

# Biblical Identity of Churches of the Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020<sup>1</sup>

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UDK: 27-23:277(497.5)"1990/2020"

Category: Original scientific article

<https://doi.org/10.32862/k.19.1.2>

## Abstract

*The article aimed to investigate and describe the biblical identity of the Churches of the Reformation Heritage (CRH) in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020. The author utilized sources such as newspapers, magazines, books, and social media published by the CRH during the relevant period, as well as personal observations of how CRH believers identified themselves, biblical texts, and his own long-term experience as a CRH member and an associate of CRH's educational and research institutions. The biblical identity of the CRH is based on the fundamental common belief that the Bible is the Word of God and, therefore, the supreme authority for faith and life, which includes the identity that God gives to those who accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. The believers in CRH identified themselves, based on the New Testament texts, as born-again, consciously baptized, "in Christ," saved, converted, God's children and God's family, Christ's disciples, saints, Biblical or New Testament Christians, and as God's, that is, Christ's church. Biblical identity was primarily shaped through participation in local church activities, where the Bible was taught and studied, as well as through personal Bible reading and study. Certain deviations from biblical identity are also described.*

**Keywords:** Churches of the Reformation Heritage, Evangelical Christians, Bible, Identity

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

## Introduction

Churches of the Reformation Heritage (further “CRH”) in Croatia can be defined as:

...autonomous and independent churches which from Luther’s Protestantism accepted that only Scripture, grace, and faith are the foundations of man’s relationship with God, and from the radical wing of the Reformation inherited the doctrine of discipleship, the belief that man must first believe to receive all the blessings of baptism, the awareness of the practical implementation of Christ’s mission in proclaiming the gospel, and the zeal for evangelism. Following the Anabaptist teaching, the Churches of the Reformation Heritage believe that church and state must be separated, legally and practically, and that each local church has the fullness of ecclesiology because the Word of God is proclaimed in it and the Spirit of God dwells in it, and therefore each local church is autonomous and independent (Jambrek 2003, 17).

From the above description, it is noticeable that two historical-theological origins or influences are cited that shape the identity of the CRH, namely the Reformation (Protestantism) and the Radical Reformation (Anabaptism). Leaving aside the discussion of the historical-theological influences that have developed and continue to grow in evangelical Christianity since the time of the Reformation, both in the Croatian context and more broadly, the purpose of this article is to explore how biblical truths have shaped the identity of believers in CRH, that is, their understanding of their relationship with God. Namely, for the question of identity, as for all other questions, the CRH primarily use the Bible because they consider it to be God’s revelation and God’s word, and therefore the supreme authority for belief and life.

We investigate the biblical identity of the CRH in the Republic of Croatia by identifying the biblical truths on which the CRH taught and built up its believers during the mentioned period. In the first part, we investigate the importance and role of the Bible for the CRH; in the second part, we look at how the importance and role of the Bible was applied in practice; in the third part, we state which biblical truths believers in CRH used to express their identity the most, and in the last part we state and briefly explain how the formation of the biblical identity of the believers was carried out in the CRH, and what deviations occurred in that process.

The challenge of the research has been the difficulty in finding written sources that discuss the topics of this article. Specifically, in our region, we have not found extensive research on the CRH from 1990 to 2020. Also, the CRH in Croatia consists of a certain number of denominations and independent churches. Due to the independent activities of the churches mentioned above, it was necessary to search in many different places to find information on the topics of this article,

and the churches were not inclined toward systematic written treatment of biblical and theological topics. Therefore, some of the statements made in the article are based on the author's extensive experience (over 30 years) as a member of the CRH and as an associate of the educational and research institutions affiliated with the CRH.

## 1. The Importance and Role of the Bible for CRH: Beliefs

Listing the essential characteristics of CRH, we can put the Bible in the first place "as the sole and final authority for Christian belief and life, and the belief and action of the Church. The Holy Scriptures are the sole final authority in matters of faith and morals" (Jambrek 2003, 18). The importance of the Bible is evident in the beliefs of CRH, which are found on their websites and literature:

- The Evangelical Pentecostal Church, in its text "Belief," places the statement about the Bible first: "We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible, trustworthy and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and life" (Evanđeoska pentekostna crkva u RH s. a.). This is followed by statements about belief in God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and other related matters.
- In the Baptist principal beliefs, Horak first writes about the Bible: "For Baptists, only what the Holy Scripture teaches is authoritative. In this, they differ significantly from some traditional churches, which do not consider the Holy Scripture to be the ultimate authority in matters of faith, and in addition to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, they hold tradition to be also authoritative" (Horak 1989, 27-28).
- The Church of God in the Republic of Croatia, in its text "Beliefs and Doctrines," follows the same pattern and first places a statement about the Bible: "We believe in the Holy Scriptures, inspired by God, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (Crkva Božja u RH s. a.). This is followed by statements about the Triune God, Jesus Christ, and other related topics.
- In the document "Beliefs of the Churches of Christ in the Republic of Croatia," the belief about the Bible is listed first: "The Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21) and the ultimate authority (Mt 4:4; 5:17-19; 24:35) for Christian belief and life (Jn 8:31-32)" (Vjerovanje Kristovih Crkava u RH 2021, art. I). This is followed by beliefs about the triune God, the person of Jesus Christ, and other related concepts.
- The church Word of Life, in the section "Who We Are / Vision / Belief," places the Bible at the forefront of their beliefs as the Word of God, emphasizing: "We believe that the Bible is inspired by God and revealed

to humanity. It is the supreme authority in all matters of faith and morals. The Word of God is the direct revelation of God's will to all mankind for all time (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:2)" (Kršćanski centar Riječ Života 2015). This is followed by a statement about one God of triune nature, etc.

- The Full Gospel Church, in the section "What Do We Believe?", puts the statement about the Bible first: "We believe that the Bible is the inerrant and unchangeable Word of God" (Crkva cjelovitog evanđelja s. a.). This is followed by a statement of belief regarding the triune God, Jesus Christ, and other related matters.

