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CONFLICT, CHANGE, AND CONVERSION:
FOUR DECADES OF CONVERSION AMONG
BAPTISTS IN CROATIA 1970-2010

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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December 2015

APPROVAL SHEET

CONFLICT, CHANGE, AND CONVERSION:
FOUR DECADES OF CONVERSION AMONG
BAPTISTS IN CROATIA 1970-2010

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NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

Croatian is a Slavic language that utilizes the Latin alphabet. In addition to containing several letters that do not appear in the English alphabet, it also contains letters that are pronounced differently than in English. Rather than transliterate the Croatian words in the English, the original spellings will be used in this dissertation. This pronunciation guide should help the reader in navigating these unfamiliar letters and words.

C	c	/ts/ as in “census”
Č	č	/tʃ/ as in “chalk”
Ć	ć	/tɕ/ as in the second “ch” in “church”
Đ	đ	/dʒ/ as in “Georgia”
J	j	/j/ so that Yugoslavia is spelled Jugoslavija
Lj	lj	/ʎ/ as in “billion”
Nj	nj	/ɲ/ as in “onion”
Š	š	/ʃ/ as in “shadow”
Ž	ž	/ʒ/ as in “azure”

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PREFACE

First and foremost I would like to thank the members of the Croatian Baptist churches that participated in this project, taking the time to fill out the surveys. Each visit on Sunday morning was a great opportunity not only to complete my doctoral work, but also to meet many brothers and sisters in Christ for the first time. I would like to thank the Croatian Baptist Union for their support of this project. In particular I would like to thank Željko Mraz for his support and counsel in the early stages of project design. Toma and Ksenija Magda also provided wise counsel in this area as well. The following pastors provided input before and during the project's implementation: Miroslav Balint-Feudorski (and Ivana), Grgio Grli, Nenad Kovačević, Ladislav Ružička, and Josip Špičak. Thank you to Nela Mayer-Williams for hosting me so many weekends in Zagreb (and Peter). I am also grateful to Daniel and Lidija McKenzie for their help with improving the survey instrument. Though not Croatian Baptists (being only Croatian or only Baptist) the following individuals also made valuable contributions to this project: Steve McCord, Trey Atkins, Janko Stambrek, Gene Whiting, and the students of the Baptist Theological School in Novi Sad, Serbia.

I am grateful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for allowing me to complete my doctoral degree from Croatia, and this over the course of eleven years. I believe that the result of this unorthodox arrangement served to meet the primary goal of the institution, which is not only higher education, but also gospel ministry. I am appreciative of the efforts of my supervisor, Dr. Sills, and also to Dr. Greenway and Dr.

Beougher for serving on the committee. I have greatly benefited from the help provided by Marsha Omanson in pursuing the SBTS style guidelines (and to Joseph Kelley for the template). The staff at the SBTS library is also owed a note of thanks for their prompt and courteous service in providing book and article scans from Kentucky to Croatia.

A year of field research and another year of writing (and rewriting) was not without significant sacrifice, all of which was not mine. I am grateful to my colleagues serving with the International Mission Board (both directions on the chain) for allowing me to occasionally disappear over the past two years. A very large debt of gratitude is owed to Preston Pearce who served as the primary editor of this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My parents, Jimmy and Kay, and in-laws, Bob and Betty, made significant contributions to realizing this project over the years. Nathan and Kayleigh, who had to do without Dad over so many weekends, or to deal with a distracted or bearish Dad during the week. And Julie, my wife, who made a much greater contribution to this work than she knows: editing and data entry, home base and travel partner, taskmaster and comforter... thank you.

Eric Maroney

Split/Zagreb, Croatia

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In late summer of 2006, a seaside baptismal service was held in the city of Split, Croatia.¹ That morning, the small city of Split, located on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, bore no obvious marks of the political, social, and spiritual change it had experienced in its recent past. A century before, this city had been a part of the Hapsburg Empire, with no known evangelical believers.² Just twenty-five years earlier, the city of Split had been a part of the Republic of Yugoslavia, with only two known evangelicals.³ Yet, by 2006, Yugoslavia had disintegrated and Split belonged to the Republic of Croatia, with approximately three hundred believers in eight small evangelical churches. The spiritual change embodied on that day in 2006, in the two women to be baptized, was no less striking than the political and social change that had accompanied it. Dressed in white robes, making their way down the rocks to the water below, the two women were a

¹Croatia is the English form of the German word *Kroatien*. The local name used by Croatians is Hrvatska, while the people refer to themselves as Hrvati and their language as Hrvatski. The term “Croatia” will be used for the regions that currently form the Republic of Croatia. Due to the long history of these lands, with many shifting borders, and the fact that for nearly a millennium there was no Croatian kingdom or nation state, the term “Croatia” can be a confusing. In Croatian literature the term typically used is *na hrvatskom prostoru*, literally, “on the Croatian place.” However, as this term is unwieldy, I will simply use Croatia.

²The immediate forerunners to Baptists in Croatia were colporteurs, or Bibles distributors. “Before the Baptist message reached Serbia and Croatia, representatives [colporteurs] from the British and Foreign Bible Society had been actively engaged in spreading the Scriptures among the Slavic people.” John David Hopper, “A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 60. In the American Bible Society’s 1873 annual report, the following statement is made regarding colporteurs working in the Hapsburg Empire: “The colporteurs’ work is spoken of with satisfaction, the staff now numbering forty-two, many of whom have to endure hardships of which those who labour in more civilized localities know but little, and that nothing but love to Christ and an ardent desire to win souls to Him, would ensure perseverance in the undertaking.” “Austria,” in *American Bible Society Reports* (New York: American Bible Society, 1873), 5:137.

³Toma Magda, President of the Croatian Baptist Union, interview by author, Osijek, September 25, 2011. Magda stated, “I recall standing on the *riva* (waterfront) in Split, in 1990, and thinking, this is a city of 200,000 people, and there isn’t a single church and only a couple believers.”

part of the first generation of evangelical believers in Split.⁴

On that bright summer morning, a fifty-year-old woman named Željka and her twenty-five year old daughter, Lana, were to be baptized in the Adriatic Sea. Standing in the midst of a group of about fifty people, each shared her testimony before walking down into the water to receive baptism. As Željka stood before the assembly she made the following statement: “Today marks the end of a twenty-five year battle with God.”⁵

Željka was born in the 1950s and grew up on the island of Hvar before moving to Split. During the mid-1980s, a tourist visiting Split had given Željka a New Testament Bible. Željka began to read the New Testament, but discovered that the teachings she read in the New Testament were different from what she had learned growing up as a Roman Catholic. As a child, she felt drawn to the spiritual aspects of life, but felt aversion for the Catholic forms of worship. After several months, Željka stopped reading the New Testament, though she kept it. Twenty years later, her husband Vinko heard the gospel at an outdoor evangelical concert in Split and began attending the Split Baptist church. As she began to notice the change in her husband, she began to attend the church herself, and after a few years accepted Christ and was baptized.

Tomislav is also a member of the Baptist church in Split. However, he was born and raised in the capital city of Zagreb, four hundred kilometers north of Split. Born in the early 1970s, Tomislav served as a soldier during the Homeland War.⁶ In 1995, a neighbor invited him to attend a summer camp being held in the town of Selce on the

⁴For a definition of “evangelical,” I refer to the “Bebbington Quadrilateral”: “There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be termed *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.” David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 2-3.

⁵The baptism service was held September 3, 2006, and I was present to hear the testimony.

⁶Homeland War is the translation of *Domovinski rat*, which is the Croatian name for the war of independence from Yugoslavia, fought from 1991 to 1995.

northern Croatian coast. Tomislav's friend told him that Baptists were hosting the camp, so that there would be some religious meetings, but that they would not be forced to attend. As the neighbor was not a Baptist either, he and Tomislav spent the week enjoying the waters of the Adriatic and did not attend a single worship service.

However, at the end of the week Tomislav began to feel guilty about not attending and decided that he would go to the last service of the week. When his friend refused to go with him, Tomislav went alone. That evening Tomislav attended the service and heard a sermon that brought conviction to his heart. As the final songs of the service were sung, and the preacher asked if any one would like to receive Christ as their personal Savior, Tomislav prayed to receive Christ. By the end of the year Tomislav had been baptized and was attending the Baptist church in Zagreb.⁷

Željka and Tomislav have experienced momentous change in their lives, as have all present-day Croatians. They have both lived through the transition from a communist state to a democratic state, and from a Marxist managed economy to market capitalism. They have lived through the gradual increase of religious toleration; from the time of repression under Tito to freedom of religion guaranteed by the Croatian constitution.⁸ They have lived through the transition from the ethnically pluralistic Republic of Yugoslavia, to the ethnically singular Republic of Croatia.⁹ They have lived through a violent five-year war of independence that saw nearly 20,000 of their fellow

⁷Tomislav Kućan, interview by author, Dubrovnik, October 13, 2013.

⁸While the repression experienced in Yugoslavia was less than in other Eastern Bloc countries, the Communist party in Yugoslavia was very active in discouraging religious expression. The roots of this repression were grounded in the relationship of religion to nationalism, and this particularly so in Croatia. This issue will be discussed further in chap 2.

⁹The last census performed in the Republic of Yugoslavia was conducted in 1981, with 36% Serbian, 20% Croatian, 9% Muslim (Bosnjak), 8% Slovenian, 6% Macedonian, and 6% Yugoslavian. Radio Free Europe Research, originally published March 10, 1982, "Yugoslavia's Census – Final Results," Open Society Archives, accessed April 17, 2014, <http://osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/85-4-120.shtml>. The first census performed in the Republic of Croatia was conducted in 2001, with 90% Croatian, 5% Serbian, 0.5% Bosnjak, 0.4% Italian, and 0.4% Hungarian. *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011* (Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku, Republike Hrvatske, 2011), 160.

citizens lose their lives.¹⁰ However, Željka and Tomislav have experienced another change that has eluded the vast majority of Croatians; they have experienced conversion. Both Željka and Tomislav were born in the Republic of Yugoslavia, and each was born again in the Republic of Croatia. Yet, the manner in which each experienced conversion was greatly different. Which of these conversion experiences is normative for Croatians during this period of conflict and change? The answer to this question is the goal of this dissertation.

Initial Problem

The past forty years have brought significant change to Croatia. During the decade of the 1970s, Josip Broz Tito ruled the communist state of Yugoslavia that emerged from the Second World War. In the 1980s, following Tito's death, Yugoslavia began to experience the effects of *perestroika* and *glasnost* that preceded the breakup of the Soviet Union. Then, as the Soviet Union's influence over Eastern Europe began to decline, the 1990s brought conflict to Croatia as it separated from Yugoslavia in a violent five-year civil war, fought along nationalistic and religious lines. The first decade of the third millennium saw the establishment of the first Croatian state in nearly one thousand years.¹¹ Within the span of one generation, Croatians transitioned from a state that sought to repress religion to another that actively supported the predominant religious expression of Roman Catholicism. During this forty-year period of conflict and change, how did Croatians experience conversion?

The experiences of Željka and Tomislav have been described, but they are only two of the approximately 4.3 million Croatians. What of the others? If Željka and Tomislav represent two ends on a spectrum of conversion experiences, where do the

¹⁰"Presidents apologize over Croatian war," BBC News, last modified September 10, 2003, accessed March 3, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3095774.htm>.

¹¹Chapter 2 will provide a greater detail of the history of the Croatian people.

majority of other Croatians lie on this spectrum? Currently there is no research to answer this question. While local pastors in Croatia know the conversion experiences of the individual members in the churches that they serve, they would not be able to give an answer to this question for the whole country. Therefore, the nature of conversion experiences for Croatians during this period of conflict and change is unknown.

The question then arises, what benefit would result from such an inquiry into conversion among this people group? An inquiry into conversion in Croatia during this period would provide an insight into the appeal of the gospel to a population with a shared geographic, historical, and political context, but with varying religious traditions: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and atheist. This inquiry would also provide insight into the impact of social change and civil conflict on conversion experiences. Ultimately, an inquiry into conversion experiences in Croatia during this time would provide insight into the methods that proved effective in making the gospel appeal to each of these religious traditions, as well as effective methods of evangelism in times of rapid change and conflict. The emergence of the Republic of Croatia represents an extraordinary period of history in South Europe, and an extraordinary opportunity to understand the advance of the gospel in this context. Therefore, there is historical, theological, and Missiological value in studying the nature of conversion during this period of conflict and change.

Initial Solution

Having made a case for the value of an inquiry into the question of how Croatians have converted during this period, findings and conclusions will be presented and a hypothesis will be set forth and supported with data. The methodology for seeking an answer to this question has two fundamental components.

The first requirement for this inquiry is that a manageable segment of Croatians would need to be identified; with approximately 4.3 million Croatians, the task of researching this entire population would be an enormous undertaking. Furthermore, as

there are varying interpretations of conversion among the general Croatian population, it would be impossible to determine which Croatians have converted, and which ones have not. Without a clear definition of conversion, the answers provided would not be consistent, and therefore unusable. However, by focusing on only the Baptists of Croatia, both of these challenges become more manageable. First, Baptists in Croatia hold to a generally consistent definition of conversion, which allows for a consistent inquiry into their conversion experiences. Second, Baptists in Croatia represent a population segment that is manageable, allowing the entire population to be studied. Therefore, the larger question of how Croatians converted during this period will be narrowed to ask how Croatian Baptists have converted during this period.

