

# Guidelines for the Future of Evangelical Christianity in Croatia

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UDK: 279.123:005.86 (497.5)  
Original scientific paper  
<https://doi.org/10.32862/k.16.2.2>

## Abstract

*The article discusses the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia. Together with analyzing the existing spiritual state, the author offers five key guidelines. He believes that their application in the everyday life of believers and churches of the Reformation heritage can accomplish the future God has prepared, and which he empowers and determines. For a biblically fruitful and God-pleasing future, local church and denomination leadership should adopt biblical guidelines and as soon as possible begin the appropriate processes to include God's creative activity in Croatia: 1) perspective on life; 2) God's authority in the life of a believer and the church; 3) discipleship that manifests itself in service; 4) training spiritual leaders on all levels of service to God; 5) efficient leadership system. Together with every guideline, the author suggests and explains processes belonging to it. Thinking about the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia is focused on the consideration of God's Word in the context of spiritual, social, and cultural reality in which evangelical Christians live and co-create with God.*

Keywords: God's Word, evangelical Christianity, future, God's authority, discipleship, church leadership

## Introduction

Evangelical Christianity<sup>1</sup> in Croatia uniquely participates in the spiritual processes in Southeastern Europe, and together with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina shares a specific spiritual space in which, ever since the beginning of the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century until this day, fierce spiritual battles have been occurring in heavenly places.<sup>2</sup> These spiritual battles are invisible to the eye, but their consequences have been more than visible in real life, manifesting differently over many centuries, and forming specific spiritual, social, and cultural communities.

Southeastern Europe is a specific spatial, spiritual, social, cultural, and political area where different interests intertwine, touch, permeate and clash. These interests are primarily of a spiritual kind, but there are many other kinds as well. It is an area of strong and constant spiritual struggle that shows in almost all areas of human life, including interpersonal relations, marriage, family, economy, culture, and politics. Southeastern Europe is also a meeting place of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islam, Protestantism, Evangelical Christianity, and New Age spirituality, where all these often permeate each other and intertwine, but also clash. One of the historical spiritual battlefields in Southeastern Europe, which has seen and continues to see many fierce spiritual struggles and conflicts, is the area of today's Republic of Croatia. This spiritual struggle has been going on for centuries and it involves Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam, and it was joined by Evangelical Christianity in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Simply put, Croatian borders are the place where Catholicism was stopped from spreading to Southeastern Europe; where Orthodoxy was stopped from spreading westward; and Islam was stopped from spreading to Northwestern Europe. It is an intense, perfidious, and destructive spiritual struggle. Satan uses all means at his disposal – material, spiritual, social, economic, cultural, and political – to stop the spreading of God's kingdom.

As this discussion is focused on the future of evangelical Christianity, I am here only pointing out the closest context of spiritual struggles that to this day have a significant impact on evangelical Christianity in Croatia. Where is evangelical Christianity in this spiritual struggle? Is there any chance that it can win spiritual battles, or keep winning them? Which struggles has it lost so far, and which struggles does it keep losing? What battles are ahead of evangelical Christi-

- 1 The adjective *evangelical* comes with the term *Christianity* to indicate that the mentioned group of Christians or churches base their preaching and living on the gospel (Gr. *euangelion*) of Jesus Christ. That adjective in the title of a church points to the central role of Jesus Christ, grace, faith, and the Holy Scriptures, in church's faith and practice.
- 2 This article is based on my lecture "The Future of Evangelical Christianity in Croatia: An Insider's View" at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Association of Croatia, on December 4, 2021, at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek.

anity? There are many questions. Only God knows the answers. Spiritual struggles happen every day, they are intense and unavoidable. These battles can only be won in fellowship with the triune God through consistent doing of his Word under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These thoughts about the future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia and Southeastern Europe are focused on considerations of God's Word in the context of spiritual, social, and cultural reality in which evangelical Christians live and co-create with God. On one side, this future depends on God, and on the other hand, it depends on the existing believers and the local church leadership. The future depends on the cooperation of God and man, in which God leads and empowers chosen believers to accomplish his will and plans. God wants to use the believers to accomplish his will, and the believers can do no part of God's plan on their own, so they are called to co-create with God. God the Father is always at work (John 5:17) and God's commission is valid even for us today (Matt 28:18-20), Jesus had said. It is God's will for all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4), as the apostle Paul teaches us.

The content and the quality of the future that awaits believers and the church greatly depend on the decisions they make today. They will experience the fruit and consequences of today's good or bad decisions in the near or distant future. Therefore, the future is in the believer's hands in as much as he will be close to God to see what God is doing (John 5:19-20) and hear what God is doing. If the believer does not look to God, he will not see what God is doing. If the believer does not listen to God's voice, he will not hear what God is telling him. The same is true for a church as a community of believers. The future depends on the believer's closeness and obedience to God. Of course, we are talking about the future of believers and the church that God already prepared for them. That future is indicated in God's Word. The kind and quality of the future greatly depend on the adopted perspective on life.

For evangelical Christianity in Croatia to have a biblically fruitful and God-pleasing future, it should adopt the following guidelines and as soon as possible begin the appropriate spiritual processes<sup>3</sup> among Christians and churches to participate in God's creative work in Croatia and Southeastern Europe. I indicate here five key guidelines which include: 1) perspective on life; 2) God's authority in the life of a believer and the church; 3) discipleship that manifests itself in service; 4) training spiritual leaders on all levels of service to God; 5) efficient leadership system. Alongside every guideline, I suggest and explain processes belonging to it.

3 A process is the totality of actions performed to achieve a certain result (Pròces. Hrvatski jezični portal).

## 1. Living with the Eternal Perspective

The perspective from which a Christian looks at his life and adopts attitudes when making daily, short term or long-term decisions, is very important. In and around Croatia we can observe four perspectives on life of believers and churches as communities of believers. These perspectives have been very influential in the last thirty years, and still affect the life and doctrine of Christians and local churches. I have named them: *historical perspective*, *pragmatic perspective*, *humanist-futuristic perspective*, and *eternal perspective*. The fruit of each of these perspectives, or their consequences, can be seen in the lives of Christians, local churches,<sup>4</sup> and denominations.<sup>5</sup>

The historical perspective encourages believers to maintain and revive, in any way possible, the former way of believing and living. From the historical perspective, one looks at the church as it once was, and tries to maintain the church life of that time.<sup>6</sup> By focusing on the past to live in the present, one unsuccessfully tries to revive the contemporary understanding of past events. Of course, it is always useful for the church to re-examine the past to get a more objective insight into the present. Therefore, the church needs to learn from the past, but must not revive it.

The pragmatic perspective on the Christian life is significantly present among Croatian Christians. Man is at the center of this perspective, and God is his “servant.” Everything about spirituality revolves around man’s healthy and long life, property, well-being, wealth, success, blessing, good looks, good time with a lot of thrills, and good feelings (cf. 1 Sam 15:1-33).

In the humanist-futuristic perspective of the church, people gather around ideas that aim to improve society and create a new world. At the center of this perspective is a human idea and an agreement around it, where, most often, God is neither present nor needed (cf. Gen 11:1-9). Ideas about what Christians should believe and how they should live are drawn both from the Bible and different available secular sources.

The eternal perspective is most clearly seen in the life and work of Jesus Christ. According to John 17:1-5, the eternal perspective includes 1) Eternal life that is

4 A local church is a community of saints that gathers in one place or locale. It is a fellowship of born-again Christians baptized as adults after confessing their sins and personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Every local church has the fullness of ecclesiality because it is the place where God’s Word is being proclaimed and where the Spirit of God abides, making every local church independent and autonomous.

5 For the purpose of this article I have defined the term *denomination* as a community or alliance of local churches organized for the purpose of fulfilling common interests.