What is noticeable is that in the above cases, the statement of belief about the Bible is placed before the statement of faith regarding God, Christ, and other biblical and theological doctrines.

A more detailed understanding of the importance and role of the Bible for the life and work of the CRH and the believers in these churches can be found in the book on the beliefs of the Evangelical Pentecostal Churches, as well as on the website of the Alliance of Baptist Churches, both of which cite the Lausanne Covenant,<sup>2</sup> which in the second paragraph states the following:

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness, and authority of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and as 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 Scripture is unchangeable. Through it, the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illuminates the minds of God's people in every culture, enabling them to perceive the 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) (Balog 2009, 98; Savez baptističkih crkava u RH 2016b).

It is important to note that the two largest CRH denominations in Croatia, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Alliance of Baptist Churches, as well as the Churches of Christ, also cite in their publications the confession of faith written in the Cape Town Commitment:<sup>3</sup>

- 2 The Lausanne Covenant is a confession of faith of evangelical Christians that was written in 1974 at the First International Congress for the Evangelization of the World in the Swiss city of Lausanne.
- 3 See the web page of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church ([https://epc.hr/povijest\\_i\\_dokumenti](https://epc.hr/povijest_i_dokumenti)), the web page of the Alliance of Baptist Churches (<https://baptist.hr/images/stories/Dokumenti/capetownski%20iskaz%20o%20predanju.pdf>), and *Obiteljski list*, no. 2, year 1, 2012 (Zagreb: Kristove crkve u Hrvatskoj).

We love God's Word in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, echoing the joyful delight of the Psalmist in the Torah, 'I love your commands more than gold... Oh, how I love your law.' We receive the whole Bible as the Word of God, inspired by God's Spirit, spoken and written through human authors. We submit to it as supremely and uniquely authoritative, governing our beliefs and our behavior. We testify to the power of God's Word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. We affirm that the Bible is the final written Word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God's people so that the Bible continues to speak God's truth in fresh ways to people in every culture (Cape Town Commitment 2010, 29).<sup>4</sup>

These few quotes demonstrate that when discussing any topic related to CRH, including the topic of identity, the indispensable starting point is the supreme authority of the Bible, which they consider to be the Holy Scripture, that is, the Word of God.

## 2. The Importance and Role of the Bible for CRH: Practice

The importance and role of the Bible for CRH in practice stem from the fact that, as Jambrek points out, "The Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and life. Therefore, all Christian belief and life must be founded in the Bible and judged by it" (Jambrek 2003, 191). Such a position stems from the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* ("Scripture alone") and the Reformation call *ad fontes* ("to the sources"), which served as a call for the Church to return to the source of belief, that is, to the written Word of God and the beliefs and practices of the early Church described in the New Testament.

CRH believe that the authors of the biblical texts were directly inspired by the Spirit of God when they wrote God's revelations, and this view is confirmed by texts from the Bible (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:21). From this, the understanding is derived that nothing may be added to, taken away from, or changed from the biblical revelations (e.g., Rev 22:18-19). Jovanović points out, "Even in the Old Testament, God emphasizes that his Word is perfect and forbids the Jews from altering it by any addition or omission" (Jovanović 1997, 68), citing examples from Deuteronomy 4:2 and Proverbs 30:5-6. A little later, based on Jesus' words in Mark 7:7-9, he concludes: "...no human tradition, no matter how old and convincing, can replace what God has ordained" (Jovanović 1997, 71). CRH believe that

4 The Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Manila Manifesto (1989), and the Cape Town Commitment (2010) are documents of faith produced by world congresses of evangelical churches. In addition, most evangelical churches accept the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

the canon of the Bible ended with the book of Revelation in the era of the early Church<sup>5</sup> and that the Word of God is found only in the Holy Scriptures, not in church tradition. The viewpoints mentioned above are common and primary to all believers in CRH, reflecting the belief in the supreme authority of the Bible.

Another important understanding is the view that every religious claim should be tested and judged based on the Bible (Jambrek 2003, 191). This practice is confirmed by a biblical precedent, specifically the example of the Bereans, more precisely, the Jews who gathered in the synagogue in the Greco-Roman city of Berea in first-century Macedonia, a province of the Roman Empire (Acts 17). The apostle Paul spoke to them about Jesus being the Messiah, and the author Luke writes: "They examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11b, NIV). As a result, many were convinced of the truth of Paul's message and accepted faith in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (Acts 17:12). Another example of this viewpoint is Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good" (1 Thess 5:19-21, NIV). Testing implies checking claims to see if they align with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

According to the author's assessment, in practice, CRH adhere to the principle of *prima scriptura* (Scripture first), where the Bible remains the supreme authority, but there is awareness (and for some, unawareness and misunderstanding) that the Word of God is not interpreted in a vacuum, but that there are additional elements in interpretation as well as a particular subjectivity. In addition to holding the Bible as the supreme authority, interpretation is also influenced by a particular tradition (e.g., Reformation tradition, Protestant-Evangelical tradition), affiliation with a particular denomination or movement (e.g., Pentecostal), the culture in which we live (e.g., Western), and personal experience (e.g., new spiritual birth).

