

# A Hopeful Future: Reflections on Global Evangelicalism and the Croatian Context<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Despite valid criticisms and the challenge of definition, evangelicalism remains a real and vital coalition of like-minded Christians committed to the historic Christian faith both globally and in Croatia. Evangelical Christianity in Croatia has its distinct history, challenges, and needs for its future, and its theologians will need to play a crucial role in the ongoing life and growth of evangelical churches. Four important areas are highlighted for the role of the theologian: commitment to scriptural teaching and discipleship in local churches; critical evaluation of outside influences; engagement with and contribution to the global evangelical faith, and engagement with wider Croatian society and Roman Catholicism. While some evangelicals approach the future with optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic approaches, the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia is rather rooted in a hopeful view: the eschatological hope of the Gospel. The life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus and the gift of the eschatological Spirit to the church form the historical basis by which evangelical Christians in Croatia are called and empowered to live out their future hope in the present.*

Keywords: *evangelicalism, evangelical Christianity, theology, eschatology, hope*

- 1 This article is based on a presentation of the same title given at the 2021 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Association of Croatia. The meeting theme was “The Role of the Theologian in the Life of the Church in the Croatian Context,” and the topic I was given to address was “The Future of Evangelical Christianity in Croatia: An Outsider’s View.” This article thus considers the topic within the wider theme of the meeting.

## Introduction

To speak about the future puts one on the precipitous ground. I make no prophetic claims, and for me, as for most of us, the future, at least in its specific details, remains a mystery to be unveiled or an empty page waiting to be filled in. Nevertheless, everyone has opinions and hopes and can observe trends and trajectories that suggest possibilities. But the Christian theologian is not called to be a prognosticator of the future but a proclaimer of divine promise who actively lives and teaches the reality of this promise in the present based on the revelation and acts of God in the past. That is, what one thinks about the future is based on what one thinks of the past, and necessarily affects how one lives in our present. But *what* one thinks about the future is also very much conditioned by *how* one thinks about it. Later I will discuss four ways of considering the future and relate them to the evangelical Christian movement in Croatia: a positive view, a negative view, a realistic view, and a hopeful view. But first I will reflect on evangelicalism in Croatia and the role of theologians in that context.

I should also note that what follows is written from an external perspective, by a non-Croatian. To be honest, I was uncertain about how to orient myself to this task. As a “Croatian son-in-law” who has lived in Croatia for fourteen of the past eighteen years, I wonder whether I am an outsider who happens to currently be on the inside and can look from here to there and back. Or am I a late-coming insider who was formerly on the outside who can therefore look from here to there and back? I am not sure I fulfill either role particularly well since I feel rather disengaged from the scene in my native country and yet not able to be a true insider in my adopted country. To be sure, my understanding of evangelicalism has been most profoundly shaped by my North American upbringing and theological education, but also by my practical experience as a missionary in Central and Eastern Europe. In any case, I hope my contribution from a perspective somewhere in between will be helpful.

### 1. Evangelical Christianity

As noted above, and as many scholars have expressed, defining the label “evangelical” with any kind of precision is fraught with difficulty. Who and what are evangelicals? Is there an “evangelical theology?” Due to the variety of traditions represented, a continually developing theological diversity, and an oft-perceived lack of ecclesiological or intellectual depth (Husbands and Treier 2009, 9–10; Noll 1994), some severely doubt the accuracy or usefulness of the category (Dayton 1991; Hart 2004). Indeed, those calling themselves “evangelical” or who are called so by others have very different worship practices, traditions, and theological convictions: liturgical or not; Protestant or Pietist; Pentecostal (or charismatic) or not; Arminian or Calvinist; Reformed or Wesleyan; complementarian or egalitarian.

tarian, those who worship in contemporary music and styles and those who stay more traditional (whatever the tradition maybe), etc. The fact that these varieties exist *within* what is normally deemed evangelicalism shows that the movement is something quite different from a particular church body or tradition.