The second requirement for this inquiry is that a metric be developed so that conversion experiences can be classified, quantified, and compared. First, a metric of classification would provide a way to determine the varying ways that Croatians experienced conversion. This metric would allow the research to then quantify conversion experiences among Croatian Baptists, providing insight into dominant trends as well as into more unique experiences. Finally, with this metric the researcher would be able to compare experiences among different population segments among Croatian Baptists.

Željka and Tomislav's experiences can be used to define this metric, which will be referred to as the conversion spectrum. At one end of the conversion spectrum lies Tomislav, with a near instantaneous conversion experience, spanning no more than an hour. With Tomislav there was only a single encounter with the gospel, and this from an absolute stranger. One evening, in the summer of 1995, Tomislav "made a decision for Christ," and he looks to that moment as his conversion experience. For Tomislav the conversion experience was instantaneous.

At the other end of the spectrum lies Željka, with a long, slow, and gradual process of conversion, spanning nearly three decades. For Željka, there were multiple

encounters with the gospel message, and multiple encounters with born again believers, with whom she had a long-term personal relationship. Further, there was no defining moment at which she “made a decision for Christ.” Željka cannot point to a specific moment when she converted. For Željka, the conversion experience was gradual.

In utilizing the terms “instantaneous” and “gradual,” no attempt is made at this point to define the spiritual nature of conversion.¹² Rather, what is being described is conversion as experienced and understood by the individual leading up to their point of decision. Another example of a gradual conversion experience is found in the experience of the pastor of the Baptist church in Split. In May 1996, a friend gave this man Billy Graham’s *Peace with God*. Over the summer he read the book, and then encountered the friend again in October of the same year. Following an extended conversation the friend exclaimed to the man, “You’ve been born again!”¹³ Therefore, when asked when he converted, the pastor will state, “Some point between May and October of 1996.” He does not have a specific moment that he can say it occurred; he only knows that it occurred between two specific events. Therefore, the conversion experience metric will consist of when an individual first hears the gospel, when that individual converts, and further, when this individual makes their conversion public through baptism.

Having developed a metric, the next step would be to simply ask Croatian Baptists how they experienced conversion, and then to plot these experiences on the conversion experience spectrum. This would take the form of a simple survey. This survey would ask Croatian Baptists to share their conversion experiences. The basic conversion experience information would need to consist first of a date relating to the first time they heard the gospel, and second, the date that they converted. The time

¹²Chapter 3 will provide an examination of the topic of conversion, as well as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Communist, and Croatian Baptist views on conversion.

¹³Dražen Radman, pastor of the Split Baptist Church, interview by author, Split, October 1998.

spreads between these two dates would then be used to plot the experiences on the conversion spectrum. The survey would also ask if there was a specific date that the individual recognized as having experienced conversion.

Once this information was plotted, however, additional questions would arise, such as regional, ethnic, and temporal issues. For example, does the fact that Željka grew up in a rural environment in the south of Croatia account for the difference of her experience with Tomislav's, who grew up in an urban environment in the north? Or, what about ethnic differences? Both Željka and Tomislav are Croatian. What about the ethnic Serbs who live in Croatia? What about the experiences of those who converted during the period of Yugoslavia as opposed to those who converted during the period of Croatia? Tomislav converted during the 1990s, immediately following the Homeland War, while Željka converted in the 2000s, a period of increased stability. Does this account for their varying experiences? And, what about those who converted during the period of Yugoslavia? Was their experience closer to Tomislav's or Željka's?

Further, questions arise as to the specific means of conversion. For example, for Tomislav the means of conversion included a summer camp, an evangelistic event, and a sermon. For Željka, the means of conversion included street evangelism (a Bible given to her and an outdoor evangelistic concert attended by her husband), personal reading of the New Testament, and the experiences of family members, both her husband and her daughter. Therefore, the survey would need to consist of two parts, first an expanded recounting of conversion experience, and second, demographic information which would point to regional, ethnic, and temporal distinctions.

The expanded conversion experience section would need to include a list of common means to conversion, but also allow for those taking the survey to provide a brief narrative, so as not to limit them to the means listed on the survey instrument. Also, respondents would be asked how many believers they knew prior to conversion as well as how many times they estimate that they heard the gospel prior to conversion. The

demographic information would need to consist of general information, such as geographic location, age, sex, and ethnic and religious background.

By utilizing these two variables, it would be simple to plot different demographic population segments along the conversion spectrum. For example, what is the conversion experience of southern Croatians as opposed to northerners? What is the conversion experience of those who converted in Yugoslavia as opposed to those who have converted in Croatia? Or, even more specific questions might be asked, such as, what is the conversion experience of ethnic Serb females under the age of forty who converted during the Homeland War? Answers to these questions would emerge through the survey process and allow the researcher to postulate the impact of conflict and change on the conversion experience of Croatian Baptists.

Consequent Problems

With this information, a broad picture would begin to emerge as to how Croatians have converted in the past. The question of whether Željka's or Tomislav's conversion experience is more common among Croatians would find an answer. However, having access to this answer produces additional questions. These questions are epistemological and teleological. First, what is the meaning of the research findings? And second, what should be the purpose of the research findings?

Epistemological Problem

An evangelical missiologist and an atheist/agnostic sociologist could find common ground in examining the results gained by this research. Both could agree that based on the knowledge obtained through research, that a certain percentage of Croatians experienced conversion in a manner defined as gradual, while another percentage experienced conversion in a manner defined as instantaneous. Yet, while the missiologist and the sociologist would agree on the results, based on the integrity of the research methods, they would not agree on what the research findings mean.

The reason for this disagreement is that each has their own perspective on the meaning of conversion based upon their own worldview. For example, the atheist/agnostic sociologist is a materialist, and does not recognize a spiritual existence. Therefore, from the perspective of the sociologist, the conversions that occurred were merely the choices made by individuals to associate with a particular social group that is self-identifying as Christian in general, and Baptist in particular.¹⁴ In contrast to the sociologist's view is the perspective of the evangelical missiologist, who recognizes a spiritual existence, and sees a much different meaning in the conversion experiences. The missiologist would not primarily see a sociological occurrence, but rather a spiritual occurrence.¹⁵ Therefore, with the same knowledge, the sociologist and the missiologist would draw different meanings, based on their unique worldview perspectives.

Anthropologists in their study of differing cultures note the dynamic of worldview perspectives and refer to both "emic" and "etic" perspectives.¹⁶ An *emic* perspective is the view from within one's own worldview, while the *etic* perspective is the view of the outsider, examining another's worldview. For example, the anthropologist's *emic* perspective consists of his view that conversion is primarily a sociological phenomenon. The *etic* perspective occurs when the sociologist examines the conclusions of the missiologist. The sociologist is an outsider to the worldview of the missiologist, and does not accept the meaning that the missiologist assigns to conversion. Therefore, in a sense, the sociologist and the missiologist are not speaking the same

¹⁴"Conversion means a transformation of one's self concurrent with a transformation of one's basic meaning system. It changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in the social situation. The process of conversion. . . can apply not only to religious changes but also to psychotherapeutic and political transformation." Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion in the Social Context*, 5th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2001), 73.

¹⁵"Spiritual transformation is the work of God in the life of a sinner, making him or her a child of God and a citizen of the kingdom of God." Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 304.

¹⁶Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 94.

language, and will come to different conclusions regarding the meaning of the research.

In order to address these varying perspectives, the nature of conversion itself would need to be defined, in order to understand what is meant by conversion in the research results. This would need to be defined for the sake of the researcher who is studying conversion, but also would need to be defined for Croatians themselves who are said to have experienced conversion. The *emic* perspective of both would need to be defined in order to understand what the research results mean. Furthermore, the *etic* perspectives would need to be defined for those who did not convert, in order to provide the outsider's perspective. For example, conversion means one thing to the individual converting, but something entirely different for another who observes the individual converting, but does not himself convert. Therefore, in order to better understand conversion among Croatians during this forty-year period, this epistemological question must be addressed.

Teleological Problem

In addition to seeking a clear meaning for the research findings, the purpose for which the research is conducted must also be addressed. Once again, worldview undergirds and drives this purpose. For the sociologist, the knowledge obtained by the research is the goal itself. Science seeks to know the unknown, and the research findings would serve this purpose. However, the missiologist has a different goal.

The missiologist studies missions for the purpose of encouraging the end goal of missions: the glorification of God and the conversion of the unconverted. And by examining the subject of conversion among Croatians, the missiologist will be forced to grapple with another question, "Why have so few Croatians converted?" With nearly 4.3

million Croats living in Croatia, the evangelical population is only 0.004%.¹⁷ It is clear that Croats are a people group that has been largely impervious to the gospel. Why is this so? Are they unreached, unengaged, or simply unresponsive?

Ralph D. Winter describes an unreached people group as, “defined by ethnic or sociological traits to be people so different from the cultural traditions of any existing church that missions (rather than evangelism) strategies are necessary for the planting of indigenous churches within their particular traditions.”¹⁸ Utilizing this definition, Croats would not be considered unreached. Indigenous churches are already present within the people group. While its numbers may be few, there is an indigenous church among the Croatian people that is self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting.

If the Croatian people group is reached, then, are they unengaged? The answer to this question would also be no, as the gospel has been present in the region since the first century, and the Croatian people have been Christianized since the ninth century. Furthermore, expatriate and indigenous evangelists have been active among the Croatian people throughout the past century. While the Second World War, Communist persecution, and the Homeland War may have impeded this witness over the past century, it could also be argued that troubles such as these as often as not serve to grow the church. And yet, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, there is only a tiny fraction of the Croatian people group that has converted. Croats, then, are not unreached or unengaged, but are, rather, unresponsive. Croats are resistant to the gospel, but what

¹⁷Patrick Johnstone cites 19,359 evangelicals, a number which represents 0.43% of the total population of Croatia. “Croatia” Operation World, accessed March 6, 2013, <http://www.operationworld.org/croa>. Johnstone, for his Operation World research, utilizes the following definition, “All who emphasize and adhere to all four of the following: (a) the Lord Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation through faith in Him, as validated by His crucifixion and resurrection, (b) personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit, (c) recognition of the inspired Word of God as the ultimate basis and authority for faith and Christian living, and (d) commitment to biblical witness, evangelism and mission that brings others to faith in Christ.” “Glossary – Evangelical,” Operation World, accessed March 6, 2013, <http://www.operationworld.org/glossary>.

¹⁸Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1992), B-42.

is the cause of this resistance?

While the sociologist will approach this question of unresponsiveness as a sociological phenomenon, the missiologist's worldview will force a much different approach. The missiologist will see the present reality of unresponsiveness in the context of his or her belief that there is a terrible future consequence to this unresponsiveness. Further, based upon his or her worldview, the missiologist will seek to understand this unresponsiveness with the purpose of changing this current reality in light of their belief regarding the future reality.

Why have so few Croatians converted? And, if so few Croatians have converted, what hope is there for the many who have not? Recognizing the barriers that stand between the Croatians and their acceptance of the gospel would be crucial to any study that seeks to understand how and why Croatians convert for the purpose of seeing more Croatians convert. Understanding this resistance to conversion is crucial to answering the missiological question of how more *could* convert, which is the purpose of missiology.

Consequent Solutions

Having raised two additional problems to the primary question of how Croatians convert, a solution for each will be proposed. First, the epistemological problem needs to be addressed in order to make clear what the research findings mean. Second, the teleological problem needs to be addressed in order to make clear how the research findings could be used in order that Croatians might be better engaged with the gospel.

Epistemological Solution

In order to obtain a clear meaning for the knowledge revealed in the field research, conversion must be clearly defined. Providing a definition for conversion will provide a context against which the meaning of the research may be inferred. However,

this context must provide both *emic* and *etic* perspectives on the meaning of conversion. In order to achieve this context, therefore, three perspectives will be examined.

First, my *emic* perspective will be explored and clearly stated. As an evangelical and a Baptist, I will clearly define my own perspective as to the meaning of conversion, before assigning meaning to the research. Doing so will provide a consistent baseline for evaluating the research findings. Further, having a clear statement of my definition of conversion will aid the reader to better understand the meaning that has been applied to the *etic* perspectives to be researched.

My perspective on conversion is more fully detailed in chapter three, however, a brief summary will suffice at this point. I believe that the God Yahweh, as revealed in the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures, created the universe through His Son Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament (Gen 1:1, Col 1:16). This creation, including mankind, was created perfect, but due to the rebellion of mankind, became corrupt and evil, and mankind became spiritually dead (Gen 1:31, Rom 5:12-14). However, God began to a redemption work, by which the spiritually dead men and women could be born again, born spiritually (Gen 3:15, John 3:3-8). This rebirth is a work of God alone, by grace, and is available by faith to those men and women called by God, as a result of the sacrificial atonement of Jesus on the cross (John 1:12-13, Eph 2:1-19, Rom 5:6-9). It is this spiritual rebirth that I identify generally as conversion, though specific elements have been assigned to conversion including calling, justification, regeneration, sanctification, and social identification.

Second, the various perspectives of the Croatian population segments must be explored. These *etic* perspectives, in relation to both the author and Croatian Baptists, are critical as they reveal the original worldviews of those who converted, as well as what in particular was being rejected by their conversion. Further, a study of this perspective would reveal how those who did not convert viewed those who did convert.

