biblical societies and the arrival of the Baptists in Croatia

As religious rights and tolerance increased in the beginning of the 20th century, some newer groups of Protestants began appearing along with Lutherans and Reformed believers, such as Baptists and Nazarenes. Members of these movements were coming from Austria and Hungary as traveling preachers and so-called “Bible street-sellers” for the *British and Foreign Bible Society*. They were taking Bibles⁴² from their regional centers and depots (Wien, Budapest) and carrying them around to cities, villages, and towns in the South-Slavic language areas (Kuzmič 1983, 199).

At the end of the 19th century, the first Baptist missionaries and workers (Edward Millard, Heinrich Meyer, Filip Lotz i Horak) came to Croatia on behalf of the Bible Society. Along with distributing Bibles, they also began organizing meetings in the homes of those who were interested in the Baptist teaching. The largest interest in these studies was shown by the German and Czech settlers (mostly Lutherans) from the regions of Daruvar, Zagreb, and Međimurje (Jambrek 2003, 44-46). After a while, agile evangelism resulted in the planting of independent church communities among Croats from Međimurje, Zagorje, and Gorski Kotar, and among Serbs from Lika. Also, at the beginning of the 20th century many people who originated from the South Slavic region were converted and joined the Serbo-Croatian Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan in the USA. Some of them have returned to their homeland, led by Ivan Vacek, with the purpose of doing missionary work and planting Baptist churches.

Vinko Vacek is responsible for the institutionalization of the Baptist movement in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, especially in the Croatian parts, where there were a lot of Baptists (Jambrek 2003, 48-67). He began the publishing activity of

41 Pentecostal churches in Croatia originated from three sources: Slavonijan-Srijem Stundists, Prekmurian “Binkost” Christians which came from Slovenian/Vendian Lutherans, and through the activities of missionaries from the USA.

42 The Daničić-Karadžić translation.

the Baptist movement, and one of the most important parts of it was publishing and editing the Baptist publication, *Glas evanđelja* (*Voice of the Gospel*). The publication was published between 1923 and 1927 in Daruvar, and after the Vacek family moved to Zagreb it was printed in Zagreb until the beginning of World War II. It contained many articles about Baptist teaching, debates with Roman Catholics and Adventists, and a number of reports regarding church activities (baptisms, the opening of houses of prayer, etc.). It was published monthly.

That is what makes *Glas evanđelja*⁴³ an authentic and good source, which can tell us if and when the Baptist church, as one of the Reformation-heritage churches, began to celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving Day, since this celebration is a part of the Baptist church tradition today.⁴⁴ In the first few issues, there are no titles which would directly point to Harvest Thanksgiving Day. There are passages which imply special gratefulness during the autumn season, i.e. issue #9 from 1925, which talks about a gathering in Daruvar where there was “*thanksgiving to God Almighty, who has lead us in past days through all our hardships, and has kept us and gathered so many of us...*” In issue #11 there is a “public thanksgiving” for the donations collected from the Baptist World Alliance in London; from Mačkovec for the help “*to the brothers and sisters for having compassion with us in the misfortune that befell us on account of the fire, and they came to our aid with such a wonderful gift*”; and from Daruvar for the help to “*our sisters across the Ocean, for their heartfelt gift...*” The harvest theme can also be seen in issue #8 from 1929, when a sermon was brought to Vojvodina (Veliki Bečkerek⁴⁵). And yet, none of these reports give us any direct mention of Harvest Thanksgiving Day.

However, in issue #10 from October, 1932 we find a report signed by Vacek (Vinko)⁴⁶ which undoubtedly points to the presence and the celebration of Harvest Thanksgiving Day among Baptists:

Zagreb. On October 2nd this year, we’ve had a wonderful celebration of the tenth anniversary of my coming to Yugoslavia, which is mentioned in another place of this publication. On the said Sunday, we had a Day of Thanksgiving for God’s mercy, and on that occasion fruits and vegetables were laid out in

43 NSK signature 90.639.

44 Telephone interview with Svjetlana Mraz on January 26, 2016. “On Harvest Thanksgiving Day, an appropriate sermon about thankfulness is prepared, and the place of worship is decorated.”

45 Today, Zrenjanin in Banat, which was inhabited by German Lutherans prior to 1945.

46 Vinko Vacek was born in 1882 near Daruvar. He went to Detroit, USA, in 1910 as an economic migrant. He became a Christian in a Czech Baptist church, after which he transferred to a Serbo-Croatian Baptist church, which ordained him as a minister and continued to support him after he went back to the homeland. He worked in Daruvar and Zagreb until his death (Jambreč 2003, 49).

front of the pulpit, and everything was wonderfully decorated, which showed us the abundance of God's blessings that He blesses us with every year... At the end, we collected the offerings which were intended for helping brother Hamar and his children... (1932.10).

