

Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia (1990–2020): Their Legal Status, Restructuring, and Overall State in 2021¹

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Justification for Undertaking the Research Project

Throughout history, Christianity has been divided into several theologically and numerically significant groups. Since the 11th century, Christianity has primarily been divided between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. During the Reformation in the sixteenth century, two renewal movements emerged in Europe: the Protestant Reformation and the Radical Reformation. Building on the Bible and certain aspects of both Reformation traditions, the evangelical movement² gained significant traction in the 19th and 20th centuries. Particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements also flourished. The World Evangelical Alliance serves as a network for churches in 43 countries, connecting the majority of evangelical Christians worldwide. This organization provides a global identity, voice, and platform for over 600 million evangelical Christians.³ According to a report by the Pew Research Center (2011), Christianity was the world's largest religion in 2010, with an estimated 2.2 billion believers, comprising almost a third (31%) of the global population of 6.9 billion. Gladwin (2019, 162) estimated that of these 2.2 billion Christians, around 820 million can be described as evangelical Christians, including Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals but excluding denominational charismatics. This data indicates that world evangelical Christianity has become the second-largest group, next to the Catholic Church. This is especially evident in the global context. Gladwin points out that the majority of these 820 million evangelical Christians reside in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – approximately 690 million, or about 85 percent of the total. It is important to note that a large portion of global evangelical Christianity consists of believers from Pentecostal and charismatic denominations as well as independent local churches, including those in Croatia.⁴

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

- 2 The adjective *evangelical* accompanies the term Christian to point out that this Christianity (or Christians) base their preaching on the *gospel* (Greek *euangelion*). By using the adjective *evangelical* in the name of the church, one emphasizes the central role of Jesus Christ, grace, faith and the Holy Scripture in the beliefs and practices of the church. The term *evangelical Christian* encompasses every Christian who bases his or her beliefs and practices on the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 3 For more details, see World Evangelical Alliance; Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2013.
- 4 For further information, see Barrett 2019. For the situation in Croatia, see the research document entitled “Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia on March 28, 2021.”

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

Project Goals

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

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

Overview of Previous Research

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

Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. CRH Terminology, Demarcations, and Basic Characteristics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

sense, it denotes the Lutheran tradition of the Reformation. The term Protestantism originated from a protest called the *Protestatio*, which was issued by six German princes and fourteen cities at the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529.¹⁷ The Diet concluded that the Edict of Worms (1521), which outlawed Martin Luther and his associates, would be enforced. In response, those implementing reforms influenced by Luther openly protested with the *Protestatio*, defending freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities (McGrath 2006, 88). After Luther's death, the Lutheran tradition of the Reformation developed along two theological-political lines from the 1540s to the 1580s: the Philippists, followers of Philip Melancthon, advocated a humanistic-Lutheran theological stance, while the Gnesio-Lutherans, led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus, advocated a "pure" biblical theological direction. In summary, the Philippists embraced humanism as the basis for interpreting the Bible and theological reflection, aligned themselves with authorities, and implemented political and humanistic reforms. In contrast, the Flacius faction pursued a "pure" biblical theological approach and sought to implement Church reforms even at the expense of conflicts with authorities. It is important to note that the teachings and actions of today's churches, including the CRH, reflect certain elements of the theological thought from the Protestant Reformation.¹⁸ The tension between the political and humanistic theological orientation on one hand, and the "pure" biblical theological orientation on the other, is still evident in today's Protestant churches and the CRH. Liberal Protestant churches and progressive evangelical churches (progressive CRH) strongly embody the political and humanistic theological orientation, while conservative evangelical churches, including conservative CRH, strive to uphold a "pure" biblical theological perspective.¹⁹ Progressive (liberal) church leaders and theologians

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

- 17 The term *protestant* was originally a political term, referring to those in the Holy Roman Empire who protested against the conclusion of the Second State Assembly in Speyer in 1529 (Scribner 1986, 3).
- 18 The Reformation had multiple influences on Croatian regions, stemming from three distinct traditions: Evangelical, Reformed, and Radical. The most significant impact came from the evangelical tradition, primarily from three centers, each with its unique goals and theological-cultural emphases. The leading center was the university in Wittenberg, led by Philipp Melancthon, a humanist colleague of Martin Luther. Another important center for the Croatian territories was found at the court of Duke Christoph von Württemberg in Stuttgart, which included the university in Tübingen. The third influential center was the Gnesio-Lutheran movement in Magdeburg, led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus. While all three centers adhered to Luther's original teachings, each pursued its own religious, political, and cultural objectives. These diverse aims were significantly reflected and realized in various areas throughout the Croatian lands (Jambrek 2013, 67).
- 19 We deal with these topics in more detail in the discussion of the relationship between progressive and conservative evangelical Christianity in the second part of this article entitled "Churches of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The development of the new evangelical movement, both globally and in Croatia, has been significantly influenced by evangelical alliances²² and the Lausanne movement.²³ For instance, the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) was established in 1951 to connect national evangelical alliances into an active community. By the early 21st century, national alliances from nearly every European country were represented in the EEA.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1. Definition of Churches of the Reformation Heritage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The basic characteristics of CRH²⁸ are compiled based on documents from various denominations and independent churches. The key documents endorsed by the Protestant Evangelical Council²⁹ include the *Lausanne Covenant*, the *Manila*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Church is a Fellowship of Born-Again Christians.

