

The Great Commission in the Context of the Evangelical Churches of Croatia in the Second Part of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract *This study deals with the biblical basis of the Great Commission and its reception in the evangelical churches of Croatia, in a global and local context. It offers a concise review of the fulfillment of the Great Commission in certain areas of work in the evangelical churches, among others, in planting churches, in the gestation of new denominations and in mission effectuation. Foundational issues that appear in its actualization are perceived in the paper, and answers are indicated concerning the relationship between evangelism and social activity, evangelization of nominal Christians and proselytism.*

Key words: church, gospel, evangelism, Christians, commission, proselytism

Introduction

The Great Commission is Jesus' command to Christians to proclaim the gospel and make the nations his disciples. It is written in all four gospels (Matt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-22) and in the book of Acts (Acts 1:8). The Great Commission is an appointment to proclaim the gospel to every creature, a command toward a movement of evangelizing the world, a divine authorization to be Christ's ambassadors to every nation (Peters, 1996:178).

In the evangelical churches of Croatia,¹ numerous sermons, conference presentations, persuasive arguments and exhortations have been offered regarding the Great Commission from a biblical perspective. There are conference invitations and rare reports about it, found in the magazines of certain denominations as partial testimonies and fractional written traits.² During 1970's and 1980's, the magazines *Glas evanđelja* (*The Voice of the Gospel*) published by the Baptist printing house, Duhovna stvarnost, and *Izvori, Magazine for Spiritual Life* published by the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, printed articles of exhortation about the Great Commission, evangelism and faith awakenings throughout the world. In 1983, Peter MacKenzie had prepared a script, *Misija* (*Mission*), which served for years as a textbook for the students of theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Osijek and as a textbook for the education of the believers of local churches. In 1996, EBI – Hrvatska (Evangelical Bible Institute – Croatia) and Baptistička Misija Hrvatske (Baptist Mission in Croatia) translated and edited the book *Biblijska teologija misija* (*A Biblical Theology of Missions*) by George W. Peters, and *Put života* (*Way of Life*) in Zagreb, translated and edited the book *Veliki nalog* (*The Great Commission*) by Oswald J. Smith. The magazine, *Duhovno vrelo* (*Spiritual Wellsprings*), dedicated its eleventh issue (Autumn/Winter, 2007) to the Great Commission. In his doctoral dissertation, *Toward an Evangelical Theology of Humanitarian Aid Ministry* (2007), Antal Balog deals with evangelism and the social responsibility of the evangelical churches, among other topics.

¹ The basic characteristics of the evangelical churches, a historical review and theological thought are displayed in the books *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj* [*Churches of Reformation Heritage in Croatia*] (Jambrek, 2003) and *Leksikon evanđeoskoga kršćanstva* [*Dictionary of Evangelical Christianity*] (Jambrek, 2007). The following are included among evangelical churches: Evanđeoska pentekostna crkva [Evangelical Pentecostal Church], Savez baptističkih crkava [Union of Baptist Churches], Vijeće Kristovih crkava [Council of Churches of Christ], Savez Kristovih pentekostnih crkava [Union of Christ Pentecostal Churches], Crkva Božja [Church of God], Savez crkava "Riječ Života" [Union of Word of Life Churches] and some small denominations and independent local Christian communities.

² Toward the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, there were four magazines published in Croatia. In the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, two magazines were issued: *Izvori, časopis za duhovni život*, which for more than 40 years has brought national and foreign articles for the encouragement of believers to live on the biblical foundations in the power of the Holy Spirit, and *Duhovno vrelo*, a magazine that offers a number of theological articles, mostly translated from the American magazine *Enrichment*, intended for pastors and spiritual workers. Within the Union of the Baptist Churches in Croatia, an evangelistically focused magazine *Glas Evanđelja* was published for several decades, which ceased to be printed in 1997, after being published irregularly for some time. Since 1996, UBC has issued a magazine called *Glas crkve* in which, along with a few, mostly national articles, publishes news about the events in the Union. The Union of Word of Life Churches sporadically issues a magazine, *Karizma*, in which articles of national and mostly foreign authors are published, as well as news about events in its churches.

Evangelical Christians³ and evangelism have always been bracketed to the point that the adjectives “evangelical” and “evangelistic” have often been identified in the popular mind (Stott, 1982). It is already common in Croatia to call Evangelical Christians “evangelists” because of their frequent practice of public and personal evangelism.

For the Evangelical Christians of Croatia, the Great Commission is a charge to proclaim the gospel, which involves preaching the good news, witnessing from a personal experience and relationship with God, effectively loving one’s neighbor by the power of the Holy Spirit, and journeying through the process of discipleship and growth into becoming a church.

1. Biblical Basis for the Great Commission

The task of evangelizing the world as given by the Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples is written in all four gospels (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-22) and in the book of Acts (Ac 1:8), and is especially emphasized in the gospel as written by Matthew:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20).

These words of Jesus contain three inseparable entities: the declaration of Christ’s authority, the command to make disciples, and the promise of Jesus’ presence with the disciples.

1.1. Declaration of Christ’s Authority: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth Has Been Given to Me.

The Great Commission begins with Jesus’ declaration: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. By receiving all power in heaven and earth,

³ The adjective *evandeoski* (evangelical) often creates misunderstandings. The term *evandeoski kršćanin* (Evangelical Christian) includes every Christian who bases his/her belief and action on the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the term *Evandeoska crkva* (Evangelical Church, or churches), the adjective *evandeoski* (Evangelical) comes alongside the term church to point out that the church mentioned here (or churches) bases its preaching on the gospel (Croatian *evandelje*, Greek *euan-gelion*). The usage of the adjective *evandeoska* (Evangelical) emphasizes the central role of Jesus Christ, grace, faith and the Holy Scripture in the beliefs and actions of the church (see Jambrek, 2003:17-19).

Jesus confirmed that he is Lord over all; everything must submit to him because all heavenly resources are available to him. “This statement is not only a Christological/cosmological declaration befitting Phil 2:9-11 (“*God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name . . . that at the name . . . every knee should bow in heaven and on earth*” RSV); it is also a statement of fulfilled prophecy (“*to him was given dominion and glory and kingship*” Dan 7:14, NRSV), and most assuredly it is a foundational word for all that is to follow. It is the objective basis for the mission” (Day, 2007:378). This statement of Jesus is the basis for Christian witness, evangelism, mission and overall activities. The disciples are not to do the task in their own strength, wisdom and power, but in Christ’s authority and power which he gave to them and behind which he himself stands as the almighty Lord above all.

It is worthwhile to note that Jesus specifically prepared his disciples for accepting his authority and acting in him.