Understanding this view of those who did not convert will aid in pursuing the teleological

solution by revealing aspects of conversion resistance.

Third, the perspective of Croatian Baptists must be explored. This third perspective is important to define, as the author must be careful not to blindly apply his own definition to those of a similar religious outlook, but with a different cultural and historical background. This perspective would reveal what the beliefs and understandings are of those who converted as well as those who worked to bring about this conversion.

Teleological Solution

Once meaning has been provided for the knowledge obtained by researching conversion among Croatians, the missiologist continues on in his studies in order to apply this knowledge to his or her purpose in missions. Behind the teleological question lies the reality of a conversion resistance among the Croatian people. Croatians have not converted in significant numbers. The reasons for this resistance must be explored in order to pursue a change in this reality.

The sociology of religion provides a framework for understanding the barrier that stands between Croatians and their acceptance of the gospel. Utilizing the church-sect typology, the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia may be seen as the classic *church*, as defined by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch.¹⁹ Weber defined a church as an “organization that accepts the masses.”²⁰ Troeltsch expanded on this understanding by stating that a church is a social institution with

. . . an orientation and organization that is essentially conserving the social order and is accommodated to the secular world. Its membership is not exclusive but incorporates the masses. . . . The church is characteristically an integral part of the social order. . . thus the church tends to be associated with the interests of the dominant classes. . . and has an objective institutional character. One is born into it,

¹⁹McGuire, *Religion in the Social Context*, 150.

²⁰Ibid.

and it mediates the divine to its members.²¹

In contrast to the church, the *sect* Weber defined as “an association that accepts only religiously qualified persons. . . a group that sets itself apart from the larger society; it exists in tension (indeed, often conflict) with its social environment.”²² Troeltsch further elaborates:

The sect, by contrast, is exclusive, aspiring to personal perfection and direct fellowship among members. . . . The sect stands apart from society in indifference or hostility. . . . The sect is a voluntary community of fellowship and service; relationships with fellow members and the divine are more direct.²³

In the Croatian context, the Roman Catholic Church may be seen as a *church*, a monopolistic religious institution, while Baptists may be seen as forming a *sect* that critiques the religious *status quo*.²⁴ Therefore, sociologically speaking Baptists and Roman Catholics are religious and societal adversaries. Roman Catholics see Baptists as sectarians, deviant from the mainstream, while Baptists see Roman Catholics as apostates, having abandoned central aspects of the Christian faith for the sake of accommodating the larger social environment. Understanding this adversarial dynamic is central to understanding conversion resistance among Croats.

Croats are traditionally Roman Catholic and have been so for more than one thousand years. Therefore, Croatian history must be examined to understand what has led to the Croatian resistance to the gospel. A Croat who converts is not merely *becoming* an evangelical; they are, in the eyes of many Croats, *ceasing* to be a Croat, and therefore not only an spiritual apostate, but also a cultural traitor.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 151.

²³Ibid.

²⁴McGuire cautions, “In Troeltsch’s scheme, the church-type and sect-type are polarized extremes, reflecting the historical situation of late medieval Christendom, in which class structure was generally polarized and religious institutions were relatively undifferentiated from economic and political ones.” McGuire, *Religion in the Social Context*, 151. However, due to the relative underdevelopment of Croatia under Hapsburgs, I would argue that this was true at least until 1945, and that this was true in the minds of many Croats even in 1995.

Therefore, from the missiologist's perspective, it can be said that the status of the Roman Catholic Church as a church among the Croatian people has become a stumbling block that keeps Croatians from receiving the gospel. Understanding the religious context in which Croatians convert will provide insight into the purpose for which the research may be used.

The Approach

Having defined the three primary problems to be addressed by this dissertation, and their proposed solutions, the research approach to each of these solutions will now be examined. This dissertation consists of three primary sections, each consisting of one chapter. The second chapter considers the history of the Croatian people, with a particular focus on the development of their primary religious tradition. The third chapter considers the theological question of the meaning of conversion, with a particular focus on the various meanings of conversion in the Croatian context. The fourth chapter consists of field research and seeks to understand how God has moved among Croatians in spite of their resistance to the gospel. The first two chapters consist of bibliographical research, while the third chapter consists of field research.

Who Are The Croatians?

The second chapter seeks to answer the question of the Croatian religious identity from an historical perspective. The chapter begins with an overview of demographics from the four decades with which this research project is concerned, including ethnicity, language, and religion. Next, the geography of Croatia is reviewed. Subsequently, the religious history of the Croatian people is detailed, providing insight into their conversion resistance. Finally, a brief overview of the Croatian Baptist history is provided.

What Is Conversion?

The third chapter seeks to provide an understanding of conversion as related to conversion experience. The first part of the chapter details differing perspectives on conversion. The second part of the chapter examines two typologies of conversion experiences, before examining two central aspects of conversion experience: context and means. The three primary conversion contexts included in this research are explored: Traditional, Materialist, and Baptist.

How Have Croatians Converted?

The fourth chapter presents the data obtained through the field research. The field research for this dissertation follows the grounded theory methodology. Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss define grounded theory research as a methodology of “building theory from data.”²⁵ John Creswell expands on this definition by stating that grounded theory research is “a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants.”²⁶ Grounded theory research does not approach its subject matter with a preexisting theory as to the cause of the process, but rather research is conducted and the theory is “generated or ‘grounded’ in the data from the participants who have experienced the process.”²⁷ In this project, the process was conversion and the participants were the Croatian Baptists.

This chapter begins with a description of the survey instrument that was created, followed by a description of the methodology of application. Following this introduction to the instrument and method, the results of the research are presented. First,

²⁵Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 1.

²⁶John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 63.

²⁷Ibid.

the results of the entire survey for the whole of Croatia are provided. Second, the results are examined for the impact of conflict and change on conversion.

Known Limitations

Before closing this section on the research approach, it is important to state the limitations that are inherent in this study. First, while every attempt was been made to survey every Croatian Baptist in every Croatian Baptist church, it was not possible to do so, for a number of reasons. First, some individuals, both church members as well as church leaders, chose not to participate in this survey. For the latter, the church leaders, this also created a problem for surveying the churches that they serve. The survey was offered as voluntary, yet every effort was made in explaining the purpose of the survey (i.e. evangelistic goal) to encourage participation in the research. Still, some refused to participate or have failed to complete or submit their completed surveys.²⁸ Therefore, a known limitation of this study will be that it does not include every Croatian Baptist's conversion experience.

A second limitation relates to Croatian Baptists who no longer are members of a local Baptist church. In the summer of 2011 as the initial plans for this research project were forming, the idea for the research was shared with a Croatian Baptist Union leader. When the discussion came to the issue of surveying all the members of all the Baptist churches in Croatia, he asked the question, "What about those who are no longer members?"²⁹ This is a pertinent and painful question for Croatian Baptists; what about those who have left the Baptist church?

²⁸Some pastors have felt that it is not proper to complete surveys Sunday morning. These pastors have stated that they wanted their members to have more time to complete the surveys, to give them a greater attention. However, this method has proved to be ineffective, as a far lower percentage of surveys are completed outside the Sunday morning service than during the service. In spite of this fact, I had to defer to the decision of the local pastor.

²⁹Željko Mraz, General Secretary to the Croatian Baptist Union, interview by author, Čakovec, June 16, 2011.

The fact is that many of those who have converted to Christianity through the ministry of a Baptist church are no longer in fellowship with a Baptist church. This is not merely due to death or moving where there is no Croatian Baptist church. Table 1, taken from the Split Baptist Church, describes this issue very clearly.³⁰

Table 1. Membership trends in the Split Baptist Church

Year	Number baptized	No longer in fellowship
1997	9	6
1998	2	2
1999	4	0
2000	2	2
2001	5	2
2002	0	0
2003	0	0
2004	0	0
2005	2	1
2006	2	0
2007	0	0
2008	2	1
2009	0	0
2010	0	0
Total	28	14

³⁰Original research. I was a member of the Split Baptist Church from 1998 to 2014, serving as an elder in the church from 2000-2010. The group that was to later become the church began meeting in 1996, with the first baptisms occurring in summer 1997. The group was formally recognized as a church by the Croatian Baptist Union in 1999. Janko Stambrek, a Croatian evangelical and historian, advised me that in the Evangelical church the situation is similar, with about 50% of individuals eventually leaving the church. Interview by author, Zagreb, April 28, 2015.

Of the nearly 30 persons who converted during the period that this research project covers, half are no longer in fellowship with a Baptist church. Of the 14 that have left the church, only one has left the city of Split; the other 13 remain in the city, but are no longer in fellowship with the church. Two of these left due to church discipline, while another 4 left due to disapproval over this discipline. Three have chosen to attend another evangelical church in the city.

A complete study of conversion would include these 14 individuals. However, including them would require an extensive process of individually locating them and convincing them to discuss what is most probably an emotionally difficult subject. Transferring this process from a single city to a nation would certainly be an enormously time consuming task, and for this reason these individuals have not be included. Therefore, a known limitation of this research project is that it does not include those who converted through the ministry of a Baptist church, but are no longer in fellowship with a Baptist church.

Thirdly, research was delimited by the decision to survey Baptists only from among all the evangelicals in Croatia. Baptists represent only 25% of the total number of evangelical Christians in Croatia.³¹ By choosing to limit the scope of the research to only Baptists, this automatically excludes 75% of evangelicals who have experienced conversion during this period. In spite of this reality, the decision has been made to focus exclusively on Baptists for two reasons. First, this allowed a more manageable project, working within one union and with a clearly defined research group. Second, focusing on one union provided a focus believed to be more useful both to national Baptists as well as to the expatriate mission agencies working with Croatian Baptists by detailing how Baptists have succeeded and providing insight into areas for improvement.

Finally, while this project is undertaken from an evangelical perspective, the

³¹Chapter 2 provides specific data on Baptists and other Protestants in Croatia.

author acknowledges the fact that one does not have to be an evangelical to have experienced conversion. The author does not believe that being a Baptist, or an evangelical, is a prerequisite for salvation.³² However, to locate all individuals who experienced genuine conversion in the Croatia would be similar to the task appointed to the field hands in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30).

Methodology

The primary focus of this dissertation is field research; seeking to discover the conversion experiences in Croatia from 1970 to 2010. As stated previously, research was limited to Croatian Baptists for both practical and theological reasons. Surveying 4.3 million Croatians, many of whom have widely varying definitions of conversion, would simply not be feasible. Croatian Baptists represent a clear and concise population segment with which the researcher shares a common view of conversion.

Surveying was conducted in churches at the time of the Sunday worship service. In cooperation with the local pastor, following the close of the service, the purpose of the research project was explained prior to distribution of the surveys. At each location, it was clearly expressed that the survey was both voluntary and anonymous. The survey consists of a single sheet of paper, printed on both sides, with multiple-choice questions relating to demographic information and conversion experience.³³ There is also a section where the respondent is able to briefly share his or her story in narrative form.

Once the surveys were completed and entered into the database, analysis of the research began, seeking theories grounded in the data obtained through the survey. This analysis consisted of three phases: first, sorting and summarizing, second, sorting and

³²That said, I firmly believe that the Baptist and evangelical views on Christian faith and practice are closer to the Scriptural teachings than any other. Furthermore, it is much more difficult for an individual to hear, understand, and respond to the Gospel outside the Baptist and evangelical churches than within.

³³See the appendix for copy of the survey, followed by an English translation and a sample completed survey.

ranking, and third, sorting and comparing.³⁴ In the first phase, a general picture of Croatian Baptists emerged. This consisted of demographic makeup as well as the characteristics of their conversion experiences.

The second and third phases provided a deeper understanding of the conversions of Croatian Baptists. In this phase, trends were sought that pointed towards elements that appear to be key among a majority of respondents. These key elements were ranked in importance, and then compared at the national level, regional level, and between individual churches. Furthermore, these elements were compared by demographic; for example, to determine what may be key for women, but not for men. Finally, comparison was made by decade of conversion, for example, to gauge what impact the changes of the 1990s had upon conversion, as opposed to other decades that saw no civil conflict.

Once the data was collected, entered into the database, and mined for trends, the information derived from the research was shared with a select group of individuals prior to finalizing conclusions in the presented dissertation. These individuals included Croatian Baptist Union leaders and pastors, national and expatriate missionaries, Baptist laymen and women, and non-Baptist evangelicals in Croatia. The feedback from these individuals provided the opportunity to draw alternate conclusions, and this feedback informed the final conclusions of this dissertation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of this dissertation was to understand how Croatians experienced conversion over the past forty years, and in doing so, to gain an understanding of how more Croatians might convert in the future. During a period of

³⁴Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 224-26.

conflict and change, God moved among the Croatian people group in specific ways to bring about spiritual change: conversion. In these specific ways, patterns of conversion experience can be found. I believe that in understanding these patterns, drawn from the conversion experiences of Croatians Baptists, from various backgrounds and demographic situations, that a more effective methodology of evangelism may be developed; a methodology that is in tune with the movement of God. It is my hope that in uncovering these patterns of conversion, this might lead to more effective patterns of witness, and that these patterns of witness might become areas of focus for those Croatians who have experienced conversion, that they may more effectively reach the other 99.99% who have not.

CHAPTER 2

WHO ARE THE CROATIANS?