6 How can this be recognized? The easiest way to recognize the historical perspective is through modes of worship (keeping to old rituals and liturgical patterns), wearing of priestly clothes, use of historical songbooks and prayerbooks, printing and promoting of books of spiritual fathers from the past, etc.

in knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ; 2) Life on earth in glorifying God – doing everything that God gave us to accomplish; 3) Receiving glory from the Father. Church from the eternal perspective is based on the promise of resurrection that God gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Christians are called to live their lives with the eternal perspective, where Jesus’ life and teaching make the standard for all human relationships, including relationships toward God, toward people, toward everything God created, toward human creativity, toward money and material things, and the world. The eternal perspective is in correlation with eternal life as a present reality. John sums it up clearly: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (John 3:36). Eternal life was thus defined by Jesus: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Eternal life is a present reality for everyone who hears and does Jesus’s word and believes God the Father (John 5:24). This knowledge comes from experience and not from intellectual facts. The experience of knowing God transforms the believer’s life and gives him life eternal. Eternal life is a present, future, and eternal reality and experience of fellowship with the triune God. For every believer, as well as every church as a community of believers, it is important to live on this earth “in light of eternity,” because that is how eternity is realized in the present. The present world is only a contemporary home for a Christian, and “friendship with the world means enmity against God. Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (Jas 4:4).

### An Overview of Contemporary Church’s Perspectives on Life<sup>7</sup>

	HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE	HUMANIST-FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE	ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE
<b>EXAMPLES IN THE BIBLE</b>	Believers from the Pharisee sect at the Church Council (Acts 15:4-5).	Sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11-17).	Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9).	Life in God’s kingdom (John 3:3-21). Jesus’ living and teaching.
<b>ROLE OF GOD</b>	God who used to be active. Human reviving of the past. God is the “prisoner” of the past.	God is active today but acts according to man’s needs and desires. Everything is in the function of man’s well-being, while God is the servant executor of human desires.	There is no true need for God’s action. God is being offered to bless human plans and actions; God is unnecessary.	God is the absolute Lord.

7 This table overview has been taken from my book *Crkva za sva vremena i sve kulture* published by the Biblijski institut in 2022.

	HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE	HUMANIST-FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE	ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE
<b>WHAT IS AT THE CENTER</b>	God's and human activity in history.	Man with his needs and wishes. God's activity serves to fulfill man's needs and desires.	Human-planned and design activity in the present and the future.	Relationship with God and doing his will in every moment.
<b>TYPE OF WORSHIP SERVICE</b>	Liturgy is rooted in history with many historical and artistic expressions that are most often fruitless.	Worship where most of the elements are aimed at man's well-being and excitement.	Different types of worship services, from liturgy rooted in the past to charismatic manifestations.	Worship "in spirit and truth," maximally focused on the triune God and his will.
<b>THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF THE CHURCH</b>	Church as the people of God.	Church as the Body of Christ.	Church as the people of God; Church as the Body of Christ.	Church as the Body of Christ; Church as a community of Spirit.
<b>MODEL OF THE CHURCH AS AN IMAGE FROM LIFE</b>	Church as an institution; religious maintenance "service;" political party.	Media shows; theater; tourist buses.	Citizen association.	Beehive.
<b>ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS</b>	Return to the Roman Catholic Church. Acceptance of the Pope.	Emphasis on unity and fellowship with all whose central care is for man's wellbeing.	Emphasis is on the unity of the whole of humankind, all religions (including Christianity).	Emphasis on the spiritual unity of all born-again persons in Jesus Christ.
<b>RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORD OF GOD</b>	Tradition and church teaching have a higher authority than the Word of God (Mark 7:8-9).	The Word of God is abundantly used to satisfy human needs and desires.	The Word of God is used to affirm and strengthen human ideas (Mark 8:33).	The Word of God is used to do the will of God.
<b>ATTITUDE TOWARD EVANGELIZATION</b>	Very small emphasis on evangelization, and a much bigger emphasis on catechesis.	Evangelization is often replaced with the promotion of "man's well-being."	Evangelization is replaced by social and cultural work for the benefit of mankind.	Evangelization, as the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, is at the center of church activity.
<b>CHURCH LEADERSHIP</b>	Mostly episcopal.	Any pragmatic type of leadership.	Any kind of leadership that is highly influenced by modern management.	Leadership that is anointed and chosen by the Holy Spirit, and recognized and blessed by the church.

	<b>HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>HUMANIST-FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE</b>
<b>ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEOLOGY</b>	Historical theology. Theology focused on creeds, church councils, and teachers.	Pragmatic theology. Theology in the service of human desires and needs.	Philosophical theology. Theology focused on human thinking, philosophical speculations, theological discussion, and agreements.	Bible as the Word of God.  Theology focused on the relationship with God where God interprets his Word, and man accepts it as such.
<b>ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION</b>	There is a great emphasis on classical, historical, philosophical, and theological education.	Most often there is a bent toward superficiality in education directed at fulfilling man's needs and desires.	There is a great emphasis on education strongly influenced by humanist philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy.	Constant seeking to know God better, as well as his Word – the Bible, and his creation with all the truths, relations, and laws.

Only the church that has the eternal perspective can survive in all times and all cultures because it bases its life on God and the dynamic fellowship with God in accomplishing his will and plans revealed in his Word. With any other perspective, the church gets lost in the wastelands of social and cultural processes and changes, because the church is not primarily a social or cultural institution, although the fruit of believers-church members living as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” benefits the social community and general culture (Matt 5:13-16). God’s Words are for today’s church as well: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-3). This biblical text encourages us not to strive for earthly goals, but heavenly ones. It motivates us to have the perspective of eternal life.

## 2. To Live and Work Under God’s Authority

Evangelical Christianity in Croatia has serious problems with accepting God’s authority, and, consequently, applying God-given authority in everyday life.<sup>8</sup> Of course, it is a rare man, and even rarer church, that will admit to having a problem with accepting God’s authority. Most often this problem is hidden behind a well-designed and presented personal understanding of God’s authority and its application. What we mostly see today, both in the world and in the church, is that

8 As the Creator of everything, God has absolute authority. Authority is the power or right to issue orders, make decisions and enforce obedience.

people either avoid or just plainly ignore God's authority. What follows after that is a full-on rebellion against God's authority. Both Christians and non-Christians avoid or ignore God's authority in certain areas of life, and that rebellion can be seen in all spheres of life – marital, familial, business, and political.

From the creation of the world and the first people, Adam and Eve, there is a constant and fierce struggle for authority or against authority. This struggle began with Satan's rebellion against God's authority and his attempt to establish his authority over everything. Under Satan's influence, Adam and Eve's rebellion against God's authority became a spiritual reality of humankind. Having created the first humans, Adam and Eve, God gave (delegated) them a part of his authority and established the sequence of authority over the creation. He gave Adam authority over Eve. However, neither Adam nor Eve did take seriously the sequence or the power of authority. They did not recognize it. Eve did not accept Adam's authority over her, and, listening to Satan, she rejected Adam's authority and sinned against God. On the other hand, Adam did not show God's authority over her thus becoming a participant in her sin against God.<sup>9</sup>

The process of acceptance and use (demonstration) of God's authority is very important for every Christian. To rebel against God's representing authority (the way Eve did) and not exercise one's authority (like Adam did) is an act of rebellion against God (Chant 1999).