“He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. . . . These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: . . . preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, and drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:1-15; Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-20).

Through discipleship and teaching them for three years, he taught them how to preach the good news, proclaim the kingdom of God, make disciples, heal the sick, cast out evil spirits, raise the dead, deliver the captives, feed the hungry and correct those who were in the wrong. He taught them to proclaim the gospel in different life circumstances and concrete situations. In that process of learning, they returned to Jesus full of joy and reported: “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Lk 10:17). They learned how to use his authority in life’s daily, often colliding, situations. They saw Jesus using his authority in conflict with the advocates of the Jewish traditions, in conflict with the Pharisees and the government authorities.

1.2. Command to the Disciples: Go and Make Disciples of All Nations.

The Great Commission contains three commands, and the mandate to make all the nations his disciples is a central command, the heart of Jesus’ mission mandate (Hertig, 2001:346). Consider each of those commands.

1.2.1. Preaching the Good News to Every Creature.

The evangelist Luke notes that Jesus often “traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (Lk

8:1). Matthew wrote Jesus' command to the disciples: "As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, and drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:7-8). Christians are sent to preach the gospel to every creature, to every nation and in every place. The result of evangelism includes being obedient to Christ, joining his church, and serving responsibly in the world (LC, 4).

1.2.2. Make Disciples of All Nations.

Preaching and accepting the gospel creates a basis for making disciples of Christ. The model for Christian discipleship can be found in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ who calls people to follow him (Lk 9:23-24; Mt 10:38-39; Mk 8:34). The disciple is a believer, a person that lives a life of conscious and permanent identification with the Lord in life, death and resurrection, through words, actions, behavior, attitudes, motives and intentions. The disciple understands Christ's absolute possession of his/her life, gladly accepts Christ's salvation, revels in Christ's lordship, lives in the permanent presence of Christ and harmonizes his/her life according to the life of Christ, glorifying his/her Lord and Savior (Peters, 1996:187).

The process of making disciples includes baptizing the disciples in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as well as teaching them to do all that Jesus commanded. Preaching the gospel brings people to a decision of accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, and baptism introduces them into the church – the community of disciples or saints in Christ in which they can be taught and trained to do everything that Jesus Christ commanded.

Some Christians have changed Jesus' commission, "teaching them to keep (do) all I have commanded you," by their lives and practice. In many churches, it reads: "teach them to know all I have commanded you." Knowledge about the Word has replaced acting according to the Word. This is perceptible by the many conferences, seminars, teachings, meetings, associations and other activities necessary for getting knowledge which usually only confirm the knowledge a Christian has already had for years, meanwhile using the precious time so needed for practical application of the obtained knowledge. Contributing to this, Peters points out: "It is tragic that in the church history about the Great Commission, more had been discussed than acted upon" (1996:173). David Bosh points out that the learning taking place in discipleship does not happen in the classroom, not even in the church, but in the world. Discipleship is taking place in the context of a relationship with Christ, and not in the mere following of rules and principles (Mt 23:3). Jesus taught the disciples to feed the hungry, to cast out demons, deliver the oppressed, and heal the sick in concrete situations. The phrase, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" is a declaration of Christ's authority over all aspects of life. The phrases, "all authority," "all

nations,” teaching them to obey “all,” and “always,” and “to the very end of the age” indicate the completeness, totality, and finality of the Great Commission (Hertig, 2001:349).

1.2.3. Serve the Needy

Jesus commanded the disciples: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons” (Mt 10:8). Christ’s disciples are servants as Jesus Christ was and is, he who indwelt the kingdom of God. The evangelist Luke reports that Jesus often “traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (Lk 8:1). An integral part of his preaching was the demonstration of the power of the kingdom of God: He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and delivered the demon possessed. In Paul’s ministry of proclaiming the gospel, words and deeds are inseparably connected and emphatically pointed out. “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of the Spirit” (Rom 15:18).

Disciples of Christ are called and sent to serve the people in the world by word and deed, introducing and intermediating in people’s lives all that God, in his love, intended for them, which he decided to accomplish and fulfill through Christians by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1.3. A Promise to the Obedient: I Am with You in All Days - to the End of the World.

Preceding the Great Commission was Jesus’ exhaustive preparation of the disciples for the fulfilling of the commission. The Acts of the Apostles, New Testament letters and the early history of the Church all witness to the fruits of keeping Jesus’ commands. The Holy Scriptures repeatedly remind readers that the Great Commission, with the task of proclaiming the gospel and making, baptizing and teaching the disciples along with serving the needy, cannot be separated from the power and the presence of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ has promised to be with those who will fulfill his commission in all days to the end of the world. Today, as well as then, Jesus’ disciples are called and sent to accomplish the Great Commission, to make disciples of Christ, in his authority and in his presence.

2. Global Evangelical Christianity and the Great Commission

The Global Evangelical Movement, in which most of the evangelical churches of Croatia participate, grew stronger in the middle of the twentieth century, giving evangelism and missions a strong stimulation. At the initiative of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, a world congress about evangelism was orga-

nized in Berlin in 1966.⁴ In July of 1974, the International Congress on World Evangelization was held in Lausanne, Switzerland. It was the largest gathering of Evangelical Christians to date, at which 2700 delegates participated from 150 world countries. The congress was, in many ways, a turning point for Evangelical Christians. At the end of the congress, a covenant was adopted, a document known today as the Lausanne Covenant.⁵

The participants of the Lausanne Congress confirmed their determination to fulfill the Great Commission as well as their commitment to the Bible as the only authority:

“We believe the Gospel is God’s good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ’s commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples of every nation” (*LC*, Introduction).

“We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God’s word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God’s revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God’s people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God” (*LC*, 2).

At the Second International Congress on World Evangelization, known as Lausanne II, held in Manila, Philippines in 1989,⁶ the *Manila Manifesto* was adopted. The *Manila Manifesto* is defined as a public manifest of commitment, intention and a prayer concerning two themes of the Congress: proclaiming Christ until he comes, and an invitation to the whole Church to take the gospel to the entire world. In its first part, the manifest brings twenty one concise declarations, and in the second part it explains them in twelve segments, and then, along with the

⁴ 1200 delegates from over a hundred countries participated in the congress. The congress stirred up many accompanying conferences, among which two are worth mentioning in Singapore and Bogotá.

⁵ The *Lausanne Covenant* is a largely prevalent confession of faith, the most representative evangelical confession of faith in the contemporary era. It is primarily a covenant, a personal promise to God and people that prayerful and active help will be offered toward the evangelization of the world.