Introduction

In 1519, Pope Leo X described the Croatian peoples as the “bulwarks of Christendom.”¹ The Muslim world was marching, in the form of the Ottoman Sultan and his army, against the Christian world in the form of Western Europe. Christendom was threatened from the outside, yet remained largely fractured politically within. Leo X made plans for a Crusade to free the lands to his east from the Ottoman raiders, but failed to achieve this, as war with France and ultimately the Reformation drew his attention to the west and north. Along the southern border of Christendom, the Croatian peoples fought and suffered to keep the Ottomans outside Christendom.

Five hundred years later, the idea of Christendom, and religion in general, has largely been set-aside in modern Europe, as the continent has pursued an increasingly secular path.² Yet, it will be argued in this chapter that during the period of time that this research project examines, an attempt has been made by Croats to reestablish Christendom in Croatia. In this sense, Croatia at the end of the twentieth century represented the last Christendom, one of the last places in Europe seeking to marry the temporal world of governing and politics with the sacred world of the Roman Catholic Church. It was in this context of the last Christendom that the Baptists of Croatia experienced conversion over the past forty years.

¹Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 32.

²John Micklethwait and Arian Wooldridge, *God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009). The authors argue that in the early twenty-first century, religion is growing everywhere in the world except in Europe, which has become almost completely agnostic.

This chapter introduces the Croatian people and their land. It is assumed that the reader has very little knowledge of Eastern Europe in general and of Croatia in particular. Yet, Croatia is a very specific and unique context, and a lack of familiarity with this context will keep the reader from realizing the true miracle of the conversions that have occurred. With this in mind, prior to discussing research findings in chapter four, in the next two chapters the subjects of the Croats and of conversion will be examined. Each of these overviews will be general but focused towards preparing the reader to better appreciate the research findings. This first overview will consist of three sections: demographic, geographic, and religion. Each of these sections will contain a historic component, as contemporary Croatia cannot be understood apart from its long, remarkable history.

The demographic section introduces the reader to current population information. This section begins with an examination of ethnicity and language in Croatia. Next, population trends over the past forty years are discussed. Finally, religious affiliation and change in religious affiliation is analyzed. The geographic section examines the country as a whole as well as the major regions of Croatia. Due to Croatia's geographic position, its people have repeatedly experienced major disruptions and cultural influences from outside peoples both near and far. This section will conclude with a brief historical overview of Croatia's situation at the center of the world's major geopolitical fault lines for the past thousand years.

As this study is concerned primarily with spiritual change, the last section—dealing with religion—will be the largest part of this chapter. In this last section, the focus will be on the interplay between the political and religious history of the Croat people, with the goal of understanding how the Croat people at the end of the twentieth century came to pursue the Christendom referred to previously. In this section it will be seen that the Croatian people have developed a self-identity based on rejection of the “other.” Further, this rejection of the “other” has been in religious terms, so that to be a Croatian is

to hold to a particular religious expression contrary to the “other.” To be a Croatian is to be a Roman Catholic.

Finally, the chapter will conclude with a brief historical overview of the origins of Baptists in Croatia, the major focus of this study’s field research. Baptists in Croatia had their beginning in the late nineteenth century and have since remained a tiny minority in Croatia. The Croatian Baptist movement is an alien religion that has become indigenized over the past century, to the point that the majority of growth reported in the field research was a result of Croatian Baptist evangelism. Understanding how the movement first began in Croatia will aid the reader in better understanding the data in chapter four.

Demographics

In this section the demographics of the Croatian people will be examined. First, after a review of the general population information from the 2011 census, a brief overview of ethnicity and language will be presented followed by an examination of population trends during the forty years covered in this study. Second, a brief overview of religion in Croatia will be presented, followed by a discussion of religious change over the past decade.

Population

Croatia’s most recent census, conducted in 2011, registered a total population of 4,284,889.³ A current estimate as of 2014 has shown an increase to 4,470,534.⁴ The median age is 42 years and average life expectancy is 76.⁵ Secondary school education is

³*Potpis stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2011: Prvi rezultati po naseljima* (Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske), 15.

⁴“Croatia,” *The World Factbook*, last modified June 22, 2014, accessed October 15, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hr.html>.

⁵*Ibid.*

mandatory and the literacy rate is 98.9%.⁶ Monthly per capita net income in 2010 was 5343 kuna, or \$972 based historical exchange rate.⁷

Ethnicity

The 2011 census reflected a near homogenous ethnic population in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion.⁸ Of the participants, 90.42% identified themselves as Croatian. This figure is slightly higher when incorporating those who identified themselves according to their region, rising to 91.05%.⁹ The second highest single ethnic group was Serbian, with 4.36%. The figure for Serbian-related ethnicity was 4.53%.¹⁰ All other ethnicities combined totaled 4.59%, with the largest minorities being Bosnians with 0.7%, followed by Italians, Albanians, and Roma, each with about 0.4%.

It should be noted that the difference in ethnicity between Croatian and Serb is not race-related. The Oxford dictionary defines ethnicity as, “The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.”¹¹ In this case it is appropriate to define Croatians and Serbs as having a different ethnicity, as they do not share a common national heritage or cultural tradition. However, the same is not true for race. The Oxford dictionary defines race as, “Each of the major divisions of

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011* (Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku, Republike Hrvatske, 2011), 160.

⁸Unless otherwise noted, all census data from 2011 is from the Državni Zavod za Statistike (The State Institute for Statistics) publication *Potpis stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2011: Prvi rezultati po naseljima* (Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku, Republike Hrvatske, 2013).

⁹The 2011 census offered great latitude in declaring one’s self-identity. This total figure includes Croatians with Istrians, Dalmatians, “other regional affiliations,” as well as Slavonians and “Primorje people,” “Međimurje people,” and “Zagorje people.”

¹⁰This total figure includes Serbs, Montenegrins, Yugoslav, and those who identified themselves religiously as “orthodox.”

¹¹*Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. “ethnicity,” last modified October 10, 2014, accessed October 17, 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

humankind, having distinct physical characteristics.”¹² Croats and Serbs are of the same race: both are in general Slavic, and in particular part of the Slavs who migrated to south Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries. The differences between Croat and Serb are not found in physical characteristics, but in cultural tradition. The same may be said about Bosnians, the third major ethnic group.

Language

The level of homogeneity increases when looking at language. According to the 2011 census, 95.6% of the population claims Croatian as their mother tongue. The second highest language is Serbian with 1.23%. This figure rises slightly to 1.49% when incorporating Serbian-related responses.¹³ The next highest language responses were Italian, Albanian, and Bosnian, each with around 0.04%. Considering that Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian are all mutually comprehensible in the spoken form, less than 3% of the people living in Croatia are not able to speak to one another in their mother tongue.

It should be noted that the difference between the Croatian and Serbian languages is minor. “Serbo–Croatian” was considered a single language as late as the early 1990s, with what are today Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin being considered regional dialects. The most obvious difference between the four languages is that Serbian and Montenegrin use the Cyrillic alphabet and Croatian and Bosnian use the Latin alphabet. Grammar differences are minor, though there are variances in vocabulary. Slovenia and Macedonia, the other two former Yugoslav republics, have a greater variety in their language, to the point where communication can become difficult.

¹²Ibid., “Race.”

¹³This figure includes those who responded with Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian.

Population Trends

According to recent data, Croatia's population is shrinking. A 2014 estimate of Croatia's growth rate is -0.12%.¹⁴ This places Croatia in the bottom 10% of nations for world population growth. This is due to three factors. First, Croatia's birth rate (9.49 births/1,000 population) places it near the bottom 10% of nations.¹⁵ Second, Croatia's death rate (12.13 deaths/1,000 population) places it near the top 10% of nations.¹⁶ Third, Croatia's net migration rate (1.43 migrants/1000 population) is in the top 25% of nations.¹⁷ This means that for every nine new Croatians born, the country is losing fourteen.

In fact, Croatia's population has decreased over the forty years that this research project examines. According to the 1971 census, the population of the Yugoslav Republic of Croatia was around 4.4 million persons. The population of Croatia peaked in 1991 at nearly 4.8 million persons but then decreased to 4.4 million in 2001 to just fewer than 4.3 million persons in 2011. This stagnation and decline is not due simply to natural conditions but also due to issues of ethnic identity and national politics.

In table 2, these issues are revealed in the increase and decrease of the major population segments in Croatia.¹⁸ The changes in these population segments account for the population stagnation more than an overall low birth rate and a high death rate. The first issue to note is the change in Serb population, which has two significant drops. In the 1970s, the Serb population fell 15%. In the 1990s, the Serb population fell 65%.

¹⁴*The World Factbook*, "Croatia."

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Table 2 is drawn from several different sources. The data from 1961, and for "Yugoslav" in 1971, are drawn from *Nacionalni Sastav Stanovništva SFR Jugoslavije: Knjige I, Podaci po naseljima I opstinama* (Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1991), 11. The "Yugoslav" numbers for 1981 and 1991 are drawn from Ruža Petrović, "The National Composition of Yugoslavia's Population, 1991" (*Yugoslav Survey*, 33, 1992), 3-24. All 2011 numbers are drawn from *Potpis stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2011: Prvi rezultati po naseljima*, 15. All other numbers are drawn from *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011*, 105.

Table 2. Croatian population trends 1961 to 2011

Ethnicity	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total	4,159,696	4,426,221	4,601,469	4,784,265	4,437,460	4,284,889
Croat	3,339,841	3,513,647	3,454,661	3,736,356	3,977,171	3,874,321
Serb	624,985	626,789	531,502	581,663	201,631	186,633
Yugoslav	15,559	84,118	379,058	104,728	–	331
Other	–	147,934	120,329	131,648	129,752	223,935

The drop in the 1970s can be accounted for by a move from a Serb self-identity to a Yugoslav self-identity. While the Serb population dropped by nearly 100,000 persons, the Yugoslav population increased by nearly 300,000 persons. Clearly, many Croats were also drawn to identify as Yugoslavs, as the Croat population also decreased, by nearly 150,000 persons. The designation of “Other” also fell, by nearly 20%. The year 1981 should therefore be seen to be the high-water mark of Yugoslavism.

The drop among Serbs in the 1990s was due to the Homeland War. In August 1995, the Croatian army swept into areas that Serb militias had held for more than four years, and tens of thousands of Serbs fled to Serbia. Some began to return in the early 2000’s. However, two thirds of these have chosen to remain in Serbia as refugees.

The impact of the Homeland War can also be seen in the Croatian population. The low point of Croatian population was in 1981, the high point of Yugoslavism. However, these numbers were reversed in 1991, as the Yugoslav category declined by nearly 300,000 and the Croatian category increased by just slightly less than that amount, 282,000. As the “Other” category only increased by 11,000, one can assume that in the wake of the move for Croatian independence from Yugoslavia, there was a massive shift in self-identifying, from Yugoslav to Croatian.

This trend continued into 2001 as the Yugoslav category disappeared

completely—resulting in a loss of nearly 105,000 persons—while the Croatian category continued to increase—this time by 241,000. This trend began to change with the 2011 census, when the “Other” category increased by nearly 100,000 persons, and the Croatian category declined by roughly the same amount. Therefore, as 1981 was the high-water mark for “Yugoslavism,” 2001 may have been the high-water mark for Croatian nationalism.

Religious Demographics

The level of homogeneity within the country slightly decreases when looking at religion in Croatia. However, there is still an overwhelming majority present. According to the 2011 census, 86.28% of the population is Roman Catholic. The second largest religious group is Orthodox (4.44%), followed closely by “Not religious and atheist” (3.81%). However, when “Agnostics and skeptics” are added to the “Not religious and atheist” group, the total number rises to 4.57%, making agnostic/atheist the second largest worldview in Croatia. This combined agnostic/atheist worldview will be referred to as Materialism, as both groups are skeptical about any metaphysical reality. The fourth largest group is Islam with 1.47%. Combined, the four traditional worldviews found in Yugoslavia remain the overwhelming majority (97%) of worldviews found in Croatia’s predecessor, Yugoslavia: Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Materialism, and Islam.

Greater insight can be gained by examining religion in light of ethnicity, and the level of homogeneity rises again. Among those of Croat ethnicity, 92.89% are Roman Catholic. Among those of Serb ethnicity, 85.48% are Orthodox. Among those of Bosnian ethnicity, 88.82% are Muslim. Therefore, the defining characteristic among Croatian, Serb, and Bosnian, that which makes a Croatian a Croatian, or a Serb a Serb, is not ethnicity or language, but is religion.

The second largest worldview in Croatia, Materialism, should also be

examined in light of ethnicity. Nearly 5% of the population in Croatia holds to this worldview, that there is no reality beyond the material, physical reality: no God, no spiritual reality, no non-humanistic code of morals, and no metaphysical threat of judgment and punishment. This is the worldview of the communists who ruled Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991. The largest numbers of atheist/agnostics in Croatia are Croats. However, as a percentage of the Croat population, only 4% of Croats hold to this view. This worldview is more prevalent among Serbs (10%) and Bosnians (6%).