Here we clearly see all the elements of Harvest Thanksgiving Day: the date and time of celebration (beginning of October), decorated place of worship, special sermon about thanksgiving, socializing of believers, and solidarity with the needy. All these elements were present in the Erntedankfest that was celebrated by German Lutherans, although when it comes to Baptists in Croatia, there is a strong Czech influence.

There is a large Czech minority⁴⁷ in Daruvar and its surrounding area, where the Baptist movement first began. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Czechs were settling in Croatian regions, just as the Germans were. They brought with them two of their harvest-related customs. The first was called *Obzinky*, and it was celebrated at the end of August and the beginning of September. It is more of a national (i.e. folk) festival which marks the end of harvest. That is when sheafs of wheat are decorated with wildflowers and put on a carriage or on girls' heads. During *Obzinak* there are dances and gatherings where special food and drinks are served. The second custom is *Posvícení*, which has religious symbolism that is primarily tied to Roman Catholic tradition. This custom is celebrated in honor of various patron-saints (i.e. protectors) of cities and towns, and in the autumn it is celebrated as *Kirvaj*⁴⁸ in Slavonija,⁴⁹ with processions, food, and rejoicing. In Croatia these festivals are celebrated as part of Czech (and Slovak) ethnic identification.

Early Baptists, and especially those from Daruvar and its surrounding area (Golubinjak, Končanica), had not abandoned their ethnicity by leaving the traditional (i.e. Roman Catholic or Lutheran) faith, so they continued to celebrate their own ethnic festivals by placing a greater religious emphasis on them and adapting them to their own circle of believers. And yet, during the initial formation of the Baptist congregation in Daruvar, most believers came from a German background, then came the Czechs, and later on, through evangelism, Croats as well (Jambreč 2003, 45).

In the *Glas evanđelja* from the Zagreb Baptist church in 1932 we can clearly

47 The headquarters of the Czech Alliance in Croatia is in the city today, <http://www.savez-ceharrh.hr/>, and two thirds of Czechs in Croatia today live in Bjelovarsko-bilogorska county (Tatalović 2005, 68).

48 The word "kirvaj" comes from the Roman Catholic customs of German settlers, called Kirchweihe, which means "consecration."

49 Telephone interviews with Ivan Vrbicki, Secretary of the Czech Alliance in Croatia; and Pastor Ladislav Ružička, who is originally from the Daruvar area - March 17, 2016.

see the continuity of celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving Day, because the “tenth anniversary” was celebrated in that year. This means that Harvest Thanksgiving Day was present in the Croatian Baptist movement from the very beginnings, and that the celebration of the festival by early Baptists was understandable, considering the ethnicities of believers, although it had an important religious (biblical-Protestant) significance.

Pentecostals and Harvest Thanksgiving Day

The Croatian Pentecostal movement has its origin in the Pietist movement among the German Lutherans from Beška, a town in Srijem (Jambrek 2003, 100-101). The congregation in Beška had about 400 members. The Pentecostal teaching spread very rapidly among German Lutherans in other parts of Slavonija and Srijem. As time went by, other ethnic congregations of Protestant background, such as Slovaks and Hungarians, joined the movement. During the 1930s more and more Slavs (i.e. Croats and Serbs) joined the movement as a result of evangelism. In its early stages, the movement was called “the spiritual movement,” named after the Festival of the Spirit, (i.e. Pentecost, Shavuot).

As time went by, the spiritual movement branched out into three factions.⁵⁰ Due to the inability to register with the government (unlike the Baptists) until the end of World War II, they nominally belonged to the German Lutheran Church of the Augsburg confession⁵¹ (Arapović 2003, 56). Thus, the spiritual churches unified elements of German Pietism, Pentecostal dynamics, liturgical simplicity, and extreme conservatism as well (Arapović 2003, 50). They celebrated the major Christian holy days, with a special emphasis on Pentecost.

We have sources about the festivals in two Pentecostal magazines, which were published until World War II in Vinkovci⁵²: “*Entscheidung für Christus und sein Wort*” - a publication of the “Malokršteni” (baptized-as-infants) Pentecostals in the German language, and the “*Put spasenja*,” a publication of the so-called “Ve-

50 The “malokršteni,” who accepted the Pentecostal teaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but kept the practice of baptizing infants from the Lutheran church; the “velikokršteni,” who accepted the teaching about baptizing adults in 1930s as the symbol of the “new birth”; and the “nogoprani” (foot-washer) faction, who included foot washing in their worship, after Jesus’ example in the Gospels (John 13).