⁶ There were 4300 representatives present at the congress from different churches, mostly evangelical, from 173 countries, including the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the Congress in Manila, more women, layman and young leaders participated than at the previous congress in Lausanne <http://www.Lausanne.org/manila-1989/manila/1989.html> (accessed September 10, 2008).

Lausanne Covenant, consigns them to the churches for study and as an encouragement for action.

After the International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne, 1974), many global, regional and thematic conferences were held.⁷ At some of those gatherings, certain documents were adopted and are known as Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOP's). The documents adopted at the Consultation on World Evangelization, held in 1980 in Pattaya, Thailand, were about witnessing to nominal Christians: *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics*, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Protestants*, and *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among the Orthodox*, are important for the topic of this article.

3. The Great Commission in the Context of the Evangelical Churches of Croatia

In the second part of the twentieth century, several evangelical churches have been active in Croatia. The Baptist⁸ and the Pentecostal churches⁹ have been notably present on Croatian soil since the 1920's, and the Free Brethren since the 1950's. After the Second World War, the churches partially changed their strategy of evangelization, turning from pre-war evangelization in small places toward larger urban centers where they planted churches.¹⁰ During the seventies and eighties, in the twentieth century, numerous foreign announcers of the gospel visited Croatia, and Billy Graham and his evangelistic association (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) serve as an example and tenable encouragement for the Baptist and other evangelical churches of Croatia.¹¹ New books and articles were

⁷ Global gatherings include the Consultation on World Evangelization (Pattaya 1980), the Conference of Young Leaders (Singapore 1987), Lausanne II (Manila 1989), The Forum for Evangelization (Pattaya 2004) and The Younger Leaders Gathering (Malaysia 2006).

⁸ Although certain groups of Baptist believers were working on Croatian soil toward the end of the nineteenth century, institutionalized community is recognizable as late as the 1920's. It has been noted that in 1921, in the area of the Croatian/Serbian conference, the Baptists had 70 believers, and in 1923, 18 stations in Croatia and Slavonia (Jambrek, 2003:52).

⁹ The first Pentecostal community was founded in Beška in 1907, and around 1921 in Vinkovci and Vinkovačko Novo Selo (Jambrek, 2003:102).

¹⁰ The Baptists have, for example, founded churches in Rijeka (1954), Sisak (1956), Zadar, Šibenik, Čakovec and Osijek (1964), and in Karlovac (1965). Between 1948-1980, the Pentecostals founded fourteen churches, among which are the church in Zagreb (1948), Beli Manastir (1951), Našice (1954), Đakovo (1961), Požega (1961), Rijeka (1964), Vukovar (1966), Pula (1977) and Zagreb (1979).

¹¹ Billy Graham proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in Zagreb in the Lutheran Church and on the playing field of the Roman Catholic high school before several thousand listeners. The transmission

printed, and Graham's book, *Peace with God* was printed and distributed in several thousand copies, especially during the Croatian war for independence.

The global evangelistic motions in the 1970's and 1980's extended to the evangelical churches of Croatia, which organized numerous large and small evangelistic gatherings. Evangelistic schools were organized and new churches were founded. Croatian believers participated in numerous conferences and congresses, especially those organized by The European Missionary Association – TEMA.¹² Toward the end of the 1980's, the possibility for evangelism via movie and video arose,¹³ and at the beginning of the 1990's, for broadcasts on local radio stations.¹⁴ Particularly significant for evangelism was the film "Jesus" which was watched by several thousands of people in villages and cities throughout Croatia.

The evangelistic zeal of the Global Evangelical Movement from the second part of the twentieth century is discernible in Croatia also in the arenas of theological education, in church planting, in the foundation of new denominations, in translation and printing of the Holy Scripture, as well in editing and mission activity.

Theological Education. Toward the end of the twentieth century, there were four active theological/educational institutions in Croatia that, more or less, encouraged evangelism and the implementation of the Great Commission. The Evangelical Theological Seminary of Osijek, the oldest and most prominent theological institution that serves the evangelical churches, is a respected international and interdenominational theological seminary with public recognition which, aside from having a solid theological education, puts strong emphasis on evangelism, church planting and church growth (www.evtos.hr). The Theological Biblical Academy of Krapina emphasizes, among the rest, the responsibility of each student to be involved in personal evangelism (www.tba.hr), and the Biblical Institute of Zagreb "exists to help prepare the students for life and devoted

of his evangelistic meeting in Dortmund, Germany ("Euro 70") was viewed throughout Europe. In Zagreb, the transmission took place in the Catholic Church of the blessed Marko Križevčanin (Jambrek, 2003).

¹² In the 1970's and 1980's, every three years, TEMA organized a missions congress for youth in Holland.

¹³ The Institute for Spiritual Culture (now Theological Institute) has translated and distributed several films and TV episodes with Christian subjects, among which are the films, "The Cross and the Switchblade" and "The Hiding Place," as well as the TV series, "Superbook".

¹⁴ Associates from the Baptist, Evangelical/Pentecostal and Churches of Christ have started to prepare and transmit radio programs on local radio stations. Among the most listened broadcasts were the programs of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Izvori vjere," the Baptist program, "Pet minuta Duhovne stvarnosti" and the program, "Radosna vijest" by the Church of Christ of Zagreb.

ministry to others, through knowing God and His truths as revealed in the Bible” (www.bizg.hr). The Theological Faculty “Matija Vlačić Ilirik” of Zagreb, is dedicated, along with the education of pastors and theologians, to promulgating a general theological culture, research and promotion of ecumenism, human rights and Christian peacemaking (www.tfmvi.hr).

Church Planting. Toward the end of the twentieth century, a movement to plant churches was discernable in the evangelical churches. From 1980 to 2001, within the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, twenty three churches were planted (Jambrek, 2003:141-143). The planting of churches was also seen in the Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia. In 1991, the Union grew to thirty churches (Peterlin, 239), and in 2001, to forty five churches.¹⁵ Within those ten years, fifteen churches were founded in the Union of Baptist Churches alone.

By the year 2000, several independent churches had also been planted in Croatia, among which include the following: Full Gospel Church in Zagreb (1989), Christian Prophetic Church “Maranatha” in Split (1992), the Good News Church in Zagreb (1993), the Christian Center “Bethesda” in Zadar (1995), the Evangelical Methodist Church in Split (1995), and the Christian Prophetic Church in Zagreb (1997).

Birthing New Denominations. Between 1980 and 1990, three groups of churches were founded in Croatia that had just become denominations at the beginning of the 21st century. Those are the Council of Christ’s Churches, the Union of Word of Life churches, and the Council of Citizens for Promoting Christian Values Through Home Fellowships and Public Manifestations.