The Christian life is not a playground or kindergarten, but a battleground. We are daily engaged in spiritual battles, whether we want it or not, whether we are aware of it or not. The more faithful we are in following the Lord Jesus Christ, the deeper we are in a spiritual war with the powers of darkness. Although Christians seldom think about spiritual warfare, they cannot avoid it, because the enemy does everything in his power to lessen the Christian's faith and destroy his relationship with God. Together with exhorting Christians to, "Be alert and of sober mind," the apostle Peter adds this truth, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

From the moment of their conversion to Jesus Christ, Christians fight against three strong enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world refers to the evil system around us that opposes God. The flesh is man's old nature that goes against God and can do nothing to please God. The devil or Satan is a fallen angel who rules over the kingdom of darkness. Satan implements different strategies while using the world and the flesh to destroy man's relationship with God. These strategies are often personalized, i.e. adapted to individual people to emphasize and strengthen that person's inclination to sin (beauty, pride, knowledge, wisdom, riches).

9 For more detail, see Genesis 3:1-24.



The Bible points out: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12). A Christian wages spiritual war against the spiritual forces of darkness. This war is waged and won through the use of authority given to us by God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Concerning spiritual warfare, contemporary Christianity is made up of three groups. One group ignores the spiritual war, trying to follow Christ’s example of love in light of modern science and liberal, or the so-called “progressive,” theological thought. Most believers in this group pay no attention to spiritual warfare, believing that Satan, demons, sin, and hell either do not exist or are to be ignored. Since in their opinion the spiritual world and the supernatural cannot be scientifically proved, it is pointless to talk about spiritual warfare. The second group pays more attention to spiritual warfare and the world of darkness than the Bible itself does. It seems to me that advocates of these ideas know more about Satan and his demons than about Jesus Christ. They find demons everywhere. They name and classify them, measure their power, strength, and influence, and question authority and spheres of activity. They exorcise and chase out demons, tie up Satan and claim his territories. If the spiritual effect was measured by their wishes and activity, the world would have already become a perfect place: all demons exorcised, Satan tied up and helpless, the world thoroughly evangelized and Christians materially rich, healthy, long-lived, merry, and joyful. In the preface to his book *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis (2015, 9) called these two extremes errors: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” Neither of these two Christian extremes is and cannot be a more permanent reality of life. The third group is made up of evangelical Christians who are between those two extremes and who accept the biblical elements of spiritual warfare and apply them in their everyday life through words and deeds. This article speaks to that group of evangelical Christians.

### *2.1. Processes That Systematically Reduce God’s Authority in the Church*

The strongest spiritual battle in the life of a believer, and consequently, in the life of the church, takes place in his heart and mind because that is where basic attitudes are formed, relationships established and big or small daily decisions made. As this battle is waged and won through the use of authority received by God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, it is very important for every Christian – and then for the church – to establish and constantly maintain God’s order of authority in everyday life. I believe that this area represents the biggest problem in Croatian evangelical Christianity. Evangelical Christianity in Croatia

(and Southeastern Europe) has largely substituted God's authority in everyday life for a "colonial identity" and, on one side, an "import" mentality, and, on the other, a "sycophantic" mentality and sins of "method worship." What do these terms mean?

**Colonial identity.** Most evangelical denominations and larger local churches in Croatia function like classic colonies.<sup>10</sup> Colonial identity<sup>11</sup> is manifested in numerous spheres of life and work of believers' communities, both in Croatia and in Southeastern Europe. Similar to that system of authority, communities of believers function as colonies of foreign churches and parachurch organizations (mostly) from the West and faithfully and voluntarily nurture and emphasize their affiliation to them. Colonial identity is manifested in the reality of total relationships, behavior, and dependence of national leaders, believers, and churches on foreign evangelical and Protestant spiritual and cultural movements, and theological and denominational centers. It seems to be much easier to accept the authority of people who come from abroad supported by the authority of Western culture and currency. This is why it is imposed on believers that, spiritually, even an under-average pastor or preacher from the West is much better or "more anointed" than a local above-average pastor or preacher. Of course, this evaluation has more to do with the authority of western currency than God's authority. Naturally, there are some honorable exceptions.

A large part of Christian organizations, some denominations, and independent local churches have adopted the colonial identity, and now faithfully maintain it. It can be observed that, despite good and mostly God-pleasing local pastoral and theological thinking, key decisions are nevertheless being made somewhere in foreign centers of power or following their expectations. Churches voluntarily behave as colonies of foreign churches, denominations, and parachurch organizations, while some act as if they are still umbilically linked to foreign Christianity. Is this just my opinion? Can the colonial identity of churches, denominations, and parachurch organizations in Croatia and Southeastern Europe be proven? How can we recognize it? The easiest way to prove it or disprove it would be to see the flow of money that spiritual workers, local churches, denominations, and Christian associations have at their disposal. However, since we cannot see their financial status, we can only list the consequences or fruit of their colonial behavior. Since this work is not focused on the discussion of the colonial identity of evangelical Christianity in Croatia and its neighboring countries, the following questions can help us to consider it more deeply: What kind of Christian conferences are most often organized in Croatia? What topics are represented at such

10 A colony is a country without sovereignty, in a completely dependent or agreement-regulated relationship to the metropolis country (Kòlònija. Hrvatski jezični portal).

11 Identity is defined as the feeling of belonging to a movement, group, organization, religion, or nation; acceptance and emphasis of that belonging (Identitët. Hrvatski jezični portal).

conferences? Who are the speakers at local conferences and where do they come from? Which YouTube content is being promoted? What kinds of books are being published in Croatia? Who are the authors of those books? What are the subjects of those books? Which authors are represented in the journals? Answers to these questions lead us to key spiritual problems of evangelical Christianity in Croatia – import mentality, sycophant mentality, and method worship. These systematically reduce and ignore God’s authority in individual believers’ lives and the life of the church.

**Import mentality.** Evangelical Christianity in Croatia had entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the wings of uncritical, thoughtless, and most often unnecessary import of spiritual and cultural trends. This brought us into a period of historical transition. Relying on imported spirituality and trends, and applying their practices, evangelical Christianity lost its flavor. The western culture, which we unquestioningly accepted believing it to be Christian, increasingly turned into a post-Christian culture and is now becoming a counter-Christian culture. This moves us to reexamine what it means to be the salt of the earth.

Import mentality<sup>12</sup> represents a diverse import of spirituality, both western and eastern. This occurs through the translation and publishing of theological theoretical and practical Christian books which bring in theological considerations that emerged in different cultures, in some other spiritual and cultural environments. It also takes place when pastors, teachers, and preachers from other countries are called to speak, usually accompanied by exaggerations of their successes, “anointing,” authority and greatness. Then these pastors, preachers, and teachers try to stretch or impose their real or imagined authority on people who are outside of the sphere of authority.<sup>13</sup> Of course, once all the promotion quiets down and adrenaline levels lower, we seldom see any spiritual progress in the Body of Christ in Croatia and its neighboring countries. However, people in churches fight even more eagerly to apply American, Swedish, African, Korean, or Brazilian culture. Instead of being united by the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christians and local churches are divided by the so-called “anointed” teachings of writers, teachers, pastors, and preachers. One can find examples of such practice in more or less every local church in Croatia and its neighboring countries.

Have Christians, through this imported spirituality, opened the spiritual door for the destruction of Croatian spiritual “production?” Through heedless import of western Christian and New Age culture, theological trends, and Christian and non-Christian movements, evangelical Christians opened the spiritual door for

12 Mentality encompasses intellectual ability, or power, and reflects the spiritual state, way of thinking and the totality of spiritual characteristics and inclinations of an individual or community and its members (Mentalitët. Hrvatski jezični portal).