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

4. Baptism of Believers.

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

5. Evangelization: The Work of the Holy Spirit in and Through Believers.

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

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

6. Each Local Church is Autonomous and Independent.

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

7. The Priesthood of All Believers.

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

8. Following Jesus Christ – Discipleship.

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

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

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

9. Unity in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another important process involved the social regulation of religious communities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Despite their fervent requests, the “Word of Life” network of churches and the Church of the Full Gospel were not permitted to sign a contract with the Government of the Republic of Croatia in 2003. Their aspirations were only fulfilled after the European Court of Human Rights mandated that the Government of the Republic of Croatia sign a contract with them. This was officially done on September 12, 2014.³⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Restructuring of the CRH (1990–2020)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is a short outline of the restructured CRH in Croatia on March 28, 2021.⁴³ After the implementation of the Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities (ALSRC) between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and individual religious communities, the processes of church restructuring have been completed.

The data on CRH in Croatia⁴⁴ have been compiled based on various sources, which include: Contracts with individual denominations with the Government of the Republic of Croatia; the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia; the Records of Associations in the Republic of Croatia; the Register of Business Entities in the Republic of Croatia; official records about denominations and independent churches (including annual reports and websites); archives of denominations and independent churches; private archival materials; questionnaires and interviews with official representatives of the denominations; questionnaires and interviews with local church leaders; analysis of research data collected through the questionnaires. The situation is as follows:

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

The Church of God in Croatia – 7 registered church municipalities

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

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

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

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

“Word of Life” network of churches – 12 registered churches

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

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

The Union of Christ's Pentecostal Churches – 9 registered churches
Independent Baptist Church – 3 registered churches

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

The Good News Church, Zagreb
Christ's Spiritual Church, Zagreb
Christ's Church of the Infant-Baptized, Zagreb
Christian Prophetic Church "Jesus is King," Zagreb
Church of Christ's Disciples, Tenja
Evangelical Christians, Tenja

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

Humanitarian Association Remar Croatia, Zaprešić (registered on June 7, 2006)
Christ is International Association, Mušalež (registered on March 8, 2017)
Christian Community Šibenik (registered on January 1, 2018)
Dunamis Association, Zagreb (registered on February 14, 2020)
Communities of Believers That Are Registered as Business Subjects (Other Organizations) Related to Religious Organizations' Activities
Christian Prophetic Church Maranatha, Split

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

Independent Spiritual Community, Osijek
Christian Community Split
Christ's Community "Home of Grace," Zadar

Based on the basic characteristics of the CRH,⁴⁵ the research team concluded that on March 28, 2021, eight denominations⁴⁶ and their 162 local churches were recorded in the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia. The Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, which comprises nine registered churches, and the Independent Baptist Church, with three registered churches, did not participate in the research. Consequently, the research focused on 150 churches that are listed in the register. Upon reviewing the official data from these denominations, we found that out of the 150 registered churches, 121 are active,

45 See Introduction to the Research for the definition.

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

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

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

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

The Church of God in Croatia – 7 church municipalities

The Full Gospel Church – 4 churches

Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) – 44 churches

Churches of Christ in Croatia – 12 churches

The Union of Baptist Churches (SBC) – 44 churches

“Word of Life” network of churches – 10 churches

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

The Church of God in Croatia – 6 out of 7 church municipalities (85.71%)

The Full Gospel Church – 3 out of 4 churches (75%)

Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) – 36 out of 44 churches (81.82%)

Churches of Christ in Croatia – 9 out of 12 churches (75%)

The Union of Baptist Churches (SBC) – 30 out of 44 churches (68.18%)

“Word of Life” network of churches – 2 out of 10 churches (16.67%)

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

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

⁴⁸ Churches that have filled out the Questionnaire.

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

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

4.1. Approximate Number of Believers in CRH

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

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

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

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

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

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

Approximate Number of Believers in Churches That Participated in the Research

| Name of the organizational form of the community | Number of active churches | Approx. number of believers | | Approx. number of believers, including children | Notes |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|--|
| | | Research data | Denominational data | | |
| Church of God | 7 | 255 | 275 | 310-335 | 21% of these are children |
| Full Gospel Church | 4 | 265 | 270 | 310-332 | Estimation - 23% of these are children |
| Evangelical Pentecostal Church | 44 | 1.719-1.789 | 1.800-1.900 | 2.214-2.337 | 23.16% of these are children |
| Churches of Christ in Croatia | 12 | 224 | 250 | 294-329 | 31.6% of these are children |
| Union of Baptist Churches | 44 | 1.771-1.800 | - | 2.199-2.235 | 24.17% of these are children |
| Word of Life network of churches | 10 | 700-850 | 1.100-1.200 | 865-1.050 ⁴⁹ | Estimation – 23.5% of these are children |
| Independent Spiritual Community, Osijek | 1 | 50 | 50 | 55 | |
| Total | 122 | 4.984-5.233 | 5.516-5.749 | 6.247-6.668 | |

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to the population census, Croatia had 4,784,265 inhabitants in 1991, but this number dropped to 3,888,529 by 2021.⁵⁰ Over the course of 30 years, Croatia lost 895,736 residents. However, despite these unfavorable demographic trends, the number of local CRH and their congregants has increased. For example, in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC), the number of local churches grew from 23 in 1991 to 44 active churches in 2021. The number of believers rose from approximately 900 in 1991 to between 1,700 and 1,800 in 2021, with an estimated total of 2,214 to 2,337 when including children. A similar growth trend has been observed in the Union of Baptist Churches and other groups, such as the Churches of Christ, the Word of Life network of churches, and the Full Gospel Church. As of 2021, the CRH in Croatia consists of 176 local churches⁵¹ with varying legal statuses, serving between 5,914 and 6,523 active believers, which increases to approximately 7,389 to 8,244 when including their children

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sažetak

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

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