Under the influence of the tradition of the Restoration Movement, the Church of Christ was founded in Zagreb in 1985, which then intermediated in the planting of six new Churches of Christ. In 2003, those churches, together with five other Christ’s Brethren churches founded the Council of Christ’s Churches that gathered twelve churches together.

The Christian center, Word of Life, started with embracing believers and being active in Zagreb in 1993. Through evangelistic activity, eleven centers and five mission stations were founded by 2007. Since 2003, the Union of Word of Life churches have been a denomination that follows the World Charismatic Movement of faith, if judged by its key features.¹⁶

In the last decade of the twentieth century, several home fellowships were founded in Zagreb and work by the principles of the movement of house church-

¹⁵ The members of the Union of the Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia. <http://baptist.hr/clanice.html> (accessed April 14, 2001).

¹⁶ Basic data about the Christian center, Word of Life can be found on: <http://www.rijeczivota.hr> (accessed September 10, 2008).

es. Together they gather and function as the Council of Citizens for Promoting Christian Values Through Home Fellowships and Public Manifestations. Although this group of believers does not call itself a church, the way it functions and the content of its activity refers to the birthing of a specific denomination whose identity is formed by former and future public activity.¹⁷

Translating and Printing the Holy Scriptures. At the height of the evangelistic wave in the evangelical churches of Croatia, toward the end of the twentieth century, as an answer to the growing needs in evangelization, a complete translation of the Bible emerged, five translations of the New Testament, one translation of the New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs, as well as one translation of the New Testament and the Psalms. These are: *Knjiga o Kristu: Novi zavjet živim riječima* [*The Book about Christ, The New Testament in Living Words*] (1982); *Novi zavjet: Zagrebačko izdanje* [*New Testament, Zagreb edition*] (1989); *Dvojezični englesko-hrvatski Novi zavjet, Psalmi i Mudre izreke* [*English-Croatian Parallel New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs*] (1993); *Novi zavjet po Prihvaćenom tekstu* [*The New Testament according to the Received Text*] (1998); *Sveto pismo staroga i Novoga zavjeta* [*The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*] (2000); *Novi zavjet* [*New Testament*] (2001); *Novi zavjet: suvremeni prijevod* [*New testament, Contemporary Translation*] (2003); *Novi Zavjet i Psalmi* [*New Testament and Psalms*] (2006).¹⁸ Bible societies were founded which organized the translation and distribution of the Holy Scriptures, especially of the New Testament.¹⁹

Publishing. In fulfilling the Great Commission, publishers of spiritual literature are involved who, along with evangelistic literature, publish literature for spiritual living, theological education and common culture. As Evangelical Christianity grew stronger during the second part of the twentieth century, by the number of believers as well as the churches and denominations, there were

¹⁷ This group of believers in Zagreb is called “Borongaj fellows,” named by the neighborhood in which they first started to gather as a home fellowship in 1993. Along with four fellowships in Zagreb, founded between 1993-2002, they have founded a house fellowship in Zaprešić (2006), and one in Šibenik (2007). Since March, 2008, they have published a quarterly newspaper named, *Dobre vijesti* (Good News), that is freely distributed throughout Croatia (www.dobrevijesti.hr).

¹⁸ A more concise review of these editions is issued in the article, “The Bible among the Croatian People: Translating, Printing and Distributing the Bible in the Context of Proclaiming the Gospel.” The graphical chronological overview was prepared by Stanko Jambrek and Ruben Knežević. It is published in the *Kairos, Evangelical Journal of Theology* (2007, I, 1) under the title “A Chronological Overview of Complete and Partial Translations of the Bible Published in Croatian” (131-150).

¹⁹ Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Croatian Bible Society (Hrvatsko biblijsko društvo), the International Bible Society (Internacionalno biblijsko društvo), Bible Society at Life Center International (Biblijsko društvo pri Međunarodnom centru za život), Bible Society in Croatia (Biblijsko društvo u Republici Hrvatskoj) and Croatian Bible Publisher (poduzeće Hrvatski biblijski nakladnik) were founded (Jambrek, 2007:80).

more and more publishers who strove to answer the general and specific spiritual needs by the printed word, as well as the evangelistic needs of the believers and the churches.²⁰

Mission Activity. The implementation of the Great Commission in Croatia has happened through the work of national spiritual workers and with the help of foreign missionaries that came from the west, mostly from the USA. In the mid 1980's of the twentieth century, a number of international and interdenominational parachurch organizations sent their missionaries to Croatia with the task of organizing the life and the activities of such associations.²¹

The larger denominations and theological institutions of Croatia independently consider mission strategies, and try to adopt and implement them with joint efforts. In his work, *Misija (Mission)*, Peter MacKenzie offers a general mission strategy for Evangelical Christians in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia (1983, 97-98) in ten points. At the end, he concludes,

“The national church in Yugoslavia already started to become self-governed, self-multiplying, but had not reached a financial independence yet. To a degree, this is justified, because the church is small and functions on a relatively resistant terrain. Nevertheless, it is desirable to slowly free itself from such dependency and meanwhile use those resources in projects that will bring growth” (1983, 98).

Based on the Great Commission, the Council of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Croatia adopted a mission strategy in 1992.²² The mission committee working within the Council of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Croatia got renamed in 1993 as *Misija Ilirik (Mission Illyricum)* and was given the task of accomplishing the adopted strategy in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Jambrek, 2003:139). *Mission Illyricum* then organized a number of activities and encouraged the planting of new churches, especially in the central and Adri-

²⁰ Among the most influential publishers in the evangelical churches of Croatia are: Biblijski institut, Zagreb; Biblijsko društvo pri Međunarodnom centru za život, Rijeka; Bogoslovni institut, Zagreb; Duhovna stvarnost, Zagreb; Euroliber, Split; Evanđeoski teološki fakultet, Osijek; Hrvatski biblijski nakladnik, Varaždin; Izvori, Osijek; Logos, Daruvar; Obiteljski život, Zagreb; Put života, Zagreb; Riječ Života, Zagreb; Riječi iskrene, Pušćine; Savez građana za promicanje kršćanskih vrijednosti kroz kućne zajednice i javne manifestacije, Zagreb; Stepres, Zagreb; Teološka biblijska akademija, Krapina; Teološki fakultet “Matija Vlačić Ilirik”, Zagreb.

²¹ Most successful among them are the organizations: *Nada i Život (Campus Crusade for Christ)*, *STEP – Studentski evanđeoski pokret (IFES – International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)*, *Mladi za Krista (Youth for Christ)* and *Teen Challenge*.