13 God limited every kind of authority given to people to a (most often) narrow area that encompasses the task he gave them to accomplish in his name.

systematic prevention, stopping, and destruction of the original, God-given, and Holy Spirit-led spirituality. Through the years, imported spirituality from the West has established believers in thinking that nothing local is valuable – everything that is good must come from abroad, primarily from the West, but then also from Africa, Asia, and South America. Those are the places that are seeing awakenings. Those are the places where God is present and working. Therefore, we have to invite preachers from the West and translate and publish their teachings and thinking. “Anointing” comes from the West. In the last few decades, evangelical Christians uncritically “imported” good and bad theologies and good and bad teachings from the West, and most often good and bad elements of Western culture, cultural and theological trends, and a multitude of sins. Sadly, all this import contains a lot of talk about God and the Bible, but after the import propaganda dies down, nothing remains of it. Why? Very simply put, it is not possible to “import” God from abroad because he is omnipresent. In other words, God is in Croatia and he is working in this region and this specific culture. All of the resources that God needs to work in Croatia are in Croatia, from people to money. As long as we look to import resources from abroad, we will not see the local resources which God prepared in advance for a specific ministry in Croatia (cf. Eph 2:10). The struggle of evangelical Christianity in Southeastern Europe is not against good foreign spirituality, but against the uncritical import of spirituality that perhaps used to be the means of God’s work sometime, somewhere. God’s activity cannot be imported. God must be sought directly, and not through some central station abroad. Rick Warren (1995, 14) pointed out that only God can breathe new life in the valley of dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). Only God can visit a certain area and create and maintain awakening,<sup>14</sup> spiritual growth, and spiritual receptiveness. We have imported teaching about awakenings, but we did not import the Holy Spirit who originally worked in those awakenings. That is why in the last few decades, despite many teachings about awakening and evangelization, we very rarely witnessed a greater number of people being born again<sup>15</sup> in our evangelization meet-

14 *Awakening* is a word that has no significant meaning in the Croatian spiritual environment. The word is not used in the Bible, and comes from the century long tradition of Great Britain and the USA. The word *awakening* implies that God awakes those who have fallen asleep. In societies where the evangelical tradition has been strong and longstanding, this makes sense. However, in Croatia there are very few people who have “fallen asleep” so that God would have to “awaken” them. Therefore, a word that is much more suited to Croatian reality would be *visitation*. In that way, evangelical Christians should pray to God for his sovereign visitation and spiritual receptivity in the areas of South Eastern Europe.

15 It is not my intention here to belittle a number of conversions that took place in that time. I am only pointing out that we have not experienced the results we expected – not by a long shot. Here we need to be very careful because results of evangelization can be seen only after a period of at least a year after the convert has been serving in the church.

ings. Croatia needs God's original and direct visitation in which the Holy Spirit will prepare and achieve spiritual receptiveness in the local context.

**Sycophant mentality** implies all activities that individuals and churches implement trying to achieve social recognition and acceptance of the church in the wider society, as well as social relevance. Sycophant<sup>16</sup> mentality in evangelical Christianity in Croatia developed in the last few decades when some Christian leaders tried to become socially influential through continuous obsequiousness to religious, political, and cultural structures. However, from the perspective of eternity, social recognition and acceptance of the church are clear signs of the acculturation<sup>17</sup> of the church in the world. They point to a final phase in the process through which the church adopts the basic values of society, which are most often contrary to God's values. Instead of being the corrective to society (salt and light), the church blends with society. Sycophant mentality points to a process in which the church willingly renounces God's commission and authority (but not the talk of commission and authority) in favor of participating in trendy social events and social recognition and acceptance, primarily of individuals, but also whole denominations.

**Method worship.** Society and culture are always changing, and they demand that the church also change its methods of ministry, activity, forms, and structures to remain in touch with the world in which it needs to serve God. Christians apply super cultural principles of God's Word in the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a specific social and cultural context, thus developing specific methods of activity and ministry. Methods are, therefore, valid only in that specific context and it would be difficult to use them in some other context. No method lasts forever nor can it have universal success (Warren 1995, 70). Based on the Word of God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, every local church must implement the most effective method of serving God in the world. It can be observed that in the local Croatian churches there have not been significantly fruitful methods, the methods that were used in the past or in some other context, e.g., in the USA, Africa, or Korea.<sup>18</sup>

16 A sycophant is a person who engages in excessive flattery in order to ingratiate him/herself with someone.

17 Acculturation is a "process of losing the characteristics of the established culture; taking details and features of another culture; a change in culture as a result of contact with another culture, usually of greater material power" (Akulturacija. Hrvatski jezični portal).

18 So, for example, the Korean method of daily Christian gathering for the morning prayer before going to work did not yield any significant results in Zagreb. At one point of church growth in Korea, this method of spiritual battle had outstanding results. Thousands of people would gather for morning prayer before going to work. In Zagreb, only a few people attended the early morning prayer during the first few days, and the number just went down in subsequent mornings. After a while, the leader (having remained alone) cancelled the early morning prayer. An

Influenced by the American culture of leadership, some Christian leaders in Croatia have been focusing on programs and methods that are seen as efficient for leading churches. They visit places around the world, most often the USA, go to Christian conferences, and visit (mega) churches, all the while copying the style of leadership of successful pastors and programs and methods of the churches they visited. During their visit, they conclude that their church will only grow and become efficient if they apply the program and the methods of that church. Upon their return to Croatia, they enthusiastically apply the leadership style of the (mega)church they stayed with; they translate, publish and implement its programs and force the local church to change its methods of evangelization, worship, ministry, study... And, of course, new changes bring refreshment for a short while, but in the long term, they usually damage the local church, because the pastor and the church have fallen into the sin of method worship whose claws are hard to escape from. The sin of method worship (worship of methods) functions as any other sin: it separates man and church from God, and, like a drug, demands more and more implementations of new church programs with new methods.

When a leader receives a task from God, he also gets instructions on how to accomplish it. Mike Ayers (2018, 32) emphasizes that a leader does not always have to be original in his methods, but he must always be authentic. He believes that method worship yields four tragic results. First, it reduces God's role in the work of the church whose methods are being copied: it emphasizes the method and the church, and not God who worked in it and through it. Second, by adopting and applying the foreign method, local pastors and leaders attempt to become someone or something they are not. God created them as unique individuals in a unique area with a unique culture, to use them in that area and in that culture. Therefore, they need to be authentic under God's guidance in the power of the Holy Spirit. Trying to be someone else is a sin since the person was created in a specific way by God himself. Third, method worship rejects God's unique activity in the local area and specific culture and strengthens the belief that God can only work through foreign preachers and teachers and their methods. Fourth, the method, instead of God, becomes the object of trust.

Programs, methods, and ministries learned from other churches and leaders are not incorrect in their application only if God works through them. However, it is most often the case that God is taken out of the borrowed methods. It is customary that a church chooses a method without consulting God and only then asks God to provide results and bless its work. Method worship minimizes God's role and supernatural activity and instead focuses on the way God worked somewhere else. But, God does not repeat himself. All his works are original, unique and spe-

extraordinarily successful method of spiritual battle in Korea had only insignificant results in the Croatian spiritual and cultural environment.

cific. Therefore, every church needs to put its trust in God, and not in methods, no matter how successful they might have been in another environment.