Regarding the Bible translations used in the CRH during the period in question, it is worth noting that until the 1970s, CRH believers primarily used the translation made by Daničić and Karadžić in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which was revised (Croatized) for the Croatian edition by Šulek and Rešetar in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since the 1970s, the Bible published by Stvarnost (also known as the Bible of Kršćanska sadašnjost or the Zagreb Bible) and the Šarić Bible published by the Croatian Bible Society in Zagreb have been used predominantly. In the early 1990s, believers used existing translations of the Bible in Croatian. The New Testament, translated by Duda and Fućak, was popular and distributed free of charge in significant quantities by the Gideons. Later, individuals and organizations within the CRH themselves published specific translations or had existing translations printed with the publisher's permission, excluding the apocryphal books. Transla-

5 The CRH accept the Protestant canon of the Bible, which consists of the 39 writings of the Old Testament and the 27 writings of the New Testament, excluding the deuterocanonical or apocryphal writings.

tions of the New Testament were made by Vrtarić (1998), Knežević (2001), and Jovanović (2006). In 2012, the Varaždin translation was published according to the model of an explicitly literal translation (word-for-word). In 2018, the Bible Plus was published as the so-called “Study Bible” because it contains short commentaries, theological articles, and a concordance. However, it is not a new translation; instead, it uses the Šarić translation from the fourth revised edition. The Contemporary Translation (Suvremeni prijevod) of the New Testament was published in 2006, and the Contemporary Croatian Translation (Suvremeni hrvatski prijevod) of the entire Bible was first published in mobile applications (Biblija 365 and Biblija – Suvremeni prijevod) in 2017, followed by a printed edition in 2020. Due to the text being easy to read and understand, this edition gained popularity in CRH; however, the Bible published by Kršćanska sadašnjost was the most widely used.<sup>6</sup>

There were other translations released between 1990 and 2020, so we can say that CRH, despite their small number, were very engaged in creating and distributing new translations to make the Word of God reach as many people as possible in the Croatian-speaking area.<sup>7</sup> Such an approach is in line with the missionary drive for evangelism that is emphasized in CRH, that is, in evangelical Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Formation of Biblical Identity

The Bible clearly describes the identity that God gives to people who believe in Christ and accept him as their Savior and Lord. This identity is based on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the believer accepts it as God’s truth. As believ-

6 In a research on reading habits conducted in the period from March 20 to May 10, 2023 in four Zagreb churches: Church of Christ Kušlanova, Dubrava Baptist Church, Evangelical Pentecostal Church “Stijena spasenja,” and Church of Christ Samobor, on a sample of 58 respondents, it was determined that the Bible published by Kršćanska sadašnjost is the most widely read (35), but the Contemporary Translation is also widely read (22) despite the fact that it has not been on our market for long. Of the other translations, 10 respondents stated that they read the Varaždin Bible the most, and 8 respondents stated the Šarić Bible (Biblical Institute. 2025. “Research on reading habits and knowledge of the Bible”). At the time of writing this article, the document had not yet been published. The document will be published in *Kairos* 19, no. 1, 2025.

7 Only a brief overview of some translations is provided for the purposes of this article. More detailed information will follow in the project “Churches of Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020.” For a detailed overview, see also Knežević 2019; Berković 2018; Jambreč, and Knežević 2007.

8 One of the fundamental emphases of evangelical Christianity is to spread the Word of God, that is, the Good News of Jesus Christ, as much as possible, which can be seen in numerous articles in CRH magazines and church bulletins from 1990 to 2020, where evangelistic events are often reported and evangelistic radio broadcasts are announced. See also Cape Town Commitment 2010, 44-47.

ers are taught (through personal Bible reading, church services, small Bible study groups, and other means), they come to know more about the person and work of Jesus Christ and take on their God-given identity. This identity is described extensively and in detail in the New Testament texts, penetrating deeply into the core of the believer; that is, it radically changes the person who follows Christ.

By accepting the Word of God, doctrine is established, and standards for the individual's and the community of believers' lives are set. By applying these accepted standards, one's identity is confirmed. Biblical identity is manifested through the measure of acceptance and application of God's word in everyday life. Biblical identity begins to form from the moment a person experiences conversion, which is the term most often used in CRH to describe knowing Jesus Christ and personally surrendering one's life to him as Savior and Lord. This falls under the common principle of CRH, according to which a person who is capable of making their own decisions is expected to believe in Christ and decide to follow Christ (Jambrek 2003, 283). Therefore, it can be an older child, adolescent, or adult, regardless of whether they grew up in a Christian, atheistic, or some other environment, who clearly and voluntarily decides to reject their previous self-willed way of life and surrender to Christ. Conversion involves repentance for sins and faith in Christ, which is a turning away from a previous way of life to a new life in Christ. In this way, a person receives God's gift of salvation based on faith in the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation is thus received instantly, but it is also a process that consists of justification, sanctification, and final glorification. It is important to emphasize that in CRH, a person who has grown up in a Christian environment and church is also expected to experience a personal encounter with God and a personal surrender to God. Therefore, a person is not a Christian because they are part of a particular society, family, or church, but because they have personally come to know Jesus Christ and have decided to follow him. Another term often used in CRH, which denotes the beginning of a person's new, biblical identity, is the new birth, or being born again, which will be explained further in the text.

### *3.1. Identity is Acquired by Birth*

In the genealogies of the Old Testament, we read that an individual acquires identity by birth into a particular nation, tribe, clan, and family. Why did God inspire the authors of the Old Testament scriptures to record genealogies? Of all the nations in the world, Israel had a unique identity because God created them (from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), chose them to be his people, and made a covenant with them. In other words, he determined their identity; he revealed to them who they were and what they were to do. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt to be his people, to serve him, and to live according to his instructions (the so-called

Mosaic Law, that is, the law that God gave to the people of Israel through Moses). Many genealogies were written down (e.g., Num 1:20; Joshua 17:3) to show who were the descendants of Abraham chosen by God were so that each of them would receive their inheritance in the Promised Land. A person today acquires their identity through physical birth into a blood family and their spiritual identity through spiritual birth into God's family.