²² The strategy for evangelism and mission of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church written by Stanko Jambrek, in 1992 is known as a “Mission Strategy of the Evangelical Church of Croatia.” It was published by the secretariat of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church for internal use (Jambrek, 2003:138).

atic regions of Croatia.

The Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia established a department for missions called Baptist Mission in Croatia in June, 1993. The pastor of the Baptist church in Daruvar, Miško Horvatek, was chosen to be the secretary. In the first circular letter of the Mission sent to all Baptist churches, Horvatek (2003) emphasized:

The Council of the Baptist Churches in Croatia considers the National Mission as imperative emerging from Jesus' Great Commission: "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). ...The Baptists in Croatia need to send missionaries for the purpose of evangelizing and planting churches in all cities and villages (Mt 9:35-38).

The national mission endeavors were often supported by foreign missionaries. Even after a century of existence, Evangelical Christendom in Croatia cooperates closely with foreign Christian churches, institutes and organizations, mostly from the west, assuming that by joint efforts they will fulfill the Great Commission sooner and more effectively.

4. Foundational Issues

4.1. Evangelism and Social Activity

By emphasizing personal evangelism, Evangelical Christians of the first part of the twentieth century often neglected social activity. This is partially because liberal Christians endeavored to replace the lost faith by social care, attempting to model new Christians through changed social structures.²³ The participants of the Lausanne Congress (1974) publicly repented for such a condition and encouraged Christians around the world to evangelism and socio/political activation as a part of their integral duty.

²³ Within global Evangelical Christianity, there are three major influential views about the relationship between evangelism and social activity. The conservative evangelical view gives priority to the historical understanding of the mission solely as evangelism. Its goal is the planting of churches and a development of church movements throughout the world. The liberal evangelical view gives priority to care for the poor, holding that the proclaiming of the gospel should not have priority over social activity. The holistic view, on the other hand, represents the majority of Christians worldwide and in Croatia, and the expressions of commitment, along with the *Bible*, are declared in the *Lausanne Covenant*, the *Manila Manifesto* and the document *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* (Lausanne Occasional Paper 21). In his book, *Toward an Evangelical Theology of Humanitarian Aid Ministry* (72-79), Antal Balog has given a significant contribution to the comprehensive discussion considering these views.

“We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive” (LC, 5).

Discussing the relationship between the evangelistic and the social activity of the church, Roland Sider emphasizes four models present in the modern church in his book *Evangelism & Social Action: the individualistic evangelical model, the radical Anabaptist model, the dominant ecumenical model and the secular Christian model* (1993, 25-45).²⁴ Although the basic characteristics of these models apply primarily to churches in the USA, they are clearly visible in global Christianity and even in Croatia, because Evangelical Christianity in Croatia is connected to that in the USA. Therefore, following is a concise overview of Sider’s four models that maintain the relationship between evangelism and social action (1993:25-45).

Individualistic Evangelical Model. Evangelism is the primary mission of the church in this model, and the most basic concern is the salvation of individuals. The Church is not called to Christianize the World, but to evangelize it. If we focus on evangelism, individual souls can be rescued for heaven. We can only evangelize persons, not social structures, but social structures will be changed only as converted persons live as the salt and light of society. Communication of the gospel is largely through verbal proclamation. The *Lausanne Covenant* accents:

“In the Church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The Church is at the very centre of God’s cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the gospel. But a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance. The church is the community of God’s people rather than an institu-

²⁴ They all struggle to answer ten basic questions: 1) How should we understand sin? 2) How should we understand people? 3) What is the gospel? 4) What is salvation? 5) What is the connection between our work for justice and freedom now and the perfection of the coming kingdom that comes only at Christ’s return? 6) What is the ultimate source and authority for answering such tough questions? 7) Who or what is the object of evangelism? 8) How is the gospel shared? 9) How is society changed? 10) Where is the primary location of God’s activity today? (Sider, 1993:30-31).

tion, and must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology” (LC, 6).

This model, intertwined with the radical Anabaptist model, is mostly represented in the evangelical churches of Croatia. With few exceptions, it is noticeable in the Union of the Baptist Churches, in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the Council of the Churches of Christ, the Church of God, the Christ Pentecostal Church and the Union of the Word of Life Churches.

Radical Anabaptist Model. In this model, the basic mission of the church is to be a community of believers. The gospel is the good news of the kingdom. Forgiveness and regeneration are central parts of the gospel. By their words, deeds and life together, Christians evangelize the world by announcing the good news that, by grace it is now possible to live in a new society (the visible body of believers) in which all relationships are being redeemed. The church refuses to live by the social, cultural, and economic values of the Old Age. Instead, it lives out the values of scripture in its life together, offering to the world a visible model of redeemed (although not yet perfect!) personal, economic, and social relationships. Salvation is, therefore, personal and social. Evangelism happens by the word of proclamation and the life of discipleship.

Even though some elements of the radical Anabaptist model can be found in all evangelical churches of Croatia, most of them can be found in house fellowships in the Council of Citizens for Promoting Christian Values Through Home Fellowships and Public Manifestations.

The Dominant Ecumenical Model. At the core of this model is the claim that the conversion of individuals and the political restructuring of society are both central parts of evangelism and salvation. Salvation is therefore both personal and social. Social salvation includes socio-economic liberation in secular society. Salvation includes both what happens when people come to personal faith in Jesus Christ and also what happens when society attains greater justice, freedom, peace, and ecological wholeness. The document “Mission and Evangelism” published by the World Council of Churches in 1982, highlights that the conversion of individuals is important:

“The proclamation of the Gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving Lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship” (10).

To this declaration, the document adds the exhortation that Christians also need to transform social structures: “The call to conversion, as a call to repentance and obedience, should also be addressed to nations, groups, and families” (sect. 12).

Furthermore: “The Evangelistic Witness will also speak to the structures of this world; its economic, political and societal institutions” (15). The advocates of this model passionately insist that working for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation is an essential, central Christian responsibility. They believe that solidarity with the poor and oppressed is a central criterion for faithful discipleship and mission (Sider, 1993:42).

This model is greatly represented and applied by the Christians and churches gathered in the Ecumenical movement. In Croatia, it is most recognizable in the Roman Catholic Church, but it is also affirmed by various protestant churches, individuals and the local evangelical churches. The *Lausanne Covenant*, which is accepted by most Evangelical Christians globally, strongly asserts evangelism as a primary task of Christians (*LC*, 6), and then emphasizes a personal and social responsibility, because faith without works is dead.

“Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead” (*LC*, 5).

The Secular Christian Model. In this model, evangelism is merely political and salvation is only a form of social justice. The adjective “Christian” in this model could be deceptive because this model has denied Christ and the faith in God revealed in the Bible. The basic goal of the mission of the Church is the humanization of society. Some advocates of this model hold that Christians should stop evangelizing and join all religions in the search of god and a decent world (Sider, 1993:45).