51 This is why even the “*velikokršteni*” were baptizing their children in the Lutheran church. Without that, a person could not be officially married or buried.

52 Vinkovci - more precisely, Vinkovačko Novo selo (Neudorf) is one of the most important centers for German Lutherans. After World War I, this informal synod of Protestant churches in the SHS Kingdom was held there (Wild 1980, 72).

likokršteni” (baptized-as-adults) Pentecostals. Looking into those magazines⁵³ shows us no titles or even indications of celebrating *Harvest Thanksgiving Day*. The answer can be that either both magazines were primarily aimed at evangelism and not so much reports, or that they continued to attend the *Erntedankfest* celebrations just like the German Lutherans, and it was not necessary to point that out in the magazine. Still, the Harvest Thanksgiving Day tradition was not *lost*, and we will see that later on.

After World War II

World War II resulted in many losses for Protestant churches and believers who belonged to new movements. The majority of the German ethnic community, a great number of Lutherans and Pentecostals among them, were forced to bear the unjust collective guilt of the German people. Believers from Slavonija, Srijem, Vojvodina, and Bosnia were being imprisoned, dispersed, and deported to Germany or Austria (Boisset 1999, 192-193). It is paradoxical that it was only after this that the remaining Pentecostal congregations obtained the legal right to work, and that they first received legal recognition in the new (Communist) country.

This was the moment when one would expect that the Harvest Thanksgiving Day tradition could be completely lost, due to the ethnic changes among believers and the reorganizing of churches.⁵⁴ However, looking into several sources shows us that this didn't happen after all.

Sources after the War

After a ten-year pause caused by the events of war and the postwar period, in the 1950s there was a renewal and consolidation of Pentecostal denominations. Based on the decision made by Christ's Pentecostal Church in Yugoslavia, publishing work began again, and in March 1957 a monthly publication of *Riječ Božja* began (Jambrek 2003, 146). The monthly, also known as the “newsletter,” was written on a typewriter on A4 paper in Veščica, in Prekomurje, and it was duplicated in KPC Osijek (Zadarska 19) under the editorship of Dragutin Volf. The newsletter was mostly comprised of sermons and a few reports, plus a Bible reading plan. Due to a lack of funds, the newsletter was modestly formatted, but

53 NSK “Put Spasenja”: 87 361 and “Entscheidung.”

54 The new Alliance of the Spiritual Church of Christ was joined by Slovenian congregations from the Prekomurje, where there was no *Erntedank* tradition - interview with Estera Üllen - January 2016.

is still a completely relevant source historically.

The issues which were published in the autumn, i.e., at the time when *Erntedankfest* had previously been celebrated, are relevant for this research. In one of the preserved issues⁵⁵ from October 1959, which had twelve pages and six titles, two titles, *Thanksgiving Day* and *Be Thankful*, are included. The first one was a translation by D.V., and the second one was written by an unknown author signed as “O.” The articles talk about the need to always be thankful to God, and not just on one day of the year, and they answer the questions of how, where, when, and why we should give thanks. Here is an interesting reflection from the first article: *Not just one day in the year*. This kind of language is typical for early Pentecostalism as a renewed religious movement, which offered a critical approach to formal religiousness that lacks true godly content. The authors followed up on other holy days with similar articles, but it is important to note here that *Harvest Thanksgiving Day* was (and still is) present in the time after the war, and it was the starting point for the articles from October.

Other sources offer us the testimony of postwar photographs. One of the most famous photos was published in the book by Stanko Jambrek, *Crkve reformacijske baštine* (Evangelical Churches), on page 123 (Jambrek 2003), and on the official Evangelical-Pentecostal Church website in the place which talks about the history of Evangelical churches in Croatia (www.epc.hr/hr/povijest/povijest/). The photo shows a congregation of believers (around a hundred of them) in front of the then rented synagogue in Donji Grad (part of Osijek). The photo caption reads, “Osijek - *Harvest Thanksgiving*, August 28, 1955,” and in small print it says “Foto Bučar.” This visual testimony is proof that *Harvest Thanksgiving* went on to be an important event among Pentecostal believers after the war. So we are talking about a large, organized gathering of believers, and it is certain that all the known elements of *Erntedank* were present: the worship service, believers in fellowship, decorating the church, etc. The thing that is not exactly identical is the date of the celebration, which was the case in Lutheran tradition.