Regionalism and Religion

While Roman Catholicism is nearly universal in Croatia, there are regional variations in its vitality. In a study conducted by Jerolimov and Zrinščak in 2004, and published in 2006, significant regional variations were discovered.¹⁹ When examining Croatia in four general regions (Dalmatia, Istria/Primorje, Central Croatia, and East Croatia), the study found that about 90% of the population in each region was Catholic. However, when asked about their level of faith and participation in Catholic ritual, there was a greater variety.²⁰ There was a far greater intensity in Dalmatia (86.1%) and East Croatia (80.9%), and a much lower level of intensity or opposition in Central Croatia (22.9%) and the Istria/Primorje regions (33.3%). The study noted that both the Dalmatia and East Croatia regions border states with different religions (Orthodoxy and Islam), while Central Croatia and Istria/Primorje border states with the same religion, Roman Catholicism.

This variation was even more pronounced on the county level. Four counties were examined in the study: two in Dalmatia (Split and Dubrovnik), one in East Croatia

¹⁹Dinka Marinović Jerolimov and Siniša Zrinščak, "Religion Within and Beyond Borders: The Case of Croatia," *Social Compass* 53 (2006): 279-90.

²⁰ Jerolimov and Zrinščak utilize several different studies to compile these definitions. For an explanation of their methodology and their sources see Jerolimov and Zrinščak, "Religion Within and Beyond Borders," 281.

(Vukovar), and one in Istria/Primorje (Istria). In Dubrovnik, 96.6% of respondents expressed a strong level of faith and participation, and there was not a single response of opposition. The responses were similar, though less pronounced, in Split (86.6%) and Vukovar (87.9%). However, in Istria, only 61.3% of respondents expressed a strong level of faith and participation, and 15.1% expressed a strong opposition to religion.

This more localized data supports the thesis of the study that regions bordering states with a different primary religion (Dubrovnik, Split, and Vukovar) display a greater level of religious participation than regions bordering states with the same primary religion (Istria). Therefore, while Croatia is an overwhelmingly Catholic nation, there are regional variations in the levels of intensity in which Catholicism is observed and practiced, and external as well as internal forces influence this variation. Therefore, it could be said that practice of religion is a form of nationalism in the border regions. And, as Christopher Hitchens noted in his introduction to Rebecca West's classic study on the Balkans, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, "nationalism is most intoxicating on the border."²¹

“Other” Christians

Certainly there is greater variety within the Roman Catholic Church than simply in variations of intensity. There are many movements within the church, seen in the major monastic orders (Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit) as well as in liberal, charismatic, and spiritual renewal movements. However, as this study is focused on the Baptist movement, a detailed analysis of Catholic Church is not possible. Analysis of non-traditional Christian movements, however, is necessary, as Baptists fit within this category in Croatia.

Aside from Roman Catholic and Orthodox, the 2011 census provided two

²¹Christopher Hitchens, introduction to *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*, by Rebecca West (London: Penguin Books, 1940), 91, iBook (2007).

additional categories of Christian: “Protestant” and “Other Christian.”²² Of the respondents, 14,653 (0.34%) stated that they were “Protestant” while 12,961 (0.30%) respondents fell into the “Other Christian” category. Combined, these two categories represent 0.67% of the population of Croatia. The majority of these individuals—55% of the Protestants and 81% of Other Christians—are Croatian in ethnicity. The Croatian majority of “Protestant” rises to 71% when Hungarians are removed from this category.²³

While the majority of the population of Croatia is overwhelmingly homogeneous, there is overwhelming heterogeneity within this minority population. The largest segments of the “Protestant” category are Reformed (25.4%), Evangelical (17.6%), Pentecostal (16.1%), Baptist (15.5%), and Protestant (15.3%), none of which have a majority. Other groups within this category include Word of Life (5.8%), Christ’s Church (2.8%), and Lutherans (0.9%). Once again, when removing the largely Hungarian Reformed from this category, the numbers increase to Evangelical (25.5%), Pentecostal (23.4%), Baptist (22.4%), and Protestant (22.2%). The categories of Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Protestant are, unfortunately, nebulous. An individual in the Protestant category could just as easily belong to any of the groups above. Furthermore, the Pentecostal and Evangelical categories are very closely aligned, since the largest evangelical denomination (*savez*, or “union”) in the country is the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Croatia.²⁴

²²The detailed figures for “Protestant” and “Other Christian” are unpublished at the time of this writing. The figures were provided to me by Željko Mraz, General Secretary of the Croatian Baptist Union, and observer for minority religious groups in the Croatian Sabor (Parliament). A note attached to the document states, “In the Census of 2011, there is the question of belonging to a particular religious community/church, but a small part of the population declared in the sense of belonging to a religious community that is the name by which the members of a religious community call themselves. Therefore, data on the number of members of certain religious groups. . . should be taken as the minimum figure, i.e. minimum number of members of an individual group to a particular category shown in the table” (My translation).

²³Hungary has two state churches: Roman Catholic and Reformed. The assumption is that those claiming to be Reformed are ethnic Hungarians living in Croatia. See Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 149.

²⁴This union’s website states the following: “The Evangelical Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Croatia participates in two of the leading contemporary Christian movements: the Pentecostal

The “Other Christian” category is even more obscure. This category includes splinter Catholic groups (Old Catholic and Free Catholic), evangelical groups (Seventh Day Adventists and Nazarenes), and Christian-related new religious movements (Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons). The largest segments of the “Other Christian” category are Jehovah’s Witness (50%), Adventists (20.7%, or 22.7% when adding the “Seventh Day Adventists” category, and “Christian” (17.9%). The figure for Mormons (0.9%) is clearly too low, so it should be assumed that the majority of Mormons located themselves in either Christian in the “Other Christian” category, stated that they were Protestant, without elaborating, or can be found under the larger categories of “Not Declared” or “Unknown.”²⁵

Religious Change

Unfortunately, detailed information regarding the specifics of evangelical groups in censuses previous to 2011 is not available, so an in-depth discussion of religious change throughout the forty-year period is limited. Information is available in the 2001 census, and though it is not detailed beyond “Protestant” and “Other Christian,” examination can be made of trends for the last decade of the study.

As would be expected based on the previous section on population change, the Catholic and Orthodox segments of the populations are both in decline. For Orthodox, the decline is much less dramatic than the declines in 1991 and 2001 among ethnic Serbs. The net change between 2001 and 2011 was only -2.97%, a smaller decline than the overall net change within the country of -3.44%.

and evangelical movements.” “Evandeoska pentekostna Crkva (EPC) u Republici Hrvatskoj sudjeluje u dva vodeća suvremena kršćanska pokreta: pentekostnom i evandeoskom pokretu.” The Evangelical Pentecostal Church website, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.epc.hr/hr/vodic/ustroj>.

²⁵ Mormons appear to self-identify with the evangelical movement in Croatia, as seen by their Croatian language website. “Evangelical Bookstore,” accessed October 20, 2014, <https://www.crkvaisusakrista.hr/evandeoska-knjiznica>.

Catholics declined by -5.29%, which is net change greater than the overall decline within the country. In total, there is a decline in 206,408 persons claiming to be Catholic between 2001 and 2011. The actual decline for the total population was 152,571 during this same period, leaving a gap of approximately 50,000 persons. However, the overall net change among individuals of Croatian ethnicity during this period was -2.59%, an actual decline of 102,850 persons. This would mean that among ethnic Croats, there was a drop of nearly 100,000 persons claiming to be Catholic. Where have they gone?

Two areas where they have not gone are the categories “Unknown” and “Did not state.” In the former category, there was a net change from 2001 of -52%. In the latter category there was a net change of -29%. It is the author’s belief that the declines in these two categories are the result of a greater flexibility in the 2011 census over the 2001 census, allowing respondents to more specifically identify themselves. However, another possibility might be that respondents felt freer to self-identify “outside the norm” in 2011 than in 2001.

The categories benefitting most from the Catholic decline, in percentage of growth, are: “agnostic” (2000%), “Other religions, movements, and worldviews” (387%), “Eastern religions” (163%), and “atheist” (66%). However, the largest growth in actual numbers is among atheists, which has seen nearly 65,000 new “members.” The second largest group in actual numbers is agnostic, with nearly 31,000, followed by Muslims with 6,200. Combined, the numbers for new agnostics and atheists (96,000) would account for most of the decline in Catholics in Croatia (104,000).

“Other” Growth

What about growth among evangelicals? While there is growth in this period among evangelicals, the actual level of growth is obscured by two factors. First, data is limited. While data is available for the categories “Protestant” and “Other Christian,” in

both 2001 and 2011, specific data within each of these categories is available only for 2011. Therefore, change for specific segments within these categories, such as Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Baptist, cannot be calculated between the two censuses. This leads to the second factor, which is that segments of these categories are clearly not evangelical. For example, Hungarian Reformed and Lutheran hold to an orthodox Christian tradition but are not evangelical; and Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons neither hold to an orthodox Christian tradition nor are they evangelical.

Between 2001 and 2011, "Protestants" and "Other Christians" grew by 24% and 23%, respectively. In actual numbers, "Protestants" grew by approximately 2,800, while "Other Christians" grew by approximately 2,400. However, combined this is only about 5% of the change seen by the fastest growing worldview in Croatia, Materialism. Catholicism's loss was not primarily to the gain of evangelicals.

Geography

The Shape of Croatia

When examining Croatia for the first time on a map, the first thing one usually notices is the unique "C" shape of the country. The contours of Croatia may be summarized as two axes of desirable land: the eastern Adriatic coastline and the southern Pannonian Plain, encompassing an angle, enclosing an area of less desirable land, the mountains of Bosnia and Hercegovina. Croatia's current borders are a result of two primary factors. The first factor is internal and is primarily geographic. The geographic features--elevation, water, and arable land--have all interacted to create the distinctive shape. The second factor is external and is primarily political. Croatia has existed on major geopolitical fault lines throughout its history, and these historical external pressures have determined the contemporary shape of the country.

In the first part of this section, the borders and regions of Croatia will be reviewed, including a review of neighboring states and primary population centers within

the country. In the second part of this section, the issue of geopolitics will be the focus. In that section, Croatia's geographical location in Southeast Europe will be examined historically, revealing that for the past two millennia, Croatia has been at the center of a global geopolitical fault line, ensuring that conflicts remain a constant occurrence.

Borders and Regions

Borders. The northern border of Croatia follows the Drava River, with two exceptions. First, in the northwest there is the region of Međimurje, which is a little segment of land between the Mura and Drava rivers (Međimurje literally means, “between the Mura”). In the far northeast of the country lies Baranja, which is a small region between the Drava and the Danube rivers. This border is roughly 130 miles in direct distance, and is shared with Slovenia, Hungary, and Serbia.²⁶

Due to Croatia's unique shape, the eastern border consists of several different features. In the far northeast, the Danube River marks the border between Croatia and Serbia. This is roughly 70 miles in direct distance north to south. Once reaching the area around Lipovac, where Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia all meet, Croatia's eastern border becomes somewhat complicated. Some parts of Bosnia lie to the south of some parts of Croatia; due to geopolitical considerations, however, the Bosnia-Croatia border should be considered as a continuation of Croatia's eastern border. This border section, forming the inner part of the “C,” consists of three parts—all of which border Bosnia. The Sava River forms the first section of the border. The middle section consists of the Una River, which flows out of the very far tip of the Dalmatian Hinterlands, near the town of Donji Srb, and arcs around to meet the Sava River at Jasenovac. This section of border is approximately 160 miles in length.²⁷

²⁶Calculated utilizing Google Maps Distance Calculator. “Maps,” Google, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.google.com/maps>.

²⁷Ibid.

The lower section consists of a line drawn by Venetians in 1700 between Croatia and Bosnia.²⁸ As a part of this treaty there is a short strip of land (about 15 miles) connecting Bosnia to the Adriatic Sea, thereby breaking the integrity of modern-day Croatia. This southeastern border is approximately 235 miles long.²⁹ Finally, there is a short border of only 12 miles with Montenegro in the far south.³⁰

The southern border of Croatia is defined by the Adriatic Sea. Croatia's coastline is 3,625 miles long; this includes 1185 islands, of which 67 are inhabited.³¹ The mainland coastline is approximately 1,100 miles in length.³² However, this figure is deceptive due to the coast's many bays and peninsulas. From Umag in the northwest, around the tip of the Istrian Peninsula to Rijeka, and down the coast to Zadar, Split, and Dubrovnik is approximately 400 miles.³³ The western border is less distinct. This border consists of several rivers (Kupa, Kamenica, Sutla, etc.), as well as arbitrary, seemingly "imaginary" lines drawn across hills and valleys.

Regions. Croatia consists of three primary regions: Adriatic, Pannonian, and Dinaric.³⁴ The northern Pannonian region is rich agriculturally and "controls most land routes from Western Europe to Aegean Sea and Turkish Straits."³⁵ The southern Adriatic

²⁸Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš and Ivan Zupanc, "New 18th Century Venetian Border in Croatia and its Spatial and Demographic Implications," *Hrvatski Geografski Glasnik* 69 (2007) 41-52. According to the Sremski-Karlovci treaty of 1700, between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, "the new border was transferred and established along the highest mountain ridges," and "alternated straight-line and semi-circular line of one hour walking distance (5 km) surrounding important towns and places" (42).

²⁹Google, "Maps."

³⁰Ibid.

³¹*Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011*, 40.

³²Ibid.

³³Google, "Maps."

³⁴Andrijana Jelic, "Croatia: A Small Country But Not a Small People." *The DISAM Journal* (Spring 2002): 1. All population figures in this section *Potpis stanovništva, kucanstava i stanova 2011: Prvi rezultati po naseljima*.