Social Action in Evangelism and Mission. Social action is that set of activities whose primary goal is to improve the physical, socio-economic and political well-being of people through relief, development, and structural change (Sider, 1993:45). In the evangelical churches of Croatia, humanitarian activity was noticeable only partially before the Croatian war for independence (1991-1995). At the beginning of the war, the churches responded extraordinarily. They organized humanitarian activities and associations with distribution centers in many cities and villages. Besides that, every local church served as a refuge center for

refugees and exiles, serving them food, giving them clothes and temporary shelter. The Croatian churches and their organizations served as a bridge between foreign, mostly western, churches and humanitarian organizations and the afflicted nationals.²⁵ After the end of the Croatian war for independence and the return of the refugees to their homes – mostly war-torn and restored only after the war with the help of the state, humanitarian organizations and personal resources and efforts – the humanitarian activity of the churches was reduced, and in some areas it ceased altogether. Although the churches gathered humanitarian aid in food, clothes and footwear, along with help from foreign countries, during war time, this national arrangement of the churches significantly collapsed at the beginning of the 21st century. With few exceptions, the churches did not succeed in being effectively transformed from distributors of foreign aid into givers and sharers of the material goods God had entrusted to them for stewardship.

During the humanitarian crises in Georgia, I wrote a letter (August, 2008) to the president of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, to the president of the Union of the Baptist Churches, the president of the Council of Churches of Christ and the president of the Union of Word of Life Churches, in which I asked them for an official answer to several questions,²⁶ of which the most important was the one regarding the urgent need to help the needy in Georgia. I received an answer from the three first denominations, but am still waiting for an answer from the Union of the Word of Life Churches. Their answers point to the fact that the leaders of the denominations have recognized those questions as strategic and important, and each stressed that they will do something soon. In principle, they affirmed the stance Peter MacKenzie emphasized long ago, in 1983: “At this moment, there is no room, nor financial resources for some significant social attempts. But, every member should be instructed to use every opportunity for deeds of love” (MacKenzie, 1983:97). From the official responses, it can be seen

²⁵ Regarding the humanitarian activity of the evangelical churches during the Croatian war for independence, see Jambrek, 2003 and Balog, 2007.

²⁶ I addressed them with the following questions: Does your denomination have a strategy for developing humanitarian activity with the purpose of gathering money, food, clothes, building material and other accessories for the needy in Croatia and other countries? Does your denomination have a crown humanitarian organization, a board or a committee in Croatia which coordinates the work of all humanitarian organizations and associations? If not, does your leading board plan to suggest that your denomination form a crown humanitarian institution, board, committee or some other leading body that will deal with humanitarian activity with the purpose of gathering money, food and clothes in Croatia for the needy in Croatia and other countries? Does your denomination plan to offer humanitarian aid to the hundreds of thousands of exiles and refugees in Georgia? Within your denomination, there are several humanitarian associations and centers. As a leader of the denomination, do you consider that those centers should be active in such crisis situations as the humanitarian crisis in Georgia? Can they do anything?

that the church members, national and foreign, are encouraged to pray for the different needs of the people, but the denominations themselves have not found a way to provide significant, independent help. Some denominations, like the Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia, are connected with foreign humanitarian organizations and make contributions through them. Since all evangelical churches are independent in their governing, many of their initiatives were not as effective nor as noticeable as they would have been if the churches were affiliated in this perspective.

The situation is similar in the area of changing social structures. Congregations are too small and inconsiderable in comparison with the overall population, therefore all former attempts to change social structures received a poor response.

4.2. Evangelization of Nominal Christians

Is there a need for discussion about evangelism in Croatia when the statistical data shows that in 2001, out of 4,437,460 of the Croatian population, more than 92 % declared themselves as Christians?²⁷ Croatia is a predominantly Roman Catholic nation (87.83 %). It calls itself a Catholic, Christian country because, in the past, the gospel was proclaimed, the people were baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, and the culture was Christianized. However, Evangelical Christians raise the question: Are all the Roman Catholics truly believers in the biblical sense? Are all of them truly saved?

Can we ignore the painful fact clearly pointed out by the Second Vatican Council that many members of the Roman Catholic Church are in the Church only in a “bodily” manner and not “in their hearts” (LG, 14)? The fact that there are members of the church only in a “bodily” manner and not “in heart” is, more or less, a reality in all churches: the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Protestant and the Evangelical.

It is not possible to talk about the evangelization of non-Christians, and ignore the fact that many people in the churches are in need of evangelism though they are considered church members and call themselves Christians. When someone belongs to a church in the flesh and not in their heart, Evangelical Christians call this nominal Christianity, Christianity only in name. Nominal Christianity creates a so-called grey area in evangelism (Jambrek, 1997). The grey area consists of a great number of people in the churches that are baptized, whether as

²⁷ According to the data from 2001, Croatia has a population of 4,437,460, and 87.83 % of them declared themselves as Roman Catholics, 0.14 % as Greco Catholics, 0.007 % as Old Catholics, 4.42 % as Orthodox, 1.28 % as Muslims. The Protestant churches (the Lutheran and the Reformed) make 0.165 % of the population, and the evangelical churches make 0.13 %.

children or adults, and yet have become Christians only in name.

Most probably, all the churches would agree to a great measure, that there is no need of repeated evangelization of the Christians who know Jesus Christ and have a biblically based personal relationship with him. The question, then, is what to do with the people who are Christians only by tradition and not through a personal experience of relationship with God?²⁸ This group of people comprises approximately more than 17 % of some churches in Croatia.²⁹ The Second Vatican Council encourages preaching the gospel to all people, but it still emphasizes, as a basic goal, the conversion of non-Christians and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ:

“Wherever God opens a door of speech for proclaiming the mystery of Christ (cf. Col. 4:3), there is announced to all men (cf. Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 9:15; Rom. 10:14) with confidence and constancy (cf. Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27, 28; 13:46; 14:3; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31; 1 Thess. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Phil. 1:20; Eph. 3:12; 6:19, 20) the living God, and He Whom He has sent for the salvation of all, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; Gal. 1:31; Acts 14:15-17, 17:22-31), in order that non-Christians, when the Holy Spirit opens their heart (cf. Acts 16:14), may believe and be freely converted to the Lord, that they may cleave sincerely to Him Who, being the “way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), fulfills all their spiritual expectations, and even infinitely surpasses them.

This conversion must be taken as an initial one, yet sufficient to make a man realize that he has been snatched away from sin and led into the mystery of God’s love, who called him to enter into a personal relationship with Him in Christ” (AG, 13).