Nevertheless, the widespread use of the label in churches, international and cross-denominational organizations, educational institutions, and publications demand some explanation. There must be some common characteristics that lead some Christians to consider themselves, their churches, or institutions as “evangelical.”<sup>2</sup> An appeal is often made to George Bebbington’s (1989) well-known “quadrilateral” of British evangelicalism, denoting conversion, activism, biblicism, and centrism as its main characteristics.<sup>3</sup> However, as Timothy Larsen (2007, 2) has more recently written in the *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, it would be possible to identify Francis of Assisi as an “evangelical” in such a rubric. Although Larsen fully affirms the usefulness of the quadrilateral, he offers to supplement and update it with his own “Larsen pentagon,” which is too lengthy to state here in full but covers much the same ground as Bebbington while in addition emphasizing that evangelicals “stand in the global Christian networks” arising from the 18<sup>th</sup> century revivalist movements “associated with George Whitefield and John Wesley” (2007, 5), and the stress on the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, sanctification, service, and evangelism (2007, 10). Larsen (2007, 3) aims for a definition that could be appropriated by Christians across the globe, from Africa to Europe, Asia, South America, and beyond. Of course, the Lausanne movement is concrete evidence of the reality of evangelicalism as a growing global movement that, while certainly not homogeneous, nor limited to a singular or even a few denominations or traditions, still maintains distinct unifying characteristics across various denominations, traditions, and cultures, as well as the varieties of theology and praxis noted above.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century denominational splits most often occurring over the issues of biblical inspiration and authority resulted in the distinguishing between mainline denominations and evangelical denominations from the same denominational tradition (for example Presbyterianism). But even within mainline denominations, some local congregations and individual believers will still consider themselves “evangelical,” and frequently ally with parachurch evangelical movements or institutions. Nevertheless, there is still some question as to whether

2 A wide and steady stream of publications much too long to list here about evangelicals, evangelicalism and evangelical theology continues to appear unabated into the present.

3 Bebbington has more recently (2021) published a two-volume set of reprinted papers that complement and expand the original volume.

4 On the web page advertising Stott’s Lausanne Movement, it claims that more than any other document in recent Church history, this document has served to define the evangelical faith. <https://lausanne.org/content/lausanne-covenant-the-with-study-guide>.

all theologically conservative traditional Protestants from the reformation traditions would necessarily call themselves evangelicals, or if they did, whether they could agree on the meaning of the term (Hart 2004).<sup>5</sup>

Is “evangelicalism” therefore a “big tent” within which many different Christians who fall under the rubrics listed above find commonality? The criticism of the “big tent” model is that it ignores the particularities of church bodies and traditions and can indeed promote a rather superficial theology that could work against serious discipleship and theological depth (Horton 2001; Hart 2004).

On the other hand, as Olson (2001, 161–162) responds, the evangelical coalition remains valuable in two ways. First, it promotes the Gospel and a biblical worldview even when different groups disagree in important areas. Indeed, as Budiselić (2017, 86) argues, evangelical Christianity today may find a parallel in the Patristic period, where prevalent theological and exegetical disagreements could exist within the broader unifying consensus of the rule of faith. Second, the evangelical coalition makes a common cause against an array of adversarial worldviews: fast advancing secularism, theological liberalism, where the Bible is denied its inspiration and authority, and separatist fundamentalism, which cuts off the church from its mission in the world.

While the criticisms of Hart, Horton, and others are valid,<sup>6</sup> and evangelical churches undoubtedly need to deepen and strengthen their own core theological identities and discipleship practices, broad evangelicalism nevertheless remains an important reality in an increasingly post-Christian west. Where evangelical Christians are a small minority such as in Croatia, keeping such a coalition intact, in dialogue, and theologically engaged is crucial for the future of the church.