## *2.2. Processes That Establish and Systematically Strengthen God's Authority*

### *2.2.1. Accepting God's Sovereignty*

God is the Sovereign Creator and Ruler of all.<sup>19</sup> He is still revealing his sovereign will, and he has given man the freedom to accept, ignore and reject it. After making such a decision, man faces many consequences. Those consequences follow him through life and daily yield wanted and unwanted fruit in different areas. After knowing and accepting God's sovereignty, man can do nothing else but bless God, glorify and praise him. What does it mean to say that God is sovereign over the church? As people, we are very limited in understanding God's nature, which is why we have many problems understanding God's sovereignty. I will here remark upon just a few important facts that point to God's sovereignty. First, to God belongs everything that is in heaven and on earth (Ps 103:19-22). Since they are God's children, everything belongs to Christians. They have received everything from God, but nothing is theirs. They can use it all, enjoy it all and rejoice in it all. However, they are not masters of anything. God is the only master of everything in existence. Christians are God's heirs and Christ's co-heirs, so they have to adopt the eternal perspective and its value system. Second, God has all the authority (Dan 4:22, 23, 31-34); he is the ruler of all people and every knee shall bow down to him (Ps 22:28-30). God is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim 6:15); he has given all his heavenly and earthly authority to his Son Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18). God the Father gave all the authority, which includes Croatia, to his Son Jesus Christ, who is sovereignly building his church. Third, God is sovereign in showing his power and strength (Ps 115:3). He shows it how he wishes when he wishes and where he wishes. This fact can be seen on every page of the Holy Scriptures. God's sovereignty in showing power and strength was extremely important for the life of the early church (cf. Acts 1:1-28:31), and it remains extremely important for the victorious life of the church today. Fourth, God is sovereign in delegating his power to people (Matt 10:1, 8; Luke 10:9, 17). God's sovereign delegation of power is manifested in many ways in today's church, from godly leadership to supernatural work through the gifts of the Holy Spirit; from the power to heal in Jesus' name to exorcising demons from those possessed by them. Numerous gifts of the Holy Spirit that the contemporary church uses (or that are at its disposal) are only manifestations of God's power in

19 A sovereign = an independent, autonomous ruler; one who rules completely; highest bearer of authority (Anić 2009); limitless ruler (Klaić 2002); one who is supreme in power or rank, one who completely rules over something (Süveren. Hrvatski jezični portal).

the church and through the church in the world. Fifth, God is sovereign in showing mercy (Rom 9:15-16). Nobody deserves God's grace. God gives it to those he wants to give it to.

There is always a danger for Christians to fall into the sin of neglecting and ignoring God's sovereignty, or rebelling against it. As I have already mentioned, among evangelical Christians in Croatia we can notice a practice of relying more on foreign methods of leadership, evangelization, church planting, and local church growth, than on God's direct activity in a specific and unique social, cultural, and spiritual environment. Through this practice, evangelical Christianity has deeply and in many ways sunk into the sludge of method worship. They have imported and applied *methods* of God's activity with cultural and social elements of the country it came from, but they could not import the *results* of God's activity in those countries. Doing so, they have partially ignored and significantly neglected God's sovereignty in the unique display of power and might in the specifically Croatian social, cultural, and spiritual context. To sum up, Croatia does not need to import methods of God's activity from other countries, but a direct, unique, and sovereign God's visitation in the display of his power and might.

### 2.2.2. Establishing and Maintaining a Good Relationship with God and People

Everything in life begins, develops, and ends with relationships, which then strongly influence the overall life of the church and its dynamics. Good and stable relationships strengthen, gladden and bless individual believers, and consequently the whole church. Bad, unhealthy, and problematic relationships burden, sadden and destroy both individual believers and the whole local community. Bad relationships deaden the church. Good relationships in the church develop with the consistent application of God's Word through loving service (1 Cor 16:14). Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit abiding in the born-again believer. Let us remind ourselves: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). The Christlikeness of the character of a believer who has the mentioned fruit of the Holy Spirit is mightily manifested in all Christians' relationships, in their loving service, and their fellowship in glorifying God. Therefore, Christians must pay special attention to relationships in their lives. Good relationships contribute to the dynamic life of the church. However, all Christian relationships must be in agreement with God's Word – the Bible, applied in serving and glorifying God.

For a dynamic church life and fellowship in glorifying God, together with loving service, some other things are crucial as well: God's relationship toward believers and church leadership, every believer's relationship toward God and his Word, the relationship of leadership and ministries of the church toward believers and vice versa, relationships between believers, relationships in marriages and



families of church members and the relationships of all believers individually, as well as their relationship to the world and everything that comes from it.

Relationship with the triune God: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is the most important part of discipleship. All other contents and fruit of discipleship flow out of that relationship. Through the relationship with God the Father, and by accepting and doing his Word, a disciple sets the groundwork for discipleship. Through his life and work, Jesus Christ showed us what that relationship must look like. We develop and strengthen our relationship with God the Father by adopting the doctrines and activity of Jesus Christ in the process of discipleship. Of course, Jesus Christ is not only a teacher and an example we must follow, he is also our Savior, Lord, and God the Son. He is the Head of his church. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). We can only come to God through him. Holy Spirit, as the third person of the triune God in believers and among believers gives us God's power and might to be Jesus' disciples-witnesses (Acts 1:8). He guides the disciples and gives them gifts (abilities) that are needed by individuals and the church to do God's will in the present moment, and yield fruit. That fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

Relationships and fellowship stand together in the biblical picture of the church. God is the king, head, father, and builder in a relationship and fellowship with his people as a community. The church is in a relationship with Jesus as his bride, his flock, family, body, and a living spiritual building. Believers are mutually connected as members of the same body, stones in the same building, sheep of the same flock, and children in the same family. The interrelationship of believers in the contemporary church must change from the standard of friendship, common interest, games, and fun, to a standard of the Body of Christ and mutual connection of members according to the function that every member performs in the Body. In the Body of Christ, we have the most intimate fellowship with members we are connected to or who are connected to us, and through whom all our supply links are related to the Head Jesus Christ.

### 2.2.3. Hearing and Obeying God

How can we know if we have a good relationship with God? How can we know if the leaders, teachers, and pastors in the local church have a good relationship with God? A good relationship with God the Father – the Creator, Sustainer, and Renewer of everything – is manifested in the life of a Christian in different ways. Most simply put, Christians establish their relationship with God through prayer, and through listening and obeying, and also watching and seeing, they confirm the quality of that relationship. The quality and content of prayer<sup>20</sup> are very impor-

20 Sometimes a Christian's prayer looks like an order for a hamburger at a *drive-in* restaurant. In

tant for the relationship with God because through prayer we determine the characteristics of our relationship with God and his toward us. For the relationship with God and co-creating with him, it is crucial to *hear* what he is telling us and *see* what he is doing. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19), and, “I can do nothing on my own. As I *hear*, I judge, and my judgment is just because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). For a good relationship with God, every believer must pray but also *listen-hear-obey* what God is telling him and *watch-see-do* what God is already doing. The quality of the relationship with God is not measured by the amount and contents of prayers, but by the obedient doing of what God is telling us and everything we see God doing. If a believer does not look to God, he will not see what God is doing. If a believer does not listen to God’s voice, he will not hear what God is telling him. The same thing applies to the church as a community of believers. God speaks and directs today also. The problem does not lie in God’s speaking, but in the believer’s listening and doing what God says.

#### 2.2.4. Doing Works That God Prepared in Advance for Everyone

Instead of looking in newspapers, books, on Facebook, and YouTube for what to do, local church leadership, together with believers, needs to turn to God and find out from him what he has prepared for each of them to do in this specific culture, in this specific place. Then, what they do will be under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit, with all the needed wisdom and strength to do everything God commanded. The apostle Paul declares, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). If we were created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in, we can legitimately ask where the fruit of those good works is. The answer points us to a vital truth – the relationship with God. Some Christians do not know what good works God prepared for their life simply because they have a superficial relationship with God. They miss *listen-hear-obey* what God is telling them and *watch-see-do* the same thing God is doing. The only solution in this situation is to deepen one’s relationship with God.

#### 2.2.5. Accepting God’s Authority in All Spheres of Life

At a time when the world is openly going against God’s truths and his authority, there are Christians in local evangelical churches who align themselves with

our prayer we list the things God needs to give, do, deliver and then we sit in the comfort of our car, waiting for that to happen.

worldly ideas and so directly oppose God's authority. A rebellion against God's authority can be seen in all spheres of life: in personal life, marriage, job, free time... In that way, some Christians, just like non-Christians, avoid and ignore God's authority in certain areas of life. If evangelical Christianity wants to experience a God-pleasing future, it must accept God's authority and his priorities in all spheres of life literally, the way his Word describes them. When doing so, one must beware of fresh interpretations of the Bible that are under a strong influence of humanist, feminist, liberal, progressive, and other ideas that push believers to directly avoid, ignore and oppose God's authority.