### *3.2. Identity of the Born-Again*

Believers in CRH often identify themselves as born-again believers to indicate that they are not merely nominal believers but rather have experienced the new birth that makes them true believers and new creatures. This experience is based on New Testament texts. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the necessity of the new birth in John 3:1-13. "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again... Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:3-5, NIV). Jesus thus indicates that the new birth is not a physical but a spiritual birth from God. The moment of new birth in some CRH is considered the moment when a person acknowledges their sinfulness, believes in Christ's sacrifice for forgiveness, and prays the so-called prayer of salvation. In some CRH, this moment is marked by water baptism. The first view is more challenging to support with biblical examples. In contrast, the second view is based on Romans 6: when a person believes in Christ and is baptized in water into Christ, he spiritually dies with Christ (Rom 6:3) and is resurrected with Christ to a new life (Rom 6:4). Thus the "old man" with his fallen human nature dies, and a "new man" with a new nature is born (Rom 6:6; 1 Pet 1:4). The new birth is a divine supernatural act, like a new creation. The apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here" (2 Cor 5:17, NIV). Jambreč writes, "By the mysterious intervention of the Holy Spirit, a new creature is born, for the Holy Spirit plants God's life in the human heart... At the new birth, the Holy Spirit acts in three ways: it convicts of sin (Jn 16:7-11), causes a new birth (John 3:5-6), and testifies that the person is saved (Rom 8:15-16)" (Jambreč 2003, 258). In a booklet on Baptist beliefs, Horak (1989, 45) writes, "The new birth comes from God and repentance and conversion from man. Thus, God creates a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and a child of God (John 1:12)."

### *3.3. Identity of the Consciously Baptized*

Based on numerous examples of baptism in the New Testament, CRH consider it necessary for those who believe in Christ to be baptized in water baptism into Christ, by immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself was bap-

tized as an adult and later taught, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16a). Furthermore, the book of Acts records numerous examples of adult baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the act of baptism by one’s own decision, in the name of Jesus Christ, is very significant in the identity of CRH believers. Adults or adolescents must understand what they are doing, repent of their sins, believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their salvation, and be baptized by immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. This is called the believer’s baptism. In *Radosna vijest [The Good News]*, the magazine of the Church of Christ, we find an entry by the then preacher Mladen Jovanović in the article “Biblical Baptism”:

By comparing the biblical accounts of this act, we see that baptism was performed by completely immersing the person being baptized in water. The Greek word for baptism, “baptizo,” means to dip or immerse. Changes in the method of baptism, such as by pouring or sprinkling, are of a later date and are not confirmed in the Word of God. The New Testament only contains records of the baptism of those who knew what they were doing on that occasion. In the New Testament, we cannot find an example of young children being baptized, that is, persons who could neither believe nor repent (Jovanović 2006, 2).

In the article “When to Be Baptized?” Volf writes about the necessity of conscious belief before baptism and concludes, “...in the New Testament, we do not find any theological considerations that would justify the baptism of young children. The New Testament clearly and unequivocally testifies that only those persons who can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior should be baptized” (Volf 2024, 287). Baptism practices may vary somewhat in CRH. For example, the Churches of Christ believe that a person should be baptized as soon as they believe in Jesus Christ. In contrast, Baptists require that a person receive catechetical instruction and give a testimony of conversion to the congregation before the act of baptism. Different kinds of CRH newsletters from 1990 to 2020 contain numerous reports and images of baptisms for adolescents and adults..

### *3.4. Identity in Christ*

This identity is based on the New Testament texts and is received by every person who believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior, accepts him as Lord of their life, and is baptized according to their faith in Christ’s name. The Apostle Paul uses the terms “in Christ,” “by Christ,” and “through Christ” over 150 times in the New Testament, referring to what has been done for the believer in Christ and to the new identity of the person who has become a believer. As an example, I quote Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 1:3-10 (NIV):

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

To be “in Christ” means to be united with him and to share in his identity and life. The apostle Paul claims that those who are baptized into Christ have died with him, risen with him, live with him, been raised with him, and are seated with him in the heavenly realms. Identification with Christ is a primary characteristic of the identity of believers within CRH. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 6 that in baptism, we are “(co)buried with him” (συνεταφήμεν) and “(co)crucified with him” (συνεσταυρώθη). Since we have “died with him” (ἀπεθάνομεν σὸν), we will “(co)live with him” (συζήσομεν). Furthermore, according to Ephesians 2:6, we have been “(co)resurrected with him” (συνήγειρεν) and “(co)seated with him” (συνεκάθισεν) in the heavenly realms. These verses strongly indicate the identification of believers with Christ. What happened to Christ also happens to believers when they are baptized into Christ. It happens in a spiritual sense (crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension) while the body awaits a future resurrection. Moreover, believers are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18), and united with him (1 Cor 6:17).

For example, at a youth meeting of evangelical churches in the city of Rijeka, the following was said about identity in Christ: “Identity in Christ is challenged from within and without: a believer who sees the deviation of their daily life from the story they tell about themselves easily doubts its truthfulness. The world, actively or passively (by ignoring it), also challenges the Christian story, denying its truthfulness or morality. Therefore, a believer draws the stability of his identity in Christ from what God says about him, in the face of all challenges (1 Jn 3:1-42)” (Informativna baptistička agencija 2013). The expression “what God says about him” refers to the biblical, New Testament statements about the identity of believers in Christ. On the Baptist.hr website, in the article “Identity of Christians” (Savez baptističkih crkava u RH, 2016a), it states: “What is the core of a Christian’s identity? Jesus Christ. Everything else is changeable, culturally dependent, historically conditioned, and theologically determined. Only Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever” and explains that a person who claims to be Christ’s must have the same heart desire as Christ – to do God’s will, the same mission as Christ – reconciliation with God, and the same method as Christ – to

bear his cross.” The book *Znaš li svoj pravi identitet? [Do You Know Your True Identity?]* explores the current state of believers in Christ through four key points based on New Testament texts: “1. You are spiritually alive,” “2. You are now in a covenant with God,” “3. You are now righteous,” “4. You have a new identity (You are a partaker of the divine nature)” (Loveless 2020, 50-52).<sup>9</sup>

### 3.5. *Identity of the Saved*

Believers in CRH often refer to themselves as “the saved.” This biblically based term refers to those who are saved through faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ by the grace of God. In this case, the text from the Epistle to the Romans that speaks of salvation is often cited: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved” (Rom 10:9-10, NIV). In the booklet *Abeceda spasenja [The Alphabet of Salvation]*, Kuzmič notes: “Repentance, conversion, regeneration, justification, and sanctification are central concepts of biblical soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) and are therefore of great importance for the understanding and experience of salvation, as well as for Christian witness to salvation” (Kuzmič 2020, 38). Jambreč describes salvation in the following way: “God’s plan of grace foresees the salvation of humanity, and its ultimate intention is to make them like Christ.” His goal is the complete restoration of the image of God in his child. The Holy Scriptures strongly emphasize that salvation is God’s free gift of grace, which man can only accept but cannot merit or earn through good behavior” (Jambreč 2003, 249).