## 2. Evangelical Christianity in Croatia and the Role of the Theologian

Evangelical Christianity in Croatia has its distinct history with roots in the Reformation in Croatian lands (Blažević, Jambrek and Štefanec 2015), and has emerged

5 Of course, in some European continental contexts, the term “evangelical” is basically equivalent to Protestant, or Lutheran (Larsen 2007, 2). Also, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican churches are sometimes referred to as “Protestant,” and distinguished from the pietistic churches as “churches of the Reformation heritage” (see Jambrek 2003, 13–21). However, as noted in the text, in the North American environment, these three reformed traditions are split theologically, with most conservative denominations from those traditions considering themselves “evangelical.” Moreover, liberal leaning denominations from pietistic traditions would still fall under the “mainline” label.

6 Horton (2001, 154) helpfully refers to C. S. Lewis’ (1980, preface) illustration of “mere Christianity” (i.e., equivalent to broader evangelicalism) as being a hallway in a house with many rooms, the hallway representing “mere Christianity” while the rooms represent different Christian confessions. As Lewis states, “the hall is a place to wait in... not a place to live in.”

through historical Protestant churches and other churches with a “reformation heritage” (Jambrek 2003; 2017). Undoubtedly, that peculiar history, alongside the ongoing influence of global evangelical movements has impacted the development of evangelicalism in Croatia into the present (Jambrek 2009, 195). But today, due to globalism, the internet, the ease of access to a wide variety of ideas, and Croatia’s increasing integration into the European Union and broader western culture, the continuing impact of external influences on Croatian evangelicalism may be greater than ever. That means that the challenges faced by global evangelicals will be similarly reflected among evangelicals in Croatia. From my outsider point of view, therefore, one of the most crucial factors for the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia will be how Croatian evangelical churches engage with and theologically discern the profusion of information and ideas that will bombard it from abroad, both from inside and outside global evangelicalism. By implication, the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia in this increasingly global context will largely depend upon the extent and quality of the role of evangelical theologians in its midst to faithfully lead, discern and shepherd churches in accordance with Scripture. I think that is right. But, as a gathering of theologians, we may again be on the somewhat precipitous ground. It is not my interest here to delimit who should be considered a theologian in the professional sense, but it is important to consider what a theologian is or should be before considering their role in the life of the church.

On one hand, everyone who engages in discourse about God, especially publicly and through the act of teaching others, is practicing theology. Ironically, even Christians and preachers who like to criticize theology and theologians under the wrong assumption that theology is a merely academic practice detached from or antithetical to a living faith, are themselves practicing theology in so doing. To be sure, there are plenty of examples of bad theology or even so-called theology that is hostile to the Gospel. But practiced rightly and truly, Christian theology is a calling “to know and speak truly of God” (Vanhoozer 2018, 27). Or as John Webster puts it, “that delightful activity in which the church praises God by ordering its thinking towards the Gospel of Christ” (cited in Vanhoozer 2018, 30). It is a vocation, though not necessarily a profession, regardless of whether it is practiced primarily in the academy or in the church. Indeed, Christian theology must remain rightly centered on the church as its context for thinking and praxis, while the Christian academy must always serve as a support of the church to that end. Theology therefore should not be conceived of as primarily academic and detached from the life and leadership of the church, but rather as a centrally vital and significant activity of the church. Gladly, there are signs in North America and globally of the recovery of the idea of the “pastor-theologian” (Vanhoozer and Strachan 2015). Here in Croatia, due to the small number of evangelical churches, many if not most professional evangelical Croatian theologians are also pastors by

necessity, or at least engaged in regular Christian ministry in addition to academic teaching, research, and writing. But the number of such trained pastor-theologians remains relatively low and so there continues to be a great need to equip existing and emerging Christian leaders and pastors with quality theological education that is centered on the mission of the church in the world.