³⁵*The World Factbook*, "Croatia."

region has a Mediterranean climate and karst topography. While agriculture is limited to dry climate farming in the south, the Adriatic Sea was once one of the major trade lanes in both the Classical and Medieval eras. Control of the eastern shore of this critical water way was vital to Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Venetians, and Turks. These two regions then form the axes of the Croatian “C.”



Figure 1. The regions of Croatia

The Adriatic region consists of the Istrian Peninsula to the north, with the city of Pula (60,000), the Kvarnar region around the city of Rijeka (135,000), and Dalmatia in the south. Between these two regions lies the Velebit mountain range, which is sparsely inhabited. Dalmatia can be further divided into five sub-regions: northern Dalmatia, with the cities of Zadar (78,000) and Šibenik (47,000); central Dalmatia, with the city of Split (267,000); southern Dalmatia, with the city of Dubrovnik (43,500); the interior region of the Dalmatian Hinterlands, with the town of Knin (16,600); and finally the Adriatic islands. The total population of Croatia’s islands is approximately 122,500 persons, with

the largest islands according to population being Krk (17,900), Korčula (16,200), Brač (14,000), and Hvar (11,100).



Figure 2. Major urban populations of Croatia

The northern Pannonian region consists of the southern edge of the Pannonian Basin, and is rich agriculturally. This region lies between the Drava River, to the north, and the Sava River, to the south. The eastern part of this region is called Slavonia, with the cities of Osijek (115,000) and Slavonski Brod (63,000). The western part of this region consists of the Međimurje and Zagora sub-regions in the north, and central Croatia, with the cities of Zagreb (830,000), Karlovac (69,000), and the twin towns of Sisak-Petrinja (68,100).

Between these two regions lies the Dinaric region, which consists of the Dinaric Alps, which run from northwest, out of Slovenia, to the southeast, into Bosnia, at some points running only a few miles from the Adriatic Sea. This area is very mountainous and sparsely populated, with the largest towns being Gospić (13,100) and

Otočac (10,100). The major ranges are Velebit, along the northern coast, and Mosor and Biokovo, along the southern coast. The tallest peaks are Dinara (1831m), near Knin, Kamešnica (1855m), near Sinj, and Biokovo (1762m), near Makarska, all of which are located in Dalmatia.³⁶

Geopolitics

Croatia has throughout its history been “a borderland *par excellence*.”³⁷ It has always existed between two worlds, in fact at their very point of intersection. This is true both in terms of its north-south axis as well as its east-west axis. In the Classical Era, the primary axis was north-south, while in the modern age this axis has rotated to east-west. Croatia has existed on major geopolitical fault lines throughout its history; as a result, these historical external pressures have determined the contemporary geopolitical shape of the country.

Greek colonists arrived in Dalmatia in the fourth century BC, and Roman armies arrived in 240 BC.³⁸ From this period on past the fall of the Roman Empire, this region—alternatively known as Illyria or Dalmatia in the south, and Pannonia in the north—was a border between the civilization of the Mediterranean world and “the Barbarians.” As Rome declined under its own weight amid the onslaught of outside invaders, this region knew security to its south and danger to its north, as the Great Migration pushed various peoples from the north and east into conflict with the Mediterranean world.

The Croats themselves were a part of this process, Slavs who arrived from the north between the seventh and ninth centuries and settled into the regions of modern day

³⁶The peak of Kamešnica is actually across the border in Bosnia and Hercegovina; its point in Croatia is actually less than 1855m and less than Dinara’s 1831m. *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011*, 40.

³⁷Fuerst-Bjeliš and Zupanc, “New 18th Century Venetian Border,” 42.

³⁸Tanner, *Croatia*, 4.

Croatia and Bosnia.³⁹ After a short-lived Croatian kingdom, this north-south axis continued, as the Croatian people were divided between the Hungarian kingdom to the north and the Venetian Republic to the south. When the Hungarian kingdom became a part of the Hapsburg Empire at the end of the seventeenth century, and Venice ceased to exist as a republic at the end of the eighteenth century, the northern and southern regions of Croatia were reunited in a fashion under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Croatia continued throughout this period to be at the point of intersection of major powers and major conflict. As the Roman Empire divided between the factions of western Rome and eastern Byzantium, the north-south axis of external influence in Croatia shifted to east-west. Further, as the fortunes of these empires and their political successors rose and fell, new powers emerged to fill the vacuums that opportunities of weakness afforded, leading to new conflicts. These east-west conflicts can be focused around three key historical events: The Great Schism, the Fall of Constantinople, and the establishment of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Great Schism formally divided the Christian world into western and eastern spheres. It occurred in 1054, when Papal legate Cardinal Humbert excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, who in turn excommunicated Cardinal Humbert.⁴⁰ The western sphere became the Roman Catholic Church, while the eastern sphere became the Eastern Orthodox Church. The dividing line between the two newly emerged churches fell between Rome and Byzantium, from the eastern shores of the Adriatic north to the Pannonian plain. For the Slavs inhabiting these regions, who had converted from Paganism less than two centuries previously, those nearer to Rome fell under the Latin rite and those nearer to Byzantium fell under the

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰F. L. Cross, ed., "Great Schism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Eastern rite. In short time, these religious distinctions became political as well. From the eleventh century onward, Croatia marked the eastern edge of Roman Catholicism in Southeastern Europe.

On May 29, 1453, the city of Byzantium, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire and center for Eastern Orthodoxy, fell to the Ottomans under the command of Mehmet II.⁴¹ By this point, the Byzantine Empire consisted of little more than the area “bounded by the walls of Constantinople.”⁴² While this date is significant for the end of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Turks had already had a presence on the European continent since 1354.⁴³ In 1389, at the Battle of Kosovo, the Turks had destroyed the Serbian nobility and had done the same to the Croatian nobility in 1493, at the Battle of Krbava Field.⁴⁴

The ascendancy of the Ottomans in south Europe can be bracketed around the two battles of Mohács, in southeastern Hungary on the northern border of Croatia. In 1526, at the First Battle of Mohács the Ottoman destroyed the Hungarian army. The Hungarian king was killed in the battle, and the Hungarian kingdom (which at the time included the northern part of Croatia) was thrown into a war for succession as the Ottomans continued to advance. The king supported by the Hapsburgs ultimately won out, meaning that Hungary and northern Croatia came into the Hapsburg Empire. The Ottomans continued to occupy much of Hungary and Croatia for more than a century and a half. At the Second Battle of Mohács, in 1687, the Ottomans were defeated and driven from the region, marking the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire in

⁴¹John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 434.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 388.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 320. This presence was not due to military invasion, but was in fact in response to an earthquake, which leveled large portions of the Gallipoli peninsula on March 2, 1354.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 343.

Southeast Europe. From the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century, Croatia served as the *krajina* (“military borderland”) between Christendom and the Muslim world. Following the Second Battle of Mohács, open conflict ended; however, until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, Croatia remained the eastern edge of Christendom in Southeastern Europe.

On January 31, 1946, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was created, following the end of the Second World War.⁴⁵ Yugoslavia consisted of six republics, including Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia, and Croatia. Yugoslavia’s government was led by Josip Broz, also known as Tito, who had been a Communist since encountering the movement in Russia as a prisoner of war following the First World War in 1917.⁴⁶ While Tito was later to come into conflict with Stalin, develop a moderated form of Communism known as “Titoism,” and become a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, in its initial years Yugoslavia was seen as simply a satellite of the Soviet Union. In his famous “Iron Curtain” speech, Winston Churchill noted the city of Trieste as being the southern point of the line dividing east and west.⁴⁷ For nearly forty years, Croatia marked the western edge of the Communist world, from 1946 until the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991.

In 2009, Croatia joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and joined the European Union in 2013. With these two treaties—one military, the other economic and political—Croatia formally became a part of the bloc of nations traditionally regarded as

⁴⁵James Arnold and Roberta Wiener, *Cold War: The Essential Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 216.

⁴⁶Richard West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1994), 44.

⁴⁷While Trieste is today a part of Italy, at the time of the speech Tito was contesting the city as a part of the newly formed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and had for a period occupied it with troops. Churchill said, “It is my duty, however, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe. From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” “Modern History Sourcebook: Winston S. Churchill: “Iron Curtain Speech,” March 5, 1946,” Fordham University, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/churchill-iron.asp>.

Western Europe. However, it is still unclear where the major geopolitical fault lines lie at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Perhaps Croatia will no longer find itself at the center of geopolitical conflict. One thing is certain, however: Croatia's geographic location has had a major role in determining the cultural identity of the Croatian people.

Religious History

As seen in the previous section, throughout Croatian history external forces have impacted the country in often-violent ways. Sociologist Pedro Ramet commented,

Religion is a constitutive element in the group identity and nationalism of most nationality groups for several reasons. First, it is the historical core of the culture that shaped the evolution of primitive tribes into politically conscious nations. Second, it is a badge of group identity, distinguishing "us" from "them," establishing a basis for identification or distance (so that in Yugoslavia it is possible to speak of Slovenes and Croats as being Catholic nations, and Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians as being Orthodox). Finally, encounters with other nationality groups with different religious practices encourage the group to think of its religion as particularly its own, even as essential to its national survival.⁴⁸

Persistent and sustained conflicts over generations have created a need for identifying friend from foe. In a region where physical appearance does not clearly delineate "insider" or "outsider," the place of recognizing the "other" has been appropriated by religious ritual. Therefore, the identification of "self" has also come to be closely identified with religious ritual. Further, in an area on the border—the frontier, in fact—of world geopolitical movements, the need to clearly identify and communicate the identity of "self" to one's own has caused an intensifying effect in religious identification.

From the time that "Croatia" was no more than a group of Slavic tribes migrating onto the Balkan Peninsula, on through the end of the twentieth century, when Croatia was an independent nation state, there has been a continuous movement among the Croatian people towards collective self-realization. This movement has been both attended and hampered by the conflict between internal forces with opposing views on

⁴⁸Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 149.

how to best achieve this. This movement has also been influenced and manipulated by external forces that would seek to incorporate the Croatian people into their larger sphere of control or influence.

I would argue that this dynamic relationship, between a unifying drive for collectivity and a divisive drive for how best to achieve that collectivization, has created the modern self-identity of who and what a Croatian is and is not. In this section a broad overview of this process will be presented, involving five major historical epochs; this will illustrate not only the modern Croatian self-identity, and the process by which this self-identity was constructed, but also the major player throughout this process—the Roman Catholic Church. The intensifying effect of creating self-identity in religious terms will be examined in terms of the Croatian “self” being not Pagan, not Orthodox, not Muslim, not Protestant, and not Atheist, but rather Roman Catholic.

Not Pagan

The Croatian people group first enters the pages of history with their arrival in Eastern Europe as the Roman Empire was collapsing. The region that they settled was known alternatively as the Roman provinces of Illyricum and Dalmatia. Christianity was present in this region centuries before the Croats arrived. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that the gospel arrived in this area, at least along the Adriatic coast, in the first century. Paul makes two direct references to this region, once as Illyricum and once as Dalmatia (Rom 15:19, 2 Tim 4:10). Records report the establishment of Christian communities throughout this region, including the interior, during the second century.⁴⁹ When Christianity was legalized early in the 4th century, many churches were built in the Roman cities along the Adriatic coast.⁵⁰

7. ⁴⁹Franjo Šanjek, *Kršćanstvo na Hrvatskom Prostoru* (Zagreb: Kršćanska Sadašnjost, 1991), 6-

⁵⁰Ibid.

It was into this Christianized environment that the Croats entered into the historical record. The Croats are a Slavic people that originated in the Steppes above the Carpathian Mountains, which is today Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus.⁵¹ The Croats migrated into the western Balkan Peninsula sometime between the sixth and eighth century AD.⁵² The English archeologist Huw Evans, having studied the remains of the early Croatian settlements, describes Slav migration in the following terms: “Slavic migration, or invasion, has the quality of seeping treacle, a slow steady and unordered advance, a movement that has no specific objective, but nonetheless continuously moved forward.”⁵³ This was a period in which the Roman Empire, which had ruled this region for nearly seven hundred years, was decaying under the repeated invasions of Ostrogoths and Avars.⁵⁴

Seven Slavic tribes settled in the area that is today Croatia and Bosnia.⁵⁵ The indigenous name that Croats use for themselves, *Hrvati*, comes from the Slavic clan that settled in central Dalmatia.⁵⁶ The Croats converted to Christianity relatively quickly upon their arrival, by the end of the seventh century.⁵⁷ This change in religion, from

⁵¹Tanner, *Croatia*, 2.

⁵²A record from AD 959 reports that Byzantine emperor Heraklia (610-641) sought help from the Croats in fighting against the Avars. However, this report is assumed to be apocryphal. Franjo Šanjek, *Kršćanstvo na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 15.

⁵³Huw Evans, *The Early Medieval Archaeology of Croatia: 600-900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 242.

⁵⁴Tanner, *Croatia*, 5.

⁵⁵Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata*, (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska: 1980), 1:50-51.

⁵⁶Ibid. The term “Croatian” stems from the Germanized Croatian word for “necktie,” *kravata*, for which the Croatian warriors that the Germans encountered were famous for wearing.