In CRH, the emphasis is typically on salvation from sins that lead to destruction, for eternal life with Christ, who fulfills God’s plan for humanity (Jn 3:14-18; Rom 3:21-26; 6:4-11, 23). In the New Testament, salvation is described in various ways because there are multiple spiritual realities that God reveals through Christ’s saving work and the work of the Holy Spirit in a person. These are forgiveness, redemption, liberation, justification, reconciliation, healing, new birth, new life, new creation, New Covenant, change of kingdom, change of Lord, entry into the kingdom of God, adoption (reception into God’s family), and transformation into the image of Christ (restoration of God’s image in a human) (Medved 2020). In their discourse on salvation, the CRH primarily emphasize the death and resurrection of Jesus and the doctrine of justification by faith to emphasize that sal-

9 The book was edited by Vladimir Hobljaj (Association “Hope for Life,” Varaždin) and published by Zdravko Konecky (Logos, Daruvar). Hobljaj and Konecky have made significant contributions to establishing the believer’s identity in Christ through special seminars and the publication of books on such topics among the Churches of the Reformation Heritage and beyond.

vation is a gift from God and the merit of Christ and that it can only be received through faith in the work of Christ, and in no way earned by one's good works.

### 3.6. *Identity of the Converted*

When believers within CRH discuss their religious experiences, they often say that they were converted during a specific event when they had the experience of God revealing himself to them. This could be an evangelism event, a worship service, a youth camp, a personal Bible reading, or some other event when they felt that God spoke to them personally through the written or preached Word, convicted them of sin, and offered them salvation through faith in Christ. They most often view conversion as the moment when they repent of their sins, accept Christ as their Savior and Lord, and begin to live a new life following God's Word. These are often intense experiences that are remembered for a lifetime and recounted as a testimony before water baptism when evangelizing the unsaved or for the encouragement of other believers. Even those believers within CRH who grew up in the church have such an experience at some point. In describing evangelical Christians, MacKenzie emphasizes: "**The importance of personal conversion.** For evangelical Christians, Scripture is not an end in itself. It points to a personal relationship with the living God. Evangelical Christians, therefore, always look for evidence that someone has experienced personal conversion" (MacKenzie 1997, 84, emphasis his). Conversion is a biblical term used by the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Greek verb μετανοέω and noun μετάνοια), and examples of people's conversion are found in many accounts in the Gospels and Acts. Conversion involves a turn from a self-willed way of life toward a life under the lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.7. *The Identity of God's Children and God's Family*

Among many who consider themselves Christians in Croatia, there is a widespread unbiblical opinion that all people are children of God. CRH often emphasize, based on Bible, that all people are *God's creatures*, but only those who are born again of the Spirit of God are *children of God*.<sup>11</sup> Jesus himself declared certain people to be children of the devil (Jn 8:44), from which it follows that they cannot be children of God (unless they repent and are born again as children of God into God's family by faith in him). The apostle John writes: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (Jn 1:12-13, NIV). The apostle Paul writes to

10 For a more detailed description, see "conversion" in *Leksikon evanđeoskoga kršćanstva online* (leksikon.hr).

11 See, for example, Riječ Života 2016.; Stolnik 2017, 4; Budiselić 2014, 4.

the Galatians: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (Gal 3:26). Therefore, according to the New Testament texts, faith and new birth are necessary for someone to become a child of God, and thus immediately adopted into God’s family.

Regarding the father-son relationship between God and his people, Medved observes: “While the fatherhood of God seems to be a minor doctrine in the Old Testament, it becomes a major one in the New Testament, promoted by the Son of God himself...” (Medved 2016, 209), and “The Old Testament longing of God the father to be in an intimate father-son relationship with his people, whom he blesses and who love him and obey him, is fulfilled in the New Testament, through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, creating a new people with a new spirit, relating to God as their Abba” (Medved 2016, 210). Following the biblical texts, believers within CRH consider God as their Father and newborn Christians as brothers and sisters. This identity of spiritual family often becomes stronger than the identity of blood family.<sup>12</sup> As the Lord himself warned, some newborn believers experience persecution from their own blood family precisely because of this radical change in identity. Persecution can be of a lower intensity (opposition, reprimands, etc.) or of a higher intensity (physical attacks, expulsion from the home, renunciation of the person, etc.). Although the Croatian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion as one of the fundamental human rights, persecution can still occur.<sup>13</sup>

### *3.8. Identity of the Disciples of Christ*

Believers in CRH also consider themselves disciples of Christ based on the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. In the Gospels, we read that Jesus called people to be his disciples, and before his ascension, he gave his disciples the command to make disciples of all nations. The term “disciples” for Christ’s followers appears frequently in the Gospels and Acts. This term implies that believers follow Christ, learn from him, know his teachings as recorded in the New Testament, practice his teachings, and strive to be like their Master. Also, due to the prevalence of traditional Christianity in Croatia, where many call themselves believers but do not know the teachings of Christ and do not follow Christ, CRH often emphasize that it is not enough to be a believer, but it is necessary to be a disciple of Christ. Therefore, it is not enough to believe in the existence of God or Jesus; it is necessary to know what Jesus taught and take upon oneself the duty of practicing Jesus’ teachings in everyday life because the Lord Jesus Christ himself demands it. This is also evident in the mission he gave to his disciples: “Therefore go and make dis-

12 See, for example, “Molitva za našu duhovnu obitelj.” Betel Baptist Church, Sisak 2014.

13 Article 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia states: “Freedom of conscience and religion and free public manifestation of religion or other belief are guaranteed.”

ciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20, NIV).