What then is the role of the theologian in the life of Croatian evangelical churches? A comprehensive answer to this question is both beyond my ability and the scope of this paper, but I do offer four areas that I think are significant.<sup>7</sup> First, building on the reflections above, as evangelical theologians we must continually recommit ourselves to biblical teaching and discipleship in our local churches. This is not always easy for those with ministries in academic institutions. The pull to devote oneself completely to academic theology – professional teaching, research, writing, attending international symposia, networking, etc. – will be strong. But while these endeavors are valuable and necessary, we cannot allow them to keep us from active and substantial involvement in our local churches, especially in the reading and exposition of the Holy Scriptures and the making of disciples (1 Tim 4:13; Matt 28:16-20).

Along the same lines, given the nature of global evangelicalism as a broad coalition of different Christian confessions, I would encourage Croatian evangelical theologians to engage more rigorously in their denominational traditions and theological convictions to advance faithful and effective discipleship and ecclesial practice in their local churches. Thankfully, there are many commonalities between, for example, Baptists and Pentecostals, and these should be valued and celebrated. But theologians from either group need not sacrifice their distinct theological convictions in the service of a broader evangelical alliance. Yet, at the same time, theologians can, and must, nurture love and unity between different evangelical churches and denominations and work closely together in their many areas of agreement. Yet, work towards authentic unity cannot be forged without a deep understanding of one's theological tradition, history, and convictions. An advantage for Croatian evangelicals is that there are relatively few evangelical denominations in comparison to, for example, the USA. In short, it is both possible and God-honoring to have real, serious theological disagreements, and yet remain in broader unity and love in the essentials of historic and biblically centered Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

7 These reflections are not meant to suggest that Croatian evangelical theologians are not already doing these things, they certainly are! Rather, I present them simply to affirm their importance and encourage continued practice and growth.

8 In my view, such ecumenicism is both possible and desirable for evangelicals, and undoubtedly more challenging, even with churches outside of the evangelical sphere, insofar as those communities recognize the authority of scripture and the lordship of Christ. However, that issue is outside the scope of the present writing.

Second, given the reality of today's world of free-flowing ideas, evangelical theologians must devote time and energy to critical evaluation of the various external influences that affect contemporary Croatian evangelicalism. As discussed above "evangelicalism" is a term describing Christians who hold much in common but whose diversity and lack of concrete authoritative structures of the more established church and denominational bodies often allow the "evangelical" category (or other synonymous terms) to be appropriated by teachers and ministries whose teaching and practice is on the edge of orthodoxy or even forthrightly heretical. Sadly, such movements and leaders, sometimes bolstered by money, can too often gain damaging influence on ordinary Christians and even church leaders. This is nothing new. Indeed, that the earliest Christian apostles and leaders saw this as a vital role is evident throughout the New Testament (2 Cor 11:13; Gal 2:4; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1). Evangelical theologians must therefore take an active role in faithfully shepherding Christ's flock by watching carefully what teaching and practices are gaining access into local communities and denominations. This is not an attractive job. As Vanhoozer (2018, 31) puts it, "many people resent being told they are not lords of their own lives." But it is also at times a challenge to wrestle with decisions over what is an essential truth or what fits within the "rule of faith." That is why the theological enterprise must be practiced in concert with other faithful pastors, leaders, and theologians, and why bodies such as the Evangelical Theological Association of Croatia, along with churches and academic institutions, need to work together, while also being actively involved in likeminded global networks.

Thirdly, I would also encourage Croatian evangelical theologians to understand their global involvement as a two-way, not a one-way street. That is, in addition to being on the receiving end of global evangelicalism, Croatian evangelicals should also consider the distinctive voice and contribution Croatian, and perhaps more broadly, south Slavic expressions of evangelicalism and evangelical theology can make to the wider evangelical world. Croatian evangelicals should not allow their small numbers or meager resources to prohibit them from giving to the life of Christ's worldwide church. Remember Jesus' comments on the poor widow (Luke 21:2-3), "Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all of them" (ESV). What is the distinction of the evangelicals here that could be gifted to help strengthen and encourage global evangelicals? I would suggest some areas: the distinctive history and testimonies of evangelical Christians in this part of the world; the close Christian love and fellowship nurtured because of the small size and minority status; the post-communist context and the lessons learned from that recent history and the transition from it into contemporary western European culture; the unity and fellowship across ethnic divides that in the larger local