### 3. Making Jesus' Disciples Who Do the Will of God

Although in the last several decades there was a lot of preaching, teaching, writing, and discussing of discipleship, it is notable that current discipleship strategies did not bear significant results.<sup>21</sup> Why is it so? The Bible points out that a disciple is a person who follows Jesus and devotes himself to his mission (Matt 4:19, 22).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, discipleship is the *state* of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and the *process* of making disciples. We find the model of Christian discipleship in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, who invites people to follow him (Luke 9:23-24; Matt 10:38-39; Mark 8:34). True discipleship according to Jesus' example expresses itself in serving God and doing God's will.

Jesus's command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20) is relevant for today's Christianity, as well. Christians of today are called to *be* disciples of Jesus Christ and *make* disciples of Jesus Christ. In this process of making disciples of Jesus Christ, they need to be taught and equipped how to keep (hold onto, do) everything that Jesus has commanded them. Except for some honorable exceptions, today's discipleship is most often expressed only in transferring the knowledge of what Jesus taught and how he acted, and the original Jesus' command is practically changed into: "Teach them to *know* everything I have commanded you" (cf. Matt 28:20). Knowledge about the Word has replaced acting on the Word. This is notable at many conferences, seminars, teachings, meetings, fellowships, and other activities that advance knowledge but only confirm the

21 Exhaustive discussions about discipleship were jointly published in the journal *Kairos* by Martina Gracin and Ervin Budiselić (2019 and 2020) under the title *Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus' Time – Part I and Part II*, and Jeremy Bohall (2019 and 2020) under the title *Making Disciples in Croatia – Part I and Part II*.

22 The term *disciple* (Gr. *mathētēs*) is most often used in the Gospels, and then Luke replaces it with the term *Christian* in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 11:26). For the concept of discipleship, Apostle Paul utilizes the term *imitation* (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1-2; 1 Thess 1:6-7). For a more exhaustive treatment, see Bohall 2019, 189–194.

knowledge that Christians have already known for years. At the same time, they take away valuable time that should be used in the practical application of this acquired knowledge. Peters (1996, 173) agrees and points out: “It is tragic that the Great Commission has been more debated than it has been obeyed in church history.”

### *3.1. Processes to Achieve Biblically Efficient Discipleship*

#### *3.1.1. Adopting the Eternal Perspective in Discipleship*

To be capable of making believers to be disciples of Jesus, evangelical Christians need to forego current discipleship methodologies, which are mostly the fruit of adopted perspectives on life and their order of priorities. With the change of perspective on believers’ life and the church comes the change of approach, location, and content of discipleship. With the eternal perspective, the Christian is focused on the sovereign God, his plans, his present, and future work, and not on the past, regardless of how much God was working then, and not on human welfare or thrill, and not on building up a better society.

A disciple with an eternal perspective is a person that lives a life of conscious and continual identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in life, death, and resurrection, through his words, conduct, attitudes, motives, and intentions. This is a person whose character, values, priorities, and relationships are shaped by Jesus. A disciple understands Christ’s absolute ownership of his life, gladly accepts Christ’s salvation, enjoys Christ’s lordship, lives in Christ’s perpetual presence, and harmonizes his life according to Christ’s pattern and glorifies his Lord and Savior (Peters 1996, 187).

#### *3.1.2. Adopting Jesus’ Methodology of Disciple-Making*

Relying on the example of Jesus, David Bosch (1991, 66–67) points out that learning included in discipleship does not take place in the context of a classroom, not even the church, but in the world. The process of making disciples needs to focus on submission to the will of God as it was revealed in Jesus’ ministry and teaching. Discipleship takes place in the context of a relationship with Christ and not in following the rules and principles (Matt 23:3).

According to the Gospels, Jesus taught his disciples every day and in all life situations. The Bible confirms that discipleship takes place in a person’s daily life, wherever that person is. Discipleship envelops all time and every life situation of a person, including the church and world, especially the application of God’s Word to relationships, both with God and people. Today’s evangelical Christians have separated discipleship from everyday life by placing it into the church and limiting it to one to two gatherings of the church in the week. Therefore, daily life is largely influenced by the world, which is visible in workplaces, politics, rais-

ing children, family, and marital life.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Jesus teaches his disciples even today in all life situations: in the family, at school, at college, at church, among their friends, at their workplace, in the tram and public transport, on the internet, when they walk in the city or nature, in the village, among the rich and the poor, among the simple people and intellectuals, among the secular and religious politicians, among the peasant women selling on the market and among the merchants in the trade fair, among the bankers and IT experts. Discipleship, i.e. the teaching of Jesus Christ, takes place in real life.

### 3.1.3. Adopting Biblical Discipleship Quality and Content

Jesus' command to "Teach them to observe (do) all that I have commanded you" clearly reflects the content of discipleship. To become and remain the kind of disciples Jesus desires, we need to learn to observe (do) everything he has commanded us. This includes exhaustive knowledge of the Word of God, which is the basis on which we then build our relationship with the triune God. Our character as a disciple is built and formed from this relationship, as well as our God-fearing relationship with other people and anointed and empowered serving in the church and world.

The quality and content of discipleship are directly manifested in worshipping God by doing his will and decrees (by serving) and in living life together. Jesus taught his disciples how to make others his disciples: to preach the Good News of God's Kingdom, heal the sick, cast out evil spirits, and raise the dead (cf. Matt 10:1-15; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6); release the captives, feed the hungry (Matt 14:13-21; 15:32-33; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14); love their neighbors and enemies (Matt 5:43-48); not be afraid regardless of the circumstances (Matt 14:22-32; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21); how to relate to God's Law and human rules (Matt 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23); how to pray and fast (Matt 6:5-18); how to behave toward authorities and employers. In the process of learning, they often returned full of joy and reported: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" (Luke 10:17).

### 3.1.4. Application of Discipleship in Worship

The process of discipleship implies the process of transitioning from a formal worship service of entertainment and performance to a worship service of serving. Preaching and teaching in the church need to be a foundation for serving. Modern worship services of ritual and liturgy, as well as worship services of entertainment and performance, need to be changed into worship services of serving.

23 See Dražen Glavaš's exhaustive study *Christian on Sunday and Atheist on Monday: Bridging the Faith and Work Gap in Croatian Culture*, published in two parts in *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 2017 (1): 29–66 and 2017 (2): 155–186.

A worship service is an extremely important and unique event-encounter of the triune God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with the church as a gathered assembly of believers. Serving is an important part of a worship service: God serves believers and believers serve God, together with God and one another. Therefore, it is an inevitable duty of church leadership to ensure a spiritual environment in the worship service,<sup>24</sup> where God will be present and believers will be ready not only to receive God's blessings but, first and foremost, to serve God, with God, and one another. A worship service without serving becomes a contentless ritual.

#### 4. Training Spiritual Leaders for All Levels of Service to God

Leading a church is a continuous spiritual struggle to accept and realize everything that God speaks and directs to, and refuse to accept worldly solutions to individual situations. Therefore, the foremost challenge for every Christian leader at all times, and therefore also today, is everyday dependence on God – in everything. Every generation has its specific challenges, and God has specific instructions and a unique solution for each challenge. In resolving these specific challenges, God uses people-leaders whose required qualification is, most often, obedience to the Word of God and living with a fear of God. If we read the Bible and the history of the church, it is those leaders that God sought after, led, and used, and he is still seeking and using them.