On the topic of discipleship, Budiselić writes: “The text from Matthew 28:16-20 confirms three key elements of the content of discipleship that are unchanging and valid for us today: a) the necessity of knowing and remembering Jesus’ teachings; b) the necessity of teaching by example; c) the necessity of making disciples out of converts. Regardless of the cultures, times, customs, and contexts within which discipleship takes place, it cannot be successful and fruitful if any of these elements are neglected” (Budiselić 2020, 22-23). The Cape Town Commitment confirms, “Jesus calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him in the path of self-denial, servanthood, and obedience. ‘If you love me, keep my commandments,’ he said. ‘Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say?’ We are called to live as Christ lived and to love as Christ loved. To profess Christ while ignoring his commands is dangerous folly” (Cape Town Commitment 2010, 25).

### *3.9. Identity of Saints*

Believers within CRH accept the identity of saints based on the teachings of the New Testament, which continues the teaching of the Old Testament that God’s people are holy – dedicated to God to live according to his will and fulfill his plans. The Lord Jesus teaches, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48, NIV). The Apostle Peter quotes God’s statement from Leviticus (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7) when addressing Christians: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy because I am holy.’” (1 Pet 1:15-16, NIV). The Apostle Paul often addresses Christians in the introductions of his letters as “saints in Christ,” while in some texts, he explains that Christians are holy because Christ has made them so. Believers within CRH do not base their identity as saints on their righteousness (behavior and works) but on the doctrine of justification by faith, where all sin is forgiven, and Christ’s righteousness is attributed to those who believe in Christ (Rom 3 et al.).

The identity of saints is something that Christians receive from God by faith at the moment of justification, as a New Testament reality made possible by Jesus Christ, and is followed by lifelong sanctification, which involves growth in faith, holiness, and conformity to Christ.

Throughout the New Testament, we find exhortations to imitate or follow in the steps of Christ, Paul and even some other godly people. In the Epistle to the Philippians, we find this exhortation to imitate incorporated into a Pauline theology of progressive sanctification. Sanctification in Philippians is portrayed as a conforming to Christ through the knowledge of Him, which comes

through tripartite means of the Word of God (the Apostolic teaching), the internal work of God's Spirit and the imitation of Christ, the Apostle Paul, and other godly examples (Balint-Feudvarski 2018, 23).

### *3.10. The Identity of Biblical Christians or New Testament Christians*

This identity is based on the fact that a believer in Christ is in a New Covenant with God, as claimed by the New Testament (and, in a broader sense, the Bible), and on the fact that Christians should be guided by New Testament standards (in a broader biblical sense). Since the population in the Republic of Croatia is predominantly of the Roman Catholic faith, to explain their identity to fellow citizens who are not familiar with Protestant-Evangelical, or Reformation, spirituality, believers within CRH often say that they are "biblical Christians" or "New Testament Christians." By doing so, they aim to indicate that their identity, beliefs, and worship are based on what is written in the Bible rather than on traditions that have arisen in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and are not supported by biblical writings. Therefore, they emphasize differences in identity, beliefs, and worship to clarify their own identity. They especially emphasize the New Testament writings as a guide to New Testament Christianity. These are some of the main differences they emphasize: the Bible as the supreme authority for faith and practice, without the addition of later traditions of the Church and folk piety; the priesthood of all believers as opposed to the division into clergy and laity; the veneration of Christ as the sole mediator between God and men as opposed to the veneration of Mary and the saints of the Roman Catholic Church; prayers exclusively to the Triune God, as opposed to prayers addressed to Mary and the saints of the Roman Catholic Church; an emphasis on a personal relationship with God as opposed to a sacramental relationship mediated by a priest. What they emphasize are, in many ways, the emphases of evangelical Christianity.

The following beliefs and practices are common to CRH: "referring to the Holy Scriptures as the sole and final authority for belief and life; emphasizing that God's grace is the only means of salvation which is a gift and is accepted by faith; life of the church as a community of born-again Christians baptized as adults after confession of sin and profession of personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; and, among other things, teaching that each local church has the fullness of church" (Jambrek 2003, 283). These beliefs are based on New Testament statements.

### *3.11. Identity of God's or Christ's Church*

CRH consider themselves the church of God or the church of Christ. Both terms are used in the New Testament. The expression "church of God" occurs several

times (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 3:5), and of particular importance is Paul's statement that also defines the church: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people" (1 Cor 1:2, NIV). The expression "church of Christ" appears in Romans 16:16, and the term "church" is used by itself more than 100 times. To understand this identity, as well as all others, biblical texts are provided for reference.

In the New Testament, the Church is referred to and described as "God's Church (1 Cor 1:2), God's field (1 Cor 3:6-9), God's building (1 Cor 3:9), God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17), God's people (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10), God's house (1 Pet 4:17; Heb 3:3-6 and 1 Tim 3:15), Christ's Church (Mt 16:18; Col 1:15-20), Christ's bride (2 Cor 11:2)" (Jambrek 2019, 50-51). By that, CRH emphasize that the Church is not a physical building, but a spiritual one — God's temple, the place where God dwells—when Christians gather together in a particular place. Therefore, the Church has both a divine component (God's dwelling place) and a human component (the assembly of Christ's disciples).