cultures remain tense or hostile; and the possibility of faithful Christian presence even as a small minority in a small country.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, I suggest Croatian evangelical theologians should continue to consider the distinct contribution Croatians evangelicals have made and continue to make to larger Croatian society, even to the larger religious context of Roman Catholicism. However, this need not be done in an adversarial way. Croatian evangelicals need not continually define themselves over against their Roman Catholic neighbors. Rather, they might ask how they can better *love* and *serve* their Catholic neighbors with the gifts of their evangelical faith, and, reciprocally, how they can maintain a humble openness to learn from God through these same neighbors.

### 3. Back to the Future: Four Perspectives

Now, having considered evangelicalism and the role of the theologian in evangelical churches, I want to go back to the future, or more precisely, to the four perspectives on the future I noted in the opening. In what ways do evangelicals in the Croatian context, or even globally, consider the future? First, many evangelicals look at the future *optimistically*. One might think that for Christians, this should be the default view. But I want to distinguish between an optimistic view and a hopeful view, which I will discuss below. It is certainly not bad to be optimistic. One might say it is better than being pessimistic. But what is optimism? Was Peter being optimistic when he rebuked Jesus for speaking about his coming suffering and death (Matt 16:22)? Were the Judeans optimistic when they opposed Jeremiah's warnings about YHWH's coming judgment on them through the Babylonians? In contemporary evangelicalism, optimism is often at the heart of different expressions of triumphalist theologies, whether it is prosperity teaching, which is often most easily adopted by the poor and vulnerable, or triumphalism which rejects prosperity teaching because it is practiced by those already quite prosperous and comfortable. The former heresy both misunderstands the Gospel and often leads to major disappointment, while the latter can produce an unhealthy satisfaction with the status quo and a lack of concern to address injustice, poverty, and suffering.

Another type of optimism is the constant assurance and proclamation of a great revival just around the corner. How often have you heard, especially visitors, missionaries, etc. from abroad tell Croatian congregations how they have some special insight or revelatory knowledge that Croatia was about to embark on a great revival, and sometimes even to be the catalyst of a worldwide revival? May it be so! Of course, I don't mean to dismiss everyone who has entertained such

9 In the talk given upon which this article is based, I used the illustration of the necktie, invented by Croatians. My (metaphorical) exhortation was to "wear your neckties!"



enthusiasm. Often, messages like this are given with sincere motivation and a real heart of love for their audience. But misguided optimism can sometimes work quite against the very hope that drives it, and often fails to consider or recognize what an authentic and lasting revival would even look like in the context of Croatia.

On the other hand, we too often hear *pessimistic* views of the future. As an outsider-insider or insider-outsider, I find myself being critical of the negativity around me that my Croatian and Balkan friends often tell me about, and which I have indeed experienced first-hand. What is worse is when I catch myself adopting and practicing the very same negativity. Yet, a certain amount of pessimism can be healthy, if for nothing else than to offset misguided optimism. Pessimists are sometimes right, perceiving the real state of affairs much more accurately than optimists. After all, we live in a fallen, sinful world, and experience teaches us, if nothing else, that even when things are going well, we should not expect they will stay that way. Of course, from a biblical view, we know those true prophets were often criticized because they were perceived to be negative and pessimistic about the near future (i.e., Jeremiah and Jesus). But the difference between pessimists and true prophets is the presence of hope. It is important to distinguish between a pessimistic view of the future and a healthy prophetic response to injustice. The former ultimately tears people down even further by barring them from true joy and hope in Christ, while the latter ultimately leads to renewal and restoration. And so, a truly prophetic outlook falls not under the category of a pessimistic view of the future, but under a hopeful view, as I shall discuss further below.