Biblical leadership varies greatly from leadership defined and carried out by secular society. Although both the Bible and the secular society imply that leadership is the influence of one person on another, *the content* of this influence, *the motivation* behind it, its possible *outcome*, and *the source* of power for directing and maintaining this influence, are significantly different (more in Ayers 2016). The leadership of the church today is in a specific situation, just like the leaders of God's people from Abraham until the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. The task is almost the same: to do God's will in the environment of the specific culture where they live and work.

The church of today needs leaders (whatever we call them) who will know and do the will of God in our time, culture, and location. We need leaders whom God will empower and lead, who will depend on the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, and not ecclesial managers who rely on the newest worldly and

24 Spiritual environment is the totality of circumstances in the fellowship of believers. This is a mood, an atmosphere that cherishes God's presence, unconditional activity of the Holy Spirit and believers serving God, with God, and one another. Spiritual environment is a state where a community of believers is prepared for an encounter with God, where believers anticipate God ministering to them in their midst, where they are prepared to glorify, worship, bow down, and serve God, and serve one another.

half-Christian theories and fashion trends of leadership and management of the church as a company or corporation.

The Bible continuously emphasizes the key role of leaders in the life of God's people. Every new Christian generation faces significant challenges, and the way they overcome these challenges depends upon their leaders. The church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs servant-leaders who can lead it with integrity and wisdom. They need leaders *empowered* with the Spirit of God, *trained* in understanding, interpreting, and applying Holy Scriptures, and *equipped* for all kinds of serving.

#### *4.1. Processes to Achieve Biblical Leadership*

##### 4.1.1. Praying to the Lord of the Harvest to Send Laborers Into his Harvest

Local churches and denominations are constantly faced with a lack of spiritual workers, and some who are currently in ministry do not seem to have the spiritual quality, Christlikeness of character, and leadership competencies they should have. Jesus faced a similar situation while he was ministering in Israel. Many among God's people were ill-treated and crushed in spirit like sheep without a shepherd although they had their shepherds, priests, and scribes who worked among them and served in their synagogues. That was the context in which Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest: "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest'" (Matt 9:35-38). This exhortation is more than relevant today. We could spend a lot of time preaching, writing, and discussing it, but it is not time for that. It is time for prayer because the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

##### 4.1.2. Establishing a Spiritual Environment in the Life of a Local Church in

###### Which the Holy Spirit Will Accomplish the Will of God the Father

The life of the local church takes place all day every day. These are not only events, like worship services, talking to God, or about God, and reading the Bible. The life of the local church includes the overall state of every believer during every day, including time spent at the workplace, with family, with friends, and also alone. This state of individuals forms the spiritual environment of the church. The spiritual environment is the totality of circumstances in a believing com-

munity.<sup>25</sup> It is the ambiance, the atmosphere which emphasizes God's presence, the unconditional work of the Holy Spirit, and believers serving God and each other. The spiritual environment is the state in which the community of believers is ready to meet God, where believers anticipate God working in their midst and they are ready to glorify God, worship him and serve both him and one another. Ministries in the local church are developed by every individual serving-doing God's will under the efficiency provided by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the most important spiritual struggle for any church is the struggle to allow and enable the natural and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in accomplishing God's will in the life of every believer.

#### 4.1.3. Recognizing God's Calling for Service in Different Leading Ministries in the Lives of the Disciples

The church does not choose nor call persons in the leadership ministry. That is God's work. The task of believers and leaders in the church is not to choose a person to be a leader, but to listen to what God the Father is saying through the Holy Spirit, and recognize God's choice of a person. After that, the church shows its confirmation of God's choice, calling, and empowerment through the laying of hands after fasting and prayer. It is then that this person or persons must be released to do the work God called them to do (cf. Acts 13:1-3).

#### 4.1.4. Training Spiritual Leaders for All Levels of Service to God

Considerations of church leadership in evangelical Christianity are often focused on elders', pastoral or preaching ministries in the local church. This is indicated through leadership training and development programs which most often develop skills in studying and teaching the Bible, counseling, leading small groups, and doing other "pastoral" duties (cf. LOP 41, 11). These areas are very important. However, alongside those areas the church should pay more attention to developing leadership in numerous other areas of human activity, from the economic (Joseph, Lydia) to cultural and artistic entrepreneurship (David, Solomon); from research and writing (David, Solomon, Luke) to top-level theological education (Paul, John, Peter, James). Every social and cultural community requires God's intervention in all vitally important areas following God's plan. For every intervention, God chooses persons whom he will, after equipping them, be able to use as leaders to accomplish his task.

25 For more details about the spiritual environment, see my book *Crkva za sva vremena i sve kulture* (Jambrek 2022, 253–305).



#### 4.1.5. Cooperating With God in Shaping Godly Character and Leadership Competencies in the Lives of Spiritual Leaders

When it comes to the shaping of godly character and development of leadership competencies, both God and the person he called to become a leader work together. The church cooperates with God in different ways to shape godly character and develop leadership competencies in the lives of spiritual leaders. This cooperation takes place in the environment of the Holy Spirit's activity in the fellowship of the church. The leader in the church must have a unique mixture of anointing, which consists of personal calling, enablement, and mission from the Lord Jesus, godly character built on the truths of the Holy Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit, as well as leadership competencies given to him by the Holy Spirit and gained through education and experience in obedience to God. These three ingredients must be balanced in a leader's life and ministry. The choice of a person, calling, and enablement to accomplish a specific task falls exclusively under God's jurisdiction. The Church can do nothing to either begin, direct or accelerate that process, but during the process, it can cooperate with God and be used as an efficient tool for the shaping of Christlike character and acquisition of leadership competencies.

### 5. Establishing an Efficient Leadership System

For Christianity in Croatia to have a good future, it is very important to establish and continuously renew efficient leadership systems in local churches and denominations.<sup>26</sup> Its establishment and restoration must be preceded by the adoption of the eternal perspective for the everyday life of believers and the church, by the living and serving of believers and the church in God's authority according to the example of Jesus Christ, and by equipping spiritual leaders on all levels of service to God.

We can notice several models of leadership systems in Croatian churches of the Reformation heritage. For this work, I have classified them as the *building*, *janiitorial*, and *restorative* systems of leadership. I am here using images and models from the sphere of construction work that is close and familiar to most believers.<sup>27</sup> We will use an apartment building and work done on it as an example. Simply put, under normal conditions of construction, the investor hires an architect to accomplish his idea about an apartment building in a certain space. The archi-

26 Only God, in accordance to his Word, determines, verifies and assesses the quality of the future. In the Bible we find indications of this process of assessment and guidelines for the future of the church (Rev 2:1-3:22).

27 For a more comprehensive discussion about Biblical images and church models, see article: Stanko Jambrek. 2019. Church Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Kairos* 13 (1): 37–82.

tect then makes a project for the apartment building having this specific space in mind, following the laws and all its requirements. Upon completion, the architect gives the blueprints with all the details to the construction site manager so he could perform the construction work which at that point includes digging and pouring concrete in foundations, building walls and the roof, installment of doors and windows, setting up installations and floors, and final interior and exterior work. Knowing the apartment building project and applying his building experience, the construction site manager plans and delegates work on the building, coordinates all the different contractors, and supervises the quality of work, making sure it meets the construction standards so that the realization of investor's plans is of good quality and kept to a high standard.

When the construction work on an apartment building is finished, the system of leadership also changes, namely from a *building* system to a *janitorial* system. The apartment building has been built and now needs to be regularly maintained. Apartment owners now choose and pay a janitor (janitorial service) who will make sure that everything in the building properly functions – from electricity, water and gas to cleaning and garbage disposal.