Furthermore, the New Testament mentions the universal Church and the local church. The universal Church is all those who have been converted, baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, received the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has joined them to his Church (Acts 2:38, 47). The local church is a group of Christ's disciples who regularly gather in a specific place in the name of Christ. The Apostle Paul describes the Church in detail as the body of Christ, where Christ is the head and the believers are the members. This image makes it clear that Christ is the leader and focus of the Church, and the believers, as diverse members, build each other up with the various gifts that God has given them. Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit is essential in the Church because it is he who gives believers the gifts with which they build up the Church (other believers) and who encourages them to act. Jambrek summarizes the identity of the Church as the people of God:

The New Testament image of the Church as God's people points to a community of believers who are God's property, who are to be separated from the world, in whom God will dwell, who will joyfully testify that God is their personal God, and who will live and serve together according to God's will in the power of the Holy Spirit. These are all those who are consecrated in Christ Jesus, whom God has chosen, called, and declared saints, and all those who in any place call upon the name of Jesus Christ. The Church, as God's property, is a community of people on God's mission. God, as the owner, sent them into the world not to conform to the world but to change the world with the Gospel (Jambrek 2019, 55).

This is precisely a brief description of how CRH sees themselves, and it is based on the New Testament teaching about the Church.

## 4. Biblical Identity in Practice

### 4.1. *Receiving of Identity in a Local Church*

Believers within CRH receive their biblical identity after conversion, using the Bible as the Word of God as their primary source for learning about and adopting a new identity. They are regularly exposed to the Word of God to learn about everything that God gives them as part of their new identity. This is where the authority of the Bible is manifested as one of the fundamental beliefs of CRH. Furthermore, one of the foundations of Christian life in CRH is close fellowship with other believers. After conversion, believers become members of a local church and are expected to be regularly involved in church meetings and activities. This significantly influences the formation of identity, both biblically and denominationally.

What is it in the local church that influences the formation of biblical identity? The following factors are the same or very similar in CRH, so I will cover them together, and I will list the exceptions separately. In local CRH, the following factors influence the identity of believers: personal reading and study of the Bible, small Bible study groups, one-on-one or small group discipleship, worship services, prayer meetings, home groups, spiritual renewal meetings, camps, conferences, seminars, reading Christian books, following Christian content on the Internet, pastoral, teaching and elder's ministry, close fellowship with other Christians.

- CRH encourage believers to read and study the Bible on their own. This time is usually referred to as quiet time and consists of prayer and careful reading of biblical texts. God speaks to a person through the written Word of God, influencing their spiritual formation. The Holy Spirit, who dwells within the believer, is present in this process and influences the understanding of what is read, as well as the formation of the person's beliefs and character.
- Some CRHs practice "one-on-one" discipleship. This means that a person who is older in the faith teaches a person who is new or younger in the faith. They meet regularly by appointment to study the Bible, along with prayer and pastoral care. This relationship fosters a system of accountability that ensures believers are genuinely following Christ and growing in their faith. This can also be in a small group format.
- CRHs often have small Bible study groups where a leader leads a group of believers through a study of a biblical text, either by topic or through a specific book of the Bible or a Bible study guide. Here, the meaning and application of the biblical text are discussed, which in turn influence the spiritual formation of the group members. In small groups, typically within the framework of a specific topic, they discuss their walk with Christ,

challenges, and needs. Believers advise and encourage one another, and they pray for each other, thus fulfilling the need for pastoral care.

- Worship services are the main gatherings of the CRH, typically held on Sunday mornings (can also be in the afternoon or on Saturdays) and consist of prayers, songs, sermons, and occasionally the Lord's Supper (Eucharist). These are songs that praise God and his works or expose the experience of life with God or are taken directly from the biblical text, as is the case with some Psalms. The Lord's Supper (Eucharist) is observed in some local churches at every service, while in others, it is practiced once a month or every three months. All baptized believers partake of both bread and wine as a remembrance of the body and blood of Christ for the salvation of all who believe (Dominić 2014, 5).
- The sermon is a time when a preacher, most often a pastor of the church (but it can also be any believer), speaks a message based on biblical texts for the spiritual edification of believers. The exception is that in some CRH, women are allowed to preach and teach adults. This is the longest part of the service, typically lasting 30-45 minutes, with special attention given to the Word of God and what the Holy Spirit wants to convey to believers.
- Furthermore, weekly prayer meetings influence the spiritual formation of believers through two aspects of prayer: the Holy Spirit changes the inner state of the one praying, and the prayer of one believer influences the formation of other believers. Prayer meetings usually begin with praising God in song and thanking God and continue with asking for God's plans to be realized and presenting human needs to God. In the vast majority of CRH, prayers are not prayed according to learned prayers or prayer books, but each person addresses God with their own words and reflections. Although prayer meetings do not primarily involve Bible study, a biblical text is often read to encourage prayer. Believers strive to pray in accordance with what is written in God's word, and prayer thus contributes to the building of a biblical identity.
- CRH also hold special meetings for spiritual renewal once or more times a year, which are colloquially called "camps" because participants travel to a designated location for two or more days to focus on spiritual renewal. Camps can include the entire local church (families and individuals of different age groups) or be intended for a specific age group, such as summer camps for children. Spiritual renewal has a profound influence on the formation of believers, including their identity, as it is an intense and focused spiritual experience that removes believers from life's obligations, allowing them to primarily focus on praising God, listening to biblical teachings, engaging in continuous fellowship, and mutual edification.

- Conferences and seminars are gatherings of believers organized around a biblical or life theme, where lecturers present their talks based on the Bible, thereby contributing to the growth of believers in their knowledge of the Bible and the application of biblical teachings to specific topics. For example, conferences on discipleship are held to enable believers to learn more about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, as well as marriage seminars that help married believers grow in their understanding of biblical marriage and enhance their marital relationships.
- Reading Christian books also contributes to the development and establishment of identity, whether the books speak exclusively or partly about biblical identity. Using Christian materials on the Internet, such as video materials and written texts, also contributes to the construction of identity.
- In local churches, some ministries contribute to building identity, particularly pastoral ministry, teaching ministry, and elder ministry, which work with the church, groups, and individuals to foster growth in faith. In CRH, close fellowship with other Christians is very important, a belief emphasized by Protestant-Evangelical Christians, who base it on New Testament teachings about local churches. In Paul's letters to the churches, we find numerous commands about what needs to be done to "one another" for a group of believers to be a church and fulfill its mission truly.
- Finally, the baptism of persons who have decided to follow Christ is a unique event that is most often attended by the entire local religious community and which strongly influences the identity of the baptized, as already described in the section "The Identity of the Consciously Baptized."