⁵⁷There are reports that the Croats had been Arians, but these are discounted as propaganda. Croatian historian Šanjek states that they were pagan upon arrival, but that based on upon archeological evidence, in particular extant baptismal fonts, the Croats were Christianized by at least the end of the eighth century. Franjo Šanjek, *Kršćanstvo na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 15. Modern readers should not have romantic notions about the Christianity of this period, as the following record relates in recording the establishment of a new church in Jesenice, a small village about ten miles south of Split on the Adriatic coast, in AD 1080. “We invited the Archbishop (of Split) to consecrate the church on 11 October. Many people from Split and many Croats attended the celebration. I bought a slave Dragača from a priest in Orihovo for five *solidi*. We gave him 100 sheep, two cows and a pair of oxen, which he will keep to satisfy the needs of the church. Besides, we bought a small boy named Zloba from his father and sent him to be educated and to

paganism to Christianity, had a political as well as a spiritual facet. Pedro Ramet remarked,

The period of the Great Migrations between the fourth and tenth centuries coincided with the institutional entrenchment of Christianity in the Balkans as elsewhere in Europe. By the ninth century, Christianity had acquired a dominant influence in both Croatia and Serbia, though Christians and pagans continued to live side by side in both lands for some time. It is understandable then that the process of the formation of ethnic-national identity (ethnogenesis) was associated with Christianization. Moreover, since it was the Church that gave definition to the content of human culture and social mores, diluted tribal identities were supplanted readily by “national” identities founded on the conjunction of church and state.⁵⁸

Once arriving in Southeastern Europe, Slavic leaders sought to unify various tribes around them. At the tribal level the existing Slavic religion tended to divide rather than unite. However, in the Christian religion already present in the region, those wishing to consolidate power found a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic religion that could serve to unite these disparate tribes. As Ramet stated, “Far from being an accidental by-product of the expansion of political power, confessional homogenization was consciously sought by the Balkan princes.”⁵⁹

For the princes of the Western Balkans, including those in Croatia, the Roman Catholic Church was the sole spiritual authority for Christianity.⁶⁰ Therefore, Croatian leaders utilized the structure of the Roman Church to establish their secular power. Likewise, the Roman Catholic Church utilized the princes’ desires to establish their secular power in order to establish their own ecclesiastical power among the newly arrived Slavic tribes. In the binary system of paganism and Christianity, the Christianity

become a priest and serve permanently in this church.” From Zvane Črnja, *Cultural History of Croatia*, (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1962), 149.

⁵⁸Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 151.

⁵⁹Ibid., 152.

⁶⁰While anachronistic to speak of the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Great Schism, I will do so for the sake of simplicity. The political and cultural factors that contributed to the Schism were certainly present by this point. During this period, from the eighth to the tenth centuries, it would be more proper to describe the Western church as the Roman Pentarchy.

that took root among the Slavs was Roman Catholicism. Therefore, in the earliest stage in the construction of the Croatian self-identity, a Croatian was not pagan but Roman Catholic.

Not Orthodox

Having established their power, Croatian princes sought to consolidate it. At this point there were two primary threats to a uniform political power structure, both relating to ecclesiastical pluralism. The first threat was external, in the secular and ecclesiastical influence of the eastern Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox Church.⁶¹ The second threat was internal, in the form of multiple poles of ecclesiastical power related to the use of language in rites. In both cases, the princes turned to the Roman Catholic Church for aid in abating these threats.

Residing in relative close proximity to Rome, the Croatian churches naturally tended to fall under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. However, at this point the Roman Catholic Church's authority was not unchallenged. Even prior to the Great Schism, there was a struggle for loyalty between the Roman and Byzantine church authorities for ecclesiastical authority in the new Slavic churches. This can be seen in the efforts by Prince Zdeslav to have Croatian churches accept Byzantine jurisdiction in the late ninth century.⁶² Zdeslav was murdered in 879, only one year after becoming prince, and his successor followed a course more aligned with the Roman Catholic Church.⁶³ In this case, it can be seen that secular forces were not opposed to utilizing secular means to achieve their religious objectives.

⁶¹Once again, it is anachronistic to speak of the Orthodox Church at this time in history, as at this point the church centered in Byzantium was merely one of the two remaining Pentarchies with Rome. The other three—Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria—had fallen to the Muslim armies in the seventh century. However, as I refer to the Western church as the Roman Catholic Church for the sake of simplicity, so too I will refer to the Eastern church as the Orthodox Church.

⁶²Tanner, *Croatia*, 9.

⁶³Ibid.

The other threat to a unified political power base was in the pluralism of the Glagolithic liturgy. Glagolithic liturgy involved the use of the Slavic language as opposed to Latin in religious ritual. While only elite Croatians understood Latin, some Croatian churches closely aligned with the Roman Catholic Church utilized this “universal” language, rather than the indigenous Slavic language of Croatian. Having two liturgies created a pluralistic ecclesiastical power structure, which served to divide the political base. Ramet described the process by which this was resolved,

In Croatia, King Tomislav (910-c.928) aspired to make the church liturgically more monolithic and organizationally more unified and therefore allied with the pope and with the bishop of Split in the early tenth century to assert the primacy of the bishop of Split throughout Croatia and to ban continued use of the Old Slavic Glagolithic liturgy, requiring use of Latin in its place.⁶⁴

In choosing the Latin liturgy in opposition to the Slavic liturgy, Tomislav, the first Croatian king, traded the clarity of the indigenous language for alignment with Western powers and the Roman Catholic Church. The result was that for more than a thousand years, until Vatican II in the 1960’s, the majority of Croats would never understand the words of the religious ceremonies that they would attend. A second result was that when the Great Schism occurred, dotted lines had already been drawn down the center of the Balkans, dividing east from west, and Orthodox from Roman Catholic. The Croats would be Roman Catholic.

In both of the cases mentioned above, the process of establishing a unique self-identity can be seen as proceeding apace. Having established their secular power, the Croatian princes and kings sought to consolidate this power, eliminating the threats of ecclesiastical pluralism. In Christianity, the princes had found a cultural force that would unite the disparate Slavic tribes. However, in a pluralistic Christianity, this cultural force was divided against itself, and posed both internal and external points of dissension. This religious threat had to be dealt with in order to strengthen the secular power base.

⁶⁴Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 152.

Once again, the Croatian princes and kings can be seen using the structure of the Roman Church to consolidate their secular power. And once again, the Roman Church is seen using the secular leaders' desires to consolidate their power to consolidate their ecclesiastical power. In the search for a monolithic system of Christianity, the Christianity that took root among the Croats was Roman Catholicism. Therefore, in the second stage in the construction of the Croatian self-identity, a Croat was not Orthodox, but was Roman Catholic.

Not Muslim

The first existential threat that the developing Croatian national identity faced was from the Ottoman Turks, who, following their victories over the Byzantines, turned their eyes towards Western Europe. In fact, Islam was a threat to Western Europe for nearly a millennium. The high-water mark of their drive into Europe in the west was at the Pyrenees in Spain in the eighth century, and then in the east outside the walls of Vienna in seventeenth century. While the Croatian lands were never fully under the control of the Ottomans, large sections of Croatia and its neighboring countries were. The Croatian lands that remained free of Turkish occupation served as a militarized border zone for Western Europe. The Ottoman presence in the Croatian lands of served to strengthen the Roman Catholic identification among Croats in two ways. First, it served to orient Croatia to the West militarily and economically. Second, it weakened Roman Catholic Church's competitors, the Bogomils and the Orthodox.

The Ottoman attacks began in the late fifteenth century, and proved to be one of the most traumatic events in Croatian history. Historian Marcus Tanner comments,

There are no monuments to the Ottoman presence in Croatia today. The mosques of Slavonia were demolished after the Austrians drove the Turks from Croatia in the 1690s. Yet, the Ottoman impact on Croatia was immense, scarcely less than the impact of the Turks in other southern Balkan nations. . . . For the best part of two centuries, most of Slavonia and Dalmatia was under Turkish rule. For the Croats,

Ottoman rule was an unmitigated disaster with no redeeming characteristics.⁶⁵

In the areas occupied by the Ottomans, the Christians were not forced to convert. However, they were encouraged to do so, by the *jizya*, or Islamic religious tax.

Contemporary English traveler Henry Blount comments,

The Turks takes a more pernicious way to extinguish Christianity than ever the heathen emperors did. . . . The Turk puts none to death for religion. . . he rather sucks the purse than the unprofitable blood and by perpetual poverty renders them low towards himself. He turns the Christian churches into mosquitos, much suppressing the public exercise of religion, especially of the Roman [Catholic], so that. . . many who profess themselves Christians scarce know what they mean by being so.”⁶⁶

In the areas not occupied, the Turks had a more violent strategy. Croatian aristocrat and poet Marko Marulić describes the situation in Dalmatia during the fifteenth century,

They harass us incessantly, killing some and leading others into slavery. Our goods are pillaged, our cattle led off, our villages and settlements are burned. Our Dalmatian cities are not yet besieged or attacked due to some, I know not what, alleged peace treaty. But only the cities are spared and all else is open to rapine and pillage.⁶⁷

Marcus Tanner further elaborates,

The Ottoman invasion of Croatia was no ordinary war of conquest. . . . It entailed almost complete destruction of civilized life, the burning of towns, villages and their churches and monasteries, the murder of the leading citizens, the mass flight of peasants, the laying waste of the countryside and the enslavement of thousands of those who failed to flee in time. . . . In 1501, officials in Venetian-ruled Zadar reported that about 10,000 people in the countryside around the city had simply disappeared, presumably dragged off into slavery during the course of three big Turkish raids.⁶⁸

In the wake of such occupation and raiding, “many Christians converted to

⁶⁵Ibid., 41.

⁶⁶Henry Blount, *Brief Relation of a Journey... by way of Venice into Dalmatian Slavonia, Bosnia, Hungary, Macedonia* (London: John Norton, 1634), 109. I have modernized the text in this quote, as the original English was very difficult to read.

⁶⁷Catherine Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-century Adriatic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 22.

⁶⁸Tanner, *Croatia*, 33.

Islam over the course of several generations.”⁶⁹ As Henry Blount noted above, many of these Christians may have been only Christian marginally, and therefore, in the face of religious taxes and military incursions, it seemed wiser to adopt the religion of the invaders. Hence was born the third major ethnic group in the Western Balkans, and the Bosnians were added to the Croats and Serbs among the South Slavs.

However, “many others refused, and immigrated from Bosnia to Croatia. . . [others] fled further afield, to Italy and beyond.”⁷⁰ Those that remained in Croatia “did not accept the conquest of the country with resignation.”⁷¹ Forts were built, armies raised and trained, and for nearly two centuries, Croatia functioned as the “Bulwark of Christendom.” This experience served to further develop the Croatian identity; Croats were a Western European people, and were Christian, not Muslim.

The years of Turkish occupation and war had a second effect on the Croatian religious identity. The religious climate that the Ottomans had entered was not uniform. In the space between the churches Rome and Byzantium, in the mountains of Bosnia, a third church had developed prior to the arrival of the Ottomans, the Bosnian church. Also known as the Bogomils, the Bosnian church was independent of both Roman and Byzantine administration, and has been accused of heretical beliefs.⁷² Sociologist Pedro Ramet commented,

By the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the energetic proselytization by the Franciscan Order had eroded seriously the adherence of the Bosnian peasantry to the Bosnian Church. By 1460, according to Fine, “most of the nobility seems to have been won over to Catholicism [and].. the Bosnian church stood alone without mass popular support and without the backing of nobility. . . . Even within the church itself loyalty and interest were lacking.” This same institutional weakness facilitated the penetration of elements of Islamic culture and faith after the Turkish

⁶⁹Ibid., 30.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²John V. A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 171.

conquest (1463) but that conquest also led Bosnian Catholics and Orthodox to identify with the neighboring states of Croatia and Serbia respectively.⁷³

Ramet continued, “Both in Ottoman Bosnia and in Habsburg Vojvodina, the Serbian Orthodox church and the Roman Catholic church competed for the loyalty of the population; in both cases, confessional loyalty was equated with ethnic loyalty.”⁷⁴ In the face of the Turkish threat, Croats would remain Christian, and that Christianity would be firmly the Roman Catholic variety.