A third view of the future is the *realistic* view. And here is where academic theologians and intellectuals might most often find themselves. Recognizing the hazards of both an overly optimistic and overly pessimistic view, thinkers tend to calmly assert a more realistic view of the future based on history, current realities, and evident trends. There is no doubt that a healthy realism is good for the church. It is, for example, highly unlikely, despite optimistic proclamations in its favor, that Croatia will en masse turn to evangelical Christianity as some optimistic missionary speakers may have proclaimed. A realistic view of the future would put heavy doubt on such a possibility. But while a realistic view can be helpful by correcting extreme views, and keeping things stable, it runs the risk of relegating everything to probabilities based on human capability alone. Analyzing trends and statistics can be useful, but they may also simply turn into a religiously secular view of the future.

The final view of the future is the *hopeful* view. The hopeful view is not the same as sheer optimism, although it is ultimately optimistic. As already noted, the hopeful view is sometimes by necessity pessimistic, at least about aspects of the near future, or better, about man's future apart from the promise of God. And the hopeful view is the truly realistic one, in that it is based on the ultimate real-

ity, not of the world as it is, but of the world as it will be according to the divine promise, already activated in Jesus and his church. The hopeful view is the biblical eschatological view of the future. Perhaps that sounds like the future is far off, and not so relevant to the question at hand: the future of Croatian evangelicalism. But that is not the case if we agree that biblical eschatology is not simply an appendix to Christian thought and life, but its essential ingredient. This is indeed the view of theologians such as J. Moltmann (1967), N. T. Wright (2019), and G. K. Beale (1997). As Moltmann (1967, 17) asserts, “Christian theology does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality.” The New Testament is at its core a collection of eschatological writings, but not of an eschatology far off, but one that has been inaugurated at the coming of Jesus.

For Jews, the Messiah was expected to usher in the last days, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the wicked, and the deliverance of God’s elect. The messianic age for ancient Jews was to be an age of righteousness and bliss. But, as Jesus demonstrated by his life and death on the cross, the true Messiah of Israel took on the role of suffering servant, as foretold in the book of Isaiah. A surprising turn concerning the typical messianic expectation, and one that marked out the early church’s understanding of the coming of Jesus as the one who initiated the kingdom of God, with a full, final judgment yet delayed, resulting in a widening scope of the eschatological people of God to include repentant sinners from all nations by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Whereas ancient Judaism expected the eschatological resurrection of the dead and the new cosmos, Jewish Christians now understood that this one resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus, was the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20), anticipating and making possible the final resurrection at the consummation of the kingdom. The resurrection of Jesus signaled that the power of the old age had been irreversibly broken, was passing away, and a new age, a new creation had begun, whose full *telos* lay just over the horizon, so that the new creation, the redemption of the world, had been inaugurated, but still awaited its fulfillment. As Wright (2019, 212) states, “the resurrection of Jesus... is the beginning of creation’s renewal” (see Rom 8:18-25), and “is the reaffirmation, through redemptive transformation, of the old world.”<sup>10</sup>

Amid these two ages, the time between the times, Christians who put their faith in the crucified and risen Messiah are given the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit – a true sign of the new creation! This eschatological outlook is defined for New Testament theology. Indeed, Beale (1997, 13) argues that “all doctrine in

10 It is important to keep a clear distinction between the biblical concept of “age” (Greek αἰών), often translated as “world” and the physical creation itself. While the old age, marked by the fall and human sin, will pass away fully, the creation itself, originally made by God “very good” (Gen 1), will indeed be transformed and renewed (Rom 8:18-25). The resurrection of the body, i.e., its redemption, is according to Paul, the crucial factor in the renewal of all of creation.

the New Testament is essentially eschatological in nature.” For Beale, eschatology means “new creation,” which defines the NT people of God redeemed by Christ and given the gift of the Spirit. In this way, the Christian church is called to live in the reality of the eschatological future within its present during the time between the times, between the death and resurrection of Christ and his return. Evangelical Christians in Croatia have been given these precious gifts of God so that they can live out the future now in the present by bearing the fruit of the eschatological Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. . . (Gal 5:22). Eschatological hope, the hope of the future, is not a merely transcendent truth that lies out there, somewhere beyond remaining currently inaccessible, but rather is an already reality to be lived and practiced in earnest in the present within the particularities of each cultural context, including Croatia. The eschatological future is therefore the basis for all of the church’s praxis, such as how Croatian evangelicals practice evangelism within their cultural context (Kerovec 2008, 257–264).