Every building has an expiration date. Eventually, different malfunctions and cracks start to appear, and the janitor finds it harder and harder to maintain the building. At that point, the owner(s) of the building must restore it. Restoration can include several things, such as setting up new installations concerning electricity, water, and heating, changing floors, painting walls, and replacing windows and doors. In some cases, the building cannot be successfully restored but needs to be completely torn down and rebuilt.

### *5.1. Process of Change from a Janitorial System of Running Churches and Denominations to a Building and Restorative system*

Images and models from the construction sphere help us understand the contemporary state of denominations and local churches of the Reformation heritage. The basic characteristics of the building system include efficient evangelization led by the Holy Spirit who is manifested in the church and through the church; efficient discipleship, and God-fearing worship of God with a strong emphasis on serving God in the church and the world. The building leadership system enables the church of Jesus Christ to be *victorious* in the Croatian context because people are saved by the grace of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, have all gifts of the Holy Spirit, and are equipped in all ministries. All believers live as the Body of Christ and, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are directly connected to him. Together they function in the world led and empowered by the Holy Spirit when fulfilling God's Word and will. A victorious church accomplishes God's will in concrete spiritual, social, cultural, and political situations, regardless of whether they are friendly

or antagonistic toward the church. The church does not depend on the circumstances, but on the Holy Spirit. The building system of church leadership strongly emphasizes the everyday application of God's Word. The church is unbreakably tied to God's Word because heaven and earth, and everything in it, will pass away but the Word of the Lord will remain forever – it is imperishable and unchangeable (cf. Matt 24:35; Luke 21:33).

The building system of a local church and denomination leadership is based on Jesus' authority, mission, and promise that he will be with his disciples always, to the end of the age (Matt 28:16-20). Jesus Christ is *building* his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (cf. Matt 16:18). Leaders on all levels of leadership in the church can and should have a direct relationship with Jesus Christ – the investor, the architect, and the builder of the Church. Listening to God and doing what he says, they participate in the building of the church, including church planting and establishment of ministries, as well as investing means, time, and effort in people.<sup>28</sup> In the building church leadership system, all the contractors (pastors, preachers, elders, and other leaders) on the building (church as a community of believers) directly communicate to the architect of the building (the triune God) and receive detailed blueprints and outlines (God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit) to do the work.

The building system of leadership is most often replaced by the janitorial church leadership system. After a while, a new church or denomination adopts a janitorial church leadership system. In the janitorial system, leaders in local evangelical churches make sure that all the activities regularly take place. They take care to make a good plan and a preaching schedule a few months in advance, to have church services every Sunday, and Bible study and prayer meetings once a week. The leader sees to it that everyone is satisfied, that the administration is functional, and that the space the church uses is regularly maintained. The goal of the janitorial system of church leadership is to excellently maintain the existing state. Therefore, the janitorial leadership system strongly limits any kind of leadership development. There is only one janitor, and he is sufficient.<sup>29</sup> The problems arrive when the janitor remains in the position of a janitor, but partially or completely stops taking care of the spiritual state of those who were entrusted to him. An even bigger problem arises when the leader-janitor grows old and can no longer do all that the janitorial system requires of him. When leader-janitor, fearing that he will lose his job, does not invest in the training and development

28 It is noticeable that people are not the targeted investment in Croatia. A lot of means, time and effort was invested in building and furnishing of church buildings through the years. Some of them look prestigious and very beautiful but, unfortunately, many stand unused or partially used. That is the result of the systematic neglect to invest in people.

29 A janitor does not need an architect, because he can maintain things on his own. His work is not perfect, but it works in the short term and satisfies current needs.

of assistants, scared that he (or they) will be better at the janitorial job and so take away his job, the church becomes and remains trapped inside the janitorial leadership system. More and more believers leave such a church, leaving the leader surrounded by his ever-dwindling group of like-minded supporters. The church continues to vegetate for a while longer but then stops gathering. The janitorial leadership system reduces all church activity to a formality. Instead of everyday evangelization of all believers, it has annual or periodical evangelization meetings. Instead of preaching and interpreting God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit, there is an emphasis on Bible study that becomes tedious and boring when done week after week. Instead of fellowship with God, the church bothers itself with discussions about God. Instead of glorifying God through works God prepared in advance for every believer (Eph 2:10), the church entertains itself by singing imported and translated saccharine and often theologically incorrect songs which are pleasant to the senses. We could spend a lot of time listing examples from the everyday life of the church, but there is no need for that.

The janitorial leadership system is a reality that evangelical Christianity in Croatia has been facing for decades. This system is inevitable. Churches older than a few decades know it well. More recent churches are yet to become acquainted with it. The transition period from the building into a janitorial leadership system is usually seen at the end of the ministry of the leader who began the local church or denomination and with the second, third, and other generations of leaders in the church or denomination. Although the janitorial system is legitimate and inevitable, it should not stay in the church for long. If every brick and mortar-built building must be restored after two to three decades of its use, then the church also needs a thorough restoration after a while.

The restorative leadership system begins with the replacement of the janitorial leadership system. Leaders-janitors can change the church only in peripheral matters. The church and denomination need new leadership that will receive instructions regarding any changes in the church from the triune God – the investor, the architect, and the builder of the church. The restorative leadership system receives instructions from God regarding anything that needs to be changed in the church as well as how to do it. This system includes God's plans to change everything that does not meet God's standards and build something new from the eternal perspective.

## **Conclusion**

The contemporary state of evangelical Christianity in Croatia is the fruit of the perspectives on life it adopted in the last few decades. From these adopted perspectives and their order of priority, the believers and the churches have adopted standards for living and working. This paper suggests that the basic perspective

should be the eternal perspective because it alone can offer a God-designed future to evangelical Christianity; a future that God is willing to accomplish because it springs from his heart, it does his will and it is in accordance to his Word. The most important thing for the biblical future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia is the process of systematic adoption of the eternal perspective and reduction and abandonment of the historical, pragmatic, and humanist-futuristic perspective on church and believers' life. Once they adopt the eternal perspective, believers and the church live and work under God's authority and effectively make Jesus' disciples who do the will of God. The efficient discipleship of the church is the prerequisite for recognizing and equipping spiritual leaders whom God chose, called, and empowered for all levels of serving God in the church and the world. My last (but not least important) guideline for the God-prepared future of evangelical Christianity in Croatia is to establish an efficient system of leadership which implies a change from the former janitorial system of running churches and denominations to a building and renewing system.

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## **Smjernice za budućnost evanđeoskoga kršćanstva u Hrvatskoj**

### Sažetak

U članku se raspravlja o budućnosti evanđeoskoga kršćanstva u Hrvatskoj. Uz analizu postojećeg duhovnog stanja autor nudi pet ključnih smjernica za koje smatra da primijenjene u svakodnevnom životu vjernika i crkava reformacijske baštine mogu ostvariti budućnost koju je Bog pripremio, koju osnažuje i određuje. Za biblijski plodonosnu i Bogu ugodnu budućnost vodstvo lokalnih crkava i denominacija trebalo bi usvojiti biblijske smjernice i što prije pokrenuti njima sukladne duhovne procese kojima bi se uključilo u Božje stvaralačko djelovanje u Hrvatskoj. Smjernice obuhvaćaju: 1) perspektivu na život; 2) Božji autoritet

u vjernikovu životu i životu Crkve; 3) učenje koje se očituje u služenju; 4) obučavanje duhovnih vođa na svim razinama služenja Bogu; 5) učinkovit sustav vodstva. Uz svaku smjernicu autor predlaže i obrazlaže njoj pripadajuće procese. Promišljanje o budućnosti evanđeoskog kršćanstva u Hrvatskoj usmjereno je na razmatranja Riječi Božje u kontekstu duhovne, društvene i kulturne stvarnosti u kojoj evanđeoski kršćani žive i stvaraju s Bogom.