²⁸ Traditional Christians have a historical view of Jesus, admire his work and the message he preached. They agree with the declarations of faith compounded by their predecessors. They dispose sufficient knowledge about church liturgy, sacramental theology and folk beliefs, and have some information about God, but they lack a personal relationship with God. The Holy Scripture is only one of the authorities for theology and faith, for life and action. In the Catholic, Orthodox and the Protestant Churches, one becomes a Christian by being born into a family of believers, and by baptism as an infant, as well as by the faith of the godfather and the church. In their relationship with God, both Catholic and Orthodox traditional believers can obtain help through their mediators, like Mary and the saints. In the churches of the Reformation heritage (the Evangelical, Baptist, Pentecostal and Churches of Christ), as traditional believers are considered even the believers of the second generation, that is, the children born from believing parents, raised in a Christian environment, but without a personal repentance and conversion toward God. Many of them come to church by tradition and habit, partially participating and serving in the church, but they often have adopted attitudes and life’s beliefs more as an expression of the secular influences, instead of because of the Word of God (Jambrek, 2005:22-23).

²⁹ In some churches, this percentage is smaller, and in some it is far greater. Since we do not have scientifically based data for all the churches, this percentage is based on my free estimation.

The document, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics*, defines a nominal Christian as, a person who has not responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. He is a Christian in name only. He may be very religious. He may be a practicing or non-practicing church member. He may give intellectual assent to basic Christian doctrines and claim to be a Christian. He may be faithful in attending liturgical rites and worship services, and be an active member involved in church affairs. But in spite of all this, he is still destined for eternal judgment (cf. Mt 7:21-23, Jas 2:19) because he has not committed his life to Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10).

A nominal Christian within the Protestant tradition, according to the document, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Protestants*, is

“one who would call himself a Christian, or be so regarded by others, but who has no authentic commitment to Christ based on personal faith. Such commitment involves a transforming personal relationship with Christ, characterized by such qualities as love, joy, peace, a desire to study the Bible, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, a determination to witness faithfully, a deep concern for God’s will to be done on earth, and a living hope of heaven to come (1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Romans 2:28,29; Revelation 2:4-5; 3:1; Matthew 15:8-9; Hebrews 10:25)”.

From the point of view of a nominal Christian’s relationship to a congregation, the document *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Protestants* identifies five types of nominal Christians:

- a. One who attends church regularly and worships devoutly, but who has no vital personal relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- b. One who attends church regularly but for cultural reasons only.
- c. One who attends church only for major church festivals (Christmas, Easter, etc.) and ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals).
- d. One who hardly ever attends church but maintains a church relationship for reasons of security, emotional or family ties, or tradition.
- e. One who has no relationship to any specific church and who never attends but yet considers himself a believer in God (in a Protestant traditional sense).

Evangelical Christians are convinced they have evangelistic responsibility toward every person which, even if baptized, does not demonstrate trust for his/her salvation in Christ alone. They are aware that their conviction offends many people, but they assert that they are consistent in their standpoint because they apply the same principles for Protestants, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and for all of humanity (CWNCARC).

Evangelical Christians consider that the Christianity of an individual can not be based only on baptism or birth into a believing family. On the contrary, it must be rooted in the experience of a transformed heart through new birth (Jn 3:1-8) and a continuous relationship with the living God (Jn 15:1-10). Jesus revealed to his disciples: "Now this is eternal life: That they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). It is not enough to know about the Lord Jesus Christ; for salvation, Christian living and eternal life it is necessary to know him. One can become a Christian by converting to God, repenting for sins, accepting Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord, and being born of the Holy Spirit.

"A Christian is a disciple of Christ (Acts 11:26). It is a person that has a salvation experience and intimate relationship with God. It is a person that is in a continuous process of learning from the relationship with Jesus Christ, a person that accepts the Bible as a written Word of God, the only foundation for believing and living. A Christian lives practically by the principles he had learned from Jesus Christ and leans on the Gospel, while keeping God's will" (Jambrek, 2005:24).

Evangelical Christians also differentiate between traditional Christians, which are usually nominal Christians, and biblical Christians who have responded to the call of the gospel in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.³⁰

In considering the fulfillment of the Great Commission, Evangelical Christians of Croatia face multiple problems. One of them is to answer the question: Which church should the new converts belong to? Although Evangelical Christians rejoice in the strengthening of the Christ-centered movements for spiritual renewal in many churches, they cannot ignore the fact that the official view of the Roman-Catholic Church remains, to a great measure, "unreformed," as the document *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics* points out.³¹ Since 1982, when the document was announced, numerous other docu-

³⁰ "Although there are many of them, the most important difference between a traditional and a biblical Christian is in the dynamics of a personal relationship with God and in the adopted values. A traditional Christian most often does not have a relationship with God. Therefore, when he/she needs God, knowing they are not intimate, he/she will call for help from Mary, the saints or some other mediator. He/she is devoted to the tradition of the church, but his/her attitudes are established on secular principles. He/she agrees with the church magistrate that the sacraments are important for life, but personally, the sacraments are only good church customs, petrified remnants of a medieval theology which has nothing to do with spiritual reality" (Jambrek, 2005:24).

³¹ The document presents seven types of Roman Catholics: 1) *Tridentine Roman Catholics*. They hold the dogma of the Counter-Reformation as defined by the Council of Trent. Traditional and conservative, often politically right. 2) *Modernist/Progressive Roman Catholics*. Post-Vatican II li-

ments of the Roman Catholic Church have been announced, in which the issue of evangelism is discussed. Despite encouragement and persuasions for evangelism, the number of nominal Christians in the Roman Catholic Church and the other traditional churches has not significantly changed.

Among Evangelical Christians, there are three discernable views concerning the attitude a new convert should have toward the church to which he/she belonged as a nominal Christian.