Evangelical Christians in Croatia, like all believers in Christ, have a hopeful future, a future whose reality has been secured in the past and therefore can be lived out in the present, even as anticipatory signs during this present evil age. It is a sure hope, because of the faithfulness of God and the resurrection of Jesus. And while I cannot say what the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia is in precise terms for the very near future, I can say that the future for those who trust in Christ, receive his grace, and walk in His Spirit, will bear the fruit of the Spirit in their communities and among their neighbors, rightly worship their Lord, faithfully preach and live the good news, persevere through every trial, rightly discern injustice and respond righteously, and build communities of disciples who will love God and neighbor, worshipping and obeying the teaching of their Lord who is present with them even unto the end of the age (Matt 28:28-20).

## **Conclusion**

The somewhat surprising events of the past three years have shown us that it is difficult to foresee the events of the future. What the next three years have in store for us we cannot be sure. What is the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia? Insofar as Croatian evangelicals cling to the promises of God in the crucified and risen Messiah, through whom God is renewing all of creation, that future is hopeful and certain. Living out the sure eschatological hope of the future in the present, under the teaching of the Messiah, and in the power of the eschatological Spirit will enable Croatian evangelicals in Croatia to bear the fruit of that Spirit in their communities and among their people. Croatian evangelicals have a rich history of renewal, perseverance, and loving fellowship. These traits come from the favor of God and should be nurtured, expressed theologically, and transmitted to future

generations. But the world is rapidly changing, and influences from outside and all sides will be relentless and must be guarded against, and proactively countered with the truth of the Gospel. Internal theological debates will continue, and so theologians are also called to patiently bring wisdom and understanding to such conflicts in their church communities, even when they may not be immediately received. And even if Croatian evangelical theologians remain a small minority within their small minority churches within a small country, as they faithfully serve the Lord and teach the Gospel from their unique historical and cultural context, they will be a rich blessing to those both inside and outside Croatia.

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**Budućnost prožeta nadom:  
razmišljanja o globalnom evanđeoskom kršćanstvu i hrvatskom kontekstu**

Sažetak

Unatoč valjanim kritikama i izazovima definiranja evanđeoskoga kršćanstva, ono je i dalje stvarna i vitalna koalicija kršćana sličnoga mišljenja posvećenih povijesnoj kršćanskoj vjeri u svijetu i u Hrvatskoj. Evanđeosko kršćanstvo u Hrvatskoj ima svoju specifičnu povijest, izazove i potrebe za budućnost, a hrvatski će teolozi morati odigrati veoma važnu ulogu u daljnjem životu i rastu evanđeoskih crkava. Za ulogu teologa istaknuta su četiri važna područja: predanost svetopisamskom učenju i učeništvu u lokalnim crkvama, kritička procjena vanjskih utjecaja, uklju-

čenost u globalnu evanđeosku vjeru i doprinos istoj te dijalog sa širim hrvatskim društvom i rimokatoličanstvom. Iako neki evanđeoski kršćani budućnosti pristupaju optimistično, pesimistično ili realistično, budućnost evanđeoskoga kršćanstva u Hrvatskoj ipak je prožeta nadom: eshatološkom nadom evanđelja. Život, smrt i uskrsnuće Mesije Isusa te dar eshatološkoga Duha Crkvi čine povijesni temelj po kojemu su evanđeoski kršćani u Hrvatskoj pozvani i osposobljeni živjeti buduću nadu u sadašnjosti.