The third major source is found in oral history. Through many oral testimonies of believers from Pentecostal churches we notice a continuity in celebrating *Harvest Thanksgiving Day*, mostly in churches in Slavonija, but also in Zagreb. Even today the tradition is honored in the Osijek synagogue at the beginning of October, and in the EPC “*Radosna vijest*” in Zagreb, as well as in the EPC of Christ the King in Rijeka.⁵⁶

55 Archived and owned by EPC “*Radosna vijest*” in Zagreb.

56 Interviews with pastors: Damir Špoljarić (Osijek), Ivica Glavačko (Zagreb), and Milan Špoljarić (Rijeka).

A review of other congregations in Croatia

Apart from the Evangelical-Pentecostal Church and the Baptist Church in Croatia, Harvest Thanksgiving Day⁵⁷ is still present in the Lutheran Church, but not among Reformed churches.⁵⁸ The Church of God⁵⁹ also does not keep this custom, while some Churches of Christ (Varaždin) keep the day, informally tied to the American Thanksgiving, which is the last Thursday in November. The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia also does not celebrate *Harvest Thanksgiving Day*. This can be seen in the *Small Lexicon of Liturgy*, translated from German and written by Rupert Berger, published by the Catholic publishing house, Kršćanska sadašnjost, in 1993. Some German entries in the Lexicon were left out on purpose, and the translator's notes explain why that is the case. Some phrases are tied to the Lutheran Church, such as *Buss und Bettag* (day of penance and prayer), or *Abendmahl*, i.e. the Lord's Supper, which is liturgically different from the Catholic Eucharist. There is also no mention of *Erntedank*, i.e. Harvest Thanksgiving Day. As a reason for omitting this entry, it was cited that it was "*not well established in our parts.*" So, unlike with the German Catholics, who took over and modified this Lutheran feast,⁶⁰ it never really took in Croatia. There are some newer celebrations, such as "Days of Bread," which have some similarities to *Harvest Thanksgiving Day*. In central Croatia we also find a celebration of *Harvest Thanksgiving* that is organized by the Czech national minority in Bjelovar. This example can be used for some further ethnographic and historical research.

Conclusion

According to the definition of the *Lexicon of Evangelical Christianity*, Evangelical churches are *independent churches which accepted from Luther's Protestantism that Scripture, grace, and faith (the 3 Solas) are the only foundations for man's relationship with God; and from radical Reformation-heritage tradition, the teaching*

57 Interview with pastor of the Lutheran Church of Christ the King in Zagreb, Moran Rajković.

58 Interview with Dr. Jasmin Milić, bishop of the Protestant Reformed Christian Church.

59 Personal interview with retired bishop Josip Jendričko (Church of God) - January 2016.

60 It is worth noting that the other generally accepted symbols, such as decorating Christmas trees and the Advent wreaths with candles, came from the German Lutheran tradition (Šaško 2005, 440).

about discipleship; the conviction that a person must believe and then be baptized; and the awareness of proclaiming the Gospel, etc. (Jambrek 2007, 92).

Apart from the fundamental beliefs, the Reformation-heritage churches (i.e. Evangelical churches) took some other traditions from traditional Protestantism, such as the *Harvest Thanksgiving Day*. This custom became established in older Pentecostal and Baptist churches, which organize gatherings at the end of August or the beginning of October, and have worship services in decorated places of worship. This tradition points to the Reformation heritage of the churches (which is an attribute in the official protocol in the Mutual Interest Agreement with the Government of the Republic of Croatia); is rooted in biblical history, and a connection between Christianity and Judaism, especially in terms of the Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles); and points to the ethnic background of the pioneers of these churches.

Besides this, Harvest Thanksgiving is an excellent opportunity to bring the biblical message of thankfulness to God and of mutual Christian solidarity to believers today. Even though the harvest is less and less prominent in urban and newer churches, it still carries with it an important biblical allegory of evangelism and Christ's return. This is why this wonderful custom should be renewed and modernized for the purpose of proclaiming the timeless biblical messages of thankfulness, spiritual symbolism, respect for the workers of the past and, last but not least, mutual solidarity among believers.

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Vatroslav Župančić

Dan žetvenih zahvala u crkvama reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj

Sažetak

Članak istražuje običaj Dana žetvene zahvale u Crkvama reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj. Prvi dio nastoji pronaći biblijski temelj za obilježavanje ovog događaja. Zatim se prelazi na istraživanje opće crkvene povijesti u potrazi za sličnim tradicijama i izvorima Žetvenih zahvala. Na kraju se kroz razne primarne pisane i oralne izvore nastoji istražiti proslava Žetvene zahvale na hrvatskim područjima.