One group of Evangelical Christians holds the opinion that new converts are the precious seed for spiritual renewal within their own church. This applies especially to the nominal Christians in the Roman Catholic Church because they consider that the best method for evangelizing the Catholics is to evangelize them from within their church, along with the encouragements from Evangelical Christians (CWNCARC). Many national and foreign Evangelical Christians and organizations in Croatia have contributed to this viewpoint, among which the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Campus Crusade for Christ, International, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students and many other organizations and persons are included.³²

Another set of Evangelical Christians represent the second group which maintains that nominal Christians who have converted to God and have experienced new birth need to leave their church where they were previously attending as nominal Christians and join some evangelical church in order to continue with their spiritual growth and effective witness. Here it needs to be emphasized that the churches representing this view notice multiple numerous growths in comparison with the rest of the evangelical churches of the world, including Cro-

berals; theologically, and often politically, left. 3) *Cultural Roman Catholics*. This includes a family, tribal, and social identity with little knowledge of theology. It is often manifested in popular religiosity and syncretistic superstition. 4) *Ethnic Roman Catholics*. Often migrants, using their religion to provide a sense of belonging. They feel that not to be Roman Catholic is not to belong, and to lose nationality and roots. 5) *Charismatic Roman Catholics*. Some are truly born again and committed to the Lordship of Jesus, and enjoy the emotional uplift and personal freedom. They are committed to remain Roman Catholics. 6) *Alienated/lapsed Roman Catholics*. These are indifferent not only to Roman Catholicism but also to the God of Catholicism whom they equate with Christianity. 7) *Moderated Roman Catholics*. The "Montinian Center" which is more attached to Vatican II documents. Some are biblically oriented, some are political reformists. Others see themselves as evangelicals.

³² The standpoint that the Evangelical Christians need to cooperate with the Roman Catholic Church in evangelism is greatly reflected by the document, *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*, signed together in 1994 by the Catholic leaders and numerous influential leaders of the Protestant and Evangelical churches and parachurch organizations in the USA. In Croatia, this document did not have any reflection, but it is important for the Croatian reality because it was signed by people who have great influence on the Christians in Croatia through their actions and writing. For more, see: <http://www.leaderu.com/ft9405/articles/mission.html> (accessed September 19, 2008).

tia.³³ Many Evangelical Christians, therefore, believe that it is right to encourage newly converted believers from traditional churches to leave their church and join theirs or some other evangelical church. Some Evangelical Christians accept as valid the Roman Catholic practice of baptizing infants, some do not accept this baptism and therefore encourage the converts to be baptized, invoking the biblical arguments (for example, Mk 16:16) while not considering this to be a re-baptizing.³⁴

The third group, and the greatest in number in Croatia, considers that the Word of God needs to be preached to all people, and that then the Holy Spirit should be allowed to do his job since he “blows wherever it pleases.” Every person is allowed to decide by him or herself whether he/she will remain in his/her existing church or join another of the evangelical churches.

4.3. The Great Commission and Proselytism

A discussion about evangelism raises the question of proselytism in the Christian family because what one Christian group or church may consider as evangelism, often another group or church may consider as proselytism (Jambrek, 1997). Proselytism as a persistent and zealous endeavor toward the conversion of others to one’s religion (Anić, 1998), and is only insignificantly present in certain churches of the Reformation heritage. The goal of Evangelical Christians is evangelism, not proselytism. The goal, therefore, is not winning practicing Christians from other denominations, but evangelization of those persons who do not yet have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. During evangelism, every person is offered a free choice concerning the part of the Body of Christ he/she will join under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Common acceptance and fulfillment of the Great Commission unites Christians in the same task with the goal of effectuating God’s kingdom, which surpasses every church, denomination and group of believers. In this endeavor of common living in the kingdom of God, the problem of proselytism is being solved through continuous dialogue and the practice of Christian fellowship. This pro-

³³ For example, the Christian center, Word of Life, established in Zagreb in 1993, today counts 10 centers and 5 mission stations, gathering around several hundreds of believers (<http://www.rijeczi-vota.hr/o-nama> (accessed October 19, 2008).

³⁴ The majority of Evangelical Christians in Croatia believe and hold that according to the teaching of the Bible, a new convert needs to be baptized as an adult person on the basis of his/her own personal faith and relationship with God. They consider the baptism of infants as an act similar/equal to the act of dedication of young children in the evangelical church. Therefore, the baptism of an adult who was baptized as an infant is not considered as re-baptizing. Most churches leave the choice of being baptized or not to the new convert, based on biblical teaching.

cess of communication and fellowship is not an easy one, neither is it happening completely and successfully, but it is the way to solve most of the problems created by proselytism.

Regarding the problem of proselytism among the evangelical churches of Croatia, the leaders of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Union of Baptist Churches held a discussion in 1996. On that occasion, a document named *Promemorija*, was signed, in which the leaders confirmed that the churches in which they serve are part of the Body of Christ, and gave the churches five guidelines about how to surpass proselytism in their activities:

1. Do not encourage, not even one, transfers from a local church of one denomination to a local church of another.
2. Respect the freedom of choice of every individual to choose a local church or denomination.
3. Approach the process of transfer solemnly and rationally, but flexibly, respecting different theological convictions and other circumstances.
4. Ask for a written explanation from the person contemplating transfer to another church.
5. Encourage believers and churches to release people into another church when they insist on transitioning with a blessing, and not with an argument. If possible, get a written recommendation.

These guidelines can help to develop and nourish good relationships between different churches and to prevent possible disagreements. The churches need to accept their mission as a partnership in the kingdom of God, even when there are real differences between them in the understanding of evangelism and mission. No church has a monopoly or greater rights than others in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Conclusion

In the Great Commission, all of Christ's disciples are called and sent to proclaim the gospel: to preach the good news about the kingdom of God, witness from their own experience and relationship with God, effectively love their neighbors, serve the needy by the power of the Holy Spirit and be a part of the lifelong process of discipleship, coalescing in the Church. Today, Jesus' disciples are sent in the same way to fulfill the Great Commission, to make disciples of Christ, in Christ's authority and in his presence.

In the second part of the twentieth century, some fruits of fulfilling the Great Commission are discernable in the evangelical churches of Croatia, especially in the area of evangelism. The evangelistic enthusiasm of the Global Evangelical Movement from the second part of the 20th century is discernable in Croatia

in the arenas of theological education, church planting, the foundation of new denominations, translation and the printing of the Holy Scriptures, as well as in publishing and mission activity.

Toward the end of the 20th century, Evangelical Christians of Croatia endeavored to effectuate God's love by serving the needy along with proclaiming the gospel. They agree that the gospel needs to be proclaimed to all people who do not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, which includes nominal Christians who are in the Church only bodily, but not in their hearts.

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Sažetak *U radu se razmatra biblijska osnova Velikog poslanja i njegova recepcija u crkvama reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj, u globalnom i domaćem kontekstu. Daje se sažet prikaz ostvarenja Velikog poslanja u pojedinim područjima djelovanja crkava reformacijske baštine, uz ostalo u osnivanju crkava, rađanju novih denominacija i misijskom djelovanju. Razlažu se temeljna pitanja koja se pojavljuju u njegovu ostvarivanju te se naznačuju odgovori po pitanjima odnosa evangelizacije i društvenoga djelovanja, evangelizacije nominalnih kršćana i prozelitizma.*