Everything described regarding the acquisition of a biblical identity is largely the same or very similar in CRH; however, it is worth noting that there are differences not addressed in this article. According to a questionnaire conducted in CRH, the majority of pastors of local churches within different denominations, marked with a medium or high score on a scale of 1-10, the question of steadiness in discipleship, apostolic teaching, fellowship, singing, and worship of God, prayers and the Lord's Supper (Jambrek 2022). This suggests that there was a significant steadiness in the construction of biblical identity in the period in question.

#### *4.2. Identity According to Membership*

The questionnaire used to collect data on CRH (Jambrek 2022) asked the question, "What does it take to become a member of a church?" The answers reveal identity factors. A review of the answers given by Evangelical Pentecostal Church, Baptist Churches, Churches of Christ, Church of God, Full Gospel Church, and

the Word of Life Churches shows that the requirements for membership include repentance, conversion, personal faith in Christ, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, being born again, baptism of believers, manifestation of the fruits of conversion, that is, the fruits of the Spirit, living according to biblical standards, regular attendance at church services, involvement in church activities, and acceptance of church doctrine. Based on the answers, it can be concluded that the collected information confirms the common biblical emphases of CRH, which have already been described in this article, such as conversion, personal faith, being born again, the baptism of believers, and following Christ.

#### *4.3. Deviations from Biblical Identity*

Deviations in building a biblical identity have occurred to a greater or lesser extent in every local church and denomination of the CRH. Namely, building an identity is a demanding and long-term process, and various non-biblical influences can appear in this process. Therefore, deviations have occurred due to the following factors: partial adoption of biblical identity; adding to the Bible (from culture, philosophy, other religions, new age movements, etc.); taking away from the Bible or neglecting of biblical teachings (e.g., elevating nationality above biblical identity); wrong priorities (e.g., putting denominational doctrine before biblical doctrine); following a certain leader and his interpretation of the Bible instead of the teachings of Jesus Christ, etc.

Sometimes denominational identity (Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, etc.) can become dominant over or replace biblical identity. This happens in at least two ways. The first way is when denominational identity becomes a substitute for biblical identity. Namely, CRH emphasize a personal relationship with God for salvation, but being a member of a CRH does not automatically guarantee salvation or a relationship with God. Therefore, denominational identity cannot replace or be a substitute for biblical identity.

The second way is elitism – when a particular church group believes that they are the only true Christians with correct faith and practice. Such a spirit of elitism can lead individuals or local churches to separate themselves from other CRH because they consider them to be wrong in one or more points of correct biblical faith. As a result of such beliefs, such churches can be intrusive and exclusive towards others and build their identity by being against others.

Churches influenced by the “faith movement” have often been led astray by the teachings of certain American teachers and founders of that movement. Based on the account of creation in the book of Genesis, they falsely teach that believers are “little gods” (that God reproduced according to his kind) and that by speaking

words, they shape reality and circumstances around them. This is often accompanied by the doctrine of prosperity, i.e., success, health, and wealth of believers.<sup>14</sup>

A deviation that often occurs among nominal Christians in the Republic of Croatia is the creation of identity by bonding together religion and nationality, ignoring biblical texts that openly write against such behavior for several reasons: God is not partial, Christ's sacrifice is valid for everyone who believes, and all people are sinners in need of God's grace. CRH place biblical identity above national affiliation, based on Jesus' teaching on dealing with enemies (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27; Lk 10:25-37), and on the apostolic teaching that our homeland is in heaven (Phil 3:20), that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world (1 Pet 2:11), and that we are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). CRH believers are thus taught that there is no partiality with God, and they generally do not fall into the trap of nationalism. They see their earthly nation as people who need to be served and evangelized, not exalted above others. However, even in CRH, some believers manifest nominal Christianity, which means that they intellectually agree with reformation and evangelical principles but do not live by them.

## **Conclusion**

Since CRH follow the Protestant-Evangelical view of the Bible as the supreme authority for belief and life, biblical identity in the period from 1990 to 2020 was largely built on the truths that describe the new identity of a person who has accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord and are found in the texts of the New Testament. Such persons are converted, born again, saved, consciously baptized according to their faith in Christ, children of God accepted into God's family, disciples of Christ, saints by faith in Christ, hold biblical (especially New Testament) doctrine, consider themselves biblical or New Testament Christians, and belong to God's, i.e., Christ's church. They received and built their identity by adopting biblical truths, mostly in the context of local churches, through numerous gatherings and activities. The most important thing for biblical identity was identification with the person of Jesus Christ, to be in Christ, and to follow him. In the construction of the biblical identity of believers, deviations also occurred, such as false doctrine and wrong priorities, following a certain leader or denomination more than correct biblical doctrine, and elevating denominational identity above biblical identity.

Since the Bible is the supreme authority for the CRH, this means that it was the most important source of identity for the believers of the mentioned churches. However, the most important did not mean the only one. What we have not dealt with in this article is the fact that biblical identity was not built in isolation from

14 A separate article will deal with theological influences on CRH.

other sources of identity (historical, theological, cultural, social, etc.), nor the fact that biblical identity for CRH believers did not mean that each church interpreted the Bible in the same way. Therefore, although the CRH used the same New Testament terms (such as “converts,” “saints,” “disciples of Christ,” etc.), this did not mean that the practical expressions were identical. A separate article within the project “Churches of Reformation Heritage in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 to 2020” will address this issue, building on this article and exploring the diversity of theological influences in CRH.

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