Not Protestant

Reviewing Croatian historical literature, one could come to the assumption that the Protestant Reformation had no impact in Croatia, or that its impact was very limited. In his book *Kršćanstvo na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, Croatian church historian Franjo Šanjek dedicates only four pages out of nearly six hundred to the topic of the Reformation, and two of these pages deal with the Reformation in Europe. Only two pages deal with the Reformation in Croatia.⁷⁵ Šanjek’s view of the Reformation is summed up in the following statement, “In Luther, one finds ‘security through faith’ in opposition to ‘the security that comes from the gospel.’”⁷⁶

Šanjek’s conclusion of why the Reformation did not have a lasting impact in Croatia, as it did in Hungary, is that

Luther and Calvin’s appeal to return to the Gospel ideal of unity, and their commitment to the national language in the church coincided with the centennial efforts of the Church in Croatia, which without a doubt encouraged the expansion of the Reformist doctrine of Croatia. Yet, despite these facts, and some prominent spiritual personalities from Croatia, who were very active in spreading Protestantism, the Reformation did not develop any deep and lasting roots among the Croatian people. Croats, from the first millennium of Christianity, had a solid

⁷³Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 152.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁵The title of the book translates to *Christianity on the Croatian Location*. At the time of the book’s publication, Šanjek was a professor at the Catholic Theological Seminary in Zagreb and president of the Croatian National Board for Historical Education.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 259. My translation.

translation of the Bible and liturgical texts, so that Luther and the other reformers had nothing to teach them.⁷⁷

Šanjek's conclusion represents the dominant view among Croats regarding the Protestant Reformation. There was no real Protestant movement in Croatia, and what there was, was not really Croatian. This historical narrative puts forth the idea that the Reformation was wholly foreign to Croatia, and that there was no indigenous movement among the Croats. Further, this narrative states that what limited interest there was among Croats, was based primarily on national aspirations, for example the promotion of the Croatian language with its Glagolitic alphabet, and were not spiritually focused. Protestant missionaries, from Germany and Geneva, took advantage of the Croatian national aspirations, particularly among the elite.⁷⁸ However, recent scholarship tells a different story.⁷⁹

According to recent research by Evangelical Protestants in Croatia, Protestant preachers (in fact, missionaries) were active throughout Croatia during the sixteenth century and there was a true indigenous movement.⁸⁰ The primary areas of their activity were in Istria, Ozalj (along the central area of the border with Slovenia, south of Zagreb), Međimurje, and Baranja.⁸¹ There is also evidence of Protestant activity as far south as Knin, Split, and Dubrovnik.⁸² The primary areas of response were in the far northwest, in

⁷⁷Ibid., 260-261. My translation.

⁷⁸Ibid., 263.

⁷⁹New interest in this subject may be seen in the April 25-27, 2013 seminar held in Zagreb, Croatia, "The Reformation in the Croatian Historical Lands: Research results, challenges, perspectives." This seminar, hosted by the University of Zagreb brought together researchers from Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, and Croatia to discuss the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and their historiographies.

⁸⁰Stanko Jambrek, *Hrvatski Protestanski Pokret XVI. i XVII. Stoljeca* (Zapresić, Croatia: Matica Hrvatska Zapresic, 1999), and Gene S. Whiting, *Zrinski, Međimurje, i Reformacija: Prilozi Poznavanju Povezanosti Zrinskih, Međimurja i Reformacije u Drugoj Polovici 16. Stoljeca* (Zagreb: Bogoslovni institut, 2009). Jambrek's book title translates to *The Croatia Protestant Movement in the XVI and XVII Centuries*. Whiting's book title translates to *Zrinski, Međimurje, and the Reformation: Contributions to the knowledge related to Zrinski, Međimurje, and the Reformation in the Second Half of the 16th Century*.

⁸¹Jambrek, *Hrvatski Protestanski Pokret XVI. i XVII. Stoljeca*, 110.

⁸²Ibid.

the region of Međimurje, and the far northeast, in the region of Baranja. Regarding these two areas of response, the Baranja region was multicultural, and had had a history of Hussites among its Czech population, and therefore maybe seen as a non-indigenous movement.⁸³ However, the population in Međimurje was more purely Croatian, and so in this region there can be seen an indigenous response to the Reformation.

Critical to the Reformation movement in Croatia was the participation of the cultural and economic elites. During this time, the majority of the Croatian population lived in serfdom, illiterate and without any freedom of movement or freedom of religion. The cultural and economic elites, however, when exposed to the Reformation, had the ability not only to respond directly to its teaching, but also to encourage its development among the common people. Several examples of Croatian elites engaged in the Reformation movement are theologian Matija Vlačić Ilirik, translator and publisher Antun Dalmatin, and Ivan Ungarn, a military commander in the war against the Ottoman Turks.⁸⁴ Dalmatin and Ungarn were both instrumental in forming a publishing house in Urach, near Tübingen, Germany.⁸⁵ From this publishing house in Urach, a translation and publication of the New Testament into the Glagolitic script was completed in 1563, and disseminated throughout Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia.

Another example of Protestant elites in Croatia is the Zrinski family, one of the wealthiest families in Croatia at the time.⁸⁶ The Zrinskis had extensive landholdings from “the Mura (River) to the Adriatic Sea.”⁸⁷ According to research by Gene Whiting, “nearly all of the Zrinskis in the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of

⁸³Šanjek, *Kršćanstvo na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 263.

⁸⁴Jambrek, *Hrvatski Protestanski Pokret XVI. i XVII. Stoljeca*, 140-61.

⁸⁵Franjo Bučar, *Povijest Hrvatske Protestanske Književnosti za Reformacije iz Reformacijske Baštine* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1910), 82.

⁸⁶Jambrek, *Hrvatski Protestanski Pokret XVI. i XVII. Stoljeca*, 165.

⁸⁷*Ibid.* My translation.

the seventeenth century were followers of Protestantism.”⁸⁸ Whiting states that the role of the Zrinski family varied throughout this period, from promoter of Protestantism, under Nikola IV, to maintainer, under Juraj IV, and finally to protector, under Petar IV, as the Roman Catholic Church began the Counter Reformation.⁸⁹

The Counter Reformation began with the arrival of Franciscan and Jesuit friars in the 1560s.⁹⁰ However, ultimately it was legal action that undid the progress of the Reformation in Croatia.⁹¹ From 1604-1608 the legal groundwork was laid to move against the Protestants elites. One law in particular, entitled Article 22, stated that Protestants could not carry out civil functions in Croatia. Then, from 1610-1614 proscriptions began to be carried out against Protestants based on these laws. The Zrinski line died out with execution of Petar IV in 1671, and at this point it can be said that the nascent Reformation movement in Croatia was extinguished.

Despite the recent Evangelical Protestant historical studies Šanjek’s treatment of Protestantism in Croatia continues to be the minority view. Most Croatians are unaware of the Reformation in Croatia. Due to the legal proscriptions against Protestants in the early seventeenth century, for the majority of Croatians, Protestantism remains the domain of the “other:” Germans, Dutch, English, and Americans. Croatian Protestants are viewed as something other than Croatian. As military power was exerted to combat an external religious threat in the form of Islam, so too legal power was exerted to combat an internal religious threat in form of Protestantism. In both cases, Roman Catholicism triumphed, and so the Croatian self-identification with Roman Catholicism was further strengthened.

⁸⁸Whiting, *Zrinski, Medimurje, i Reformacija*, 162. My translation.

⁸⁹Gene S. Whiting, interview by author, Čakovec, October 21, 2014.

⁹⁰Šanjek, *Kršćanstvo na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 266.

⁹¹Gene S. Whiting, interview by author, Čakovec, October 21, 2014.

Not Atheist

The last component of the Croatian self-identity to develop is that a Croatian is not an atheist. In the light of the previous demographic section, this might seem to be a false conclusion, as there appears to be a move in the 2011 census way from Roman Catholicism and towards Materialism. However, the focus of this section relates to the state of the Croatian people in the period covered by the field research, namely 1970-2010. Yet, how does one account for the move towards Catholicism, and away from Atheism in the 1980s and 1990s, and then just a decade later, the move towards Atheism, and away from Catholicism in the early 2000s? In this section, this question will be addressed, in particular, in terms of the Croatian yearning for independence in the 20th century. This yearning which Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's first President, described as "Croatia's 1000-year-old dream."⁹²

The "1000-year-old dream" was born with the loss of a Croatian kingdom and continued through the subsequent subjugation of the Croatian people by the Hungarians, Italians, Turks, and Austrians. In the 19th century, as the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires began to weaken, nationalism rose throughout Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Two differing paths towards autonomy and self-determination began to be pursued by Croatian nationalists. The first movement was a subset of Pan-Slavism, which came to be known as Yugoslavism while the second movement was purely Croatian in nature.

The origins of Yugoslavism are described by Pedro Ramet in the following manner:

Vinko Pribojević, a Dominican priest, was one of the first clergy to write on national themes and hypothesized in a work, published in 1525, on the existence of an Illyrian people, understood by him to be Slavic in language and culture. Another Dominican priest, Juraj Križanić (1618-1683), developed Illyrian ideology further by identifying Serbs, Croats, and Bulgarians as three stems of the "Illyrian branch" of a still broader "Slavic nation," that included also Russians, Poles, and Czechs.⁹³

⁹²Tanner, *Croatia*, ix.

⁹³Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 153-54.

Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905), appointed bishop of Đakovo in 1849, has come to personify the Illyrian movement because of his active endeavors to create a political union of Croatia and Serbia. ... Strossmayer's close friend, Friar Franjo Rački (1828-1894), spelled out the essence of Illyrism when he declared that Croats and Serbs had no basis for claiming to ethnically distinct and that only the Vatican was hindering the rapprochement of the Catholic and Orthodox "Illyrians."⁹⁴

Ramet continued that "Strossmayer has come to symbolize the integrative, embracing strand in Croatian national ideology, in which the common language is stressed and the religious divide is overcome by drawing the Catholic and Orthodox churches together into a single South Slav 'national church.'"⁹⁵ South Slavism reached its fruition initially in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, following the First World War, and then again following the Second World War in the Republic of Yugoslavia. However, in neither the South Slav Kingdom nor the Republic was there any serious move to create a national church. Rather, in both cases, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches remained distinct and representative of solely one ethnicity. Further, in both the Kingdom and in Yugoslavia the Serb people held a majority of the population, and the capital of both states was in the Serbian city of Belgrade. In time, the Croats came to resent what they felt was Serbian ascendancy in their shared endeavor as South Slavs.

The second path towards autonomy also came from within the Roman Catholic Church, however, this movement was held greater allegiance to Rome than the Illyrian movement. This alternative movement did not find the path to self-determination among the South Slavs, but rather solely among the Croats themselves. Again Ramet states,

The alternative to a broader South Slav state was clearly a restoration of Croatian independence. The Croatian Party of Right, created by ex-seminarist Ante Starčević, was in essence a Catholic movement working for the political independence of a Catholic Croatia. Thus from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1920's, the church in Croatia was riven into two factions: the progressives, who favored incorporation of Croatia into a liberal Slavic state and envisioned union with Serbia on lines drawn by Strossmayer; and the conservatives, who preferred

⁹⁴Ibid., 154.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

the ecclesiastical security of union with Austria-Hungary if outright independence could not be secured, and who were loath to bind Catholic Croatia with Orthodox Serbia. By 1900, the latter (exclusivist) faction appeared to have gained the upper hand and the First Croatian Catholic Congress, held in Zagreb that year, was implicitly anti-Orthodox and anti-Serb. “As a Croat,” Baron Miroslav Kulmer told this convention, to resounding applause, “I identify Catholicism with Croatian national identity. [We must] safeguard this foundation of the Croatian nation, which is the only [institution] capable of preserving our consciousness and nationality.”⁹⁶

This desire for autonomy was temporarily achieved through the Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (NDH), or the Independent State of Croatia. Established in the wake of the disintegration of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, at the outset of World War Two, the NDH was led by members of the Ustaša party, a Croatian fascist movement that developed in the 1930s. The Roman Catholic Church was closely allied, at least initially, with the NDH movement, if not associated with its violence. An article in the *Katolički List*, 1941, the year that the NDH was proclaimed, stated “The Catholic Church which has served as the spiritual leader of the Croatian people for 1300 years in its difficult, sickly and joyous days, accompanies the Croatian people with joy and gladness in these days as its state independence is restored. . . . All members of the Croatian nation. . . find, in the Croatian state, the fulfillment of their legitimate aspirations.”⁹⁷

The fulfillment of these “legitimate aspirations” were short lived, however. A puppet of the German Nazis during World War Two, the NDH fell to Tito’s Yugoslav Partisans when Germany was defeated in 1945.⁹⁸ Due to the fascism and ethnic violence of the Ustaša, the NDH, and because of the totalitarian rule of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, the Croatian independence movement largely went underground for nearly twenty-five years.⁹⁹

⁹⁶Ibid., 154-55.

⁹⁷*Katolički List* translates to “The Catholic Newspaper,” quoted in Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i NDH* (Zagreb: S.N. Liber and Školska knjiga, 1977), 215.

⁹⁸Tanner, *Croatia*, 166.

⁹⁹See Alexander Korb, “Understanding Ustaša violence,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, (2010): 1-18; Michele Frucht Levy, “The Last Bullet for the Last Serb: The Ustaša Genocide Against Serbs, 1941 – 1945,” *Nationalities Papers* 37 (2009): 807-37; Pål Kolstø, “The Croatian Catholic Church and the Long Road to Jasenovac,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24 (2011): 37–56.

However, by the end of the 1960's, the situation in post-war Yugoslavia had settled to the point that the communists began to relax controls in each of the six republics. The result of this relaxation revealed that while the nationalist sentiments had been suppressed, they had not disappeared.

As a consequence of the liberal course of the Yugoslav communist regime of the 1960's, the six-republic federation was swamped by an upsurge of ethnic nationalism in all the republics and autonomous provinces. The carriers of this nationalism were not initially the conservative anticommunist forces such as the churches and surviving World War II enemies of the Partisans but were "ethnationally sensitive" communist leaders in the republics and autonomous provinces. They demanded more power and autonomy at the expense of the federation. Nonetheless, they unwittingly became allies of conservative nationalists who saw the process as a step toward their separatist ideal. Although secular forces dominated these movements, religious institutions were not dormant.¹⁰⁰

At the heart of this demand for greater autonomy lay economic concerns, primarily regarding disparity in productivity between eastern republics and western republics within Yugoslavia.

The most massive of the Yugoslav nationalist movements of the late sixties was the Croatian National Movement, also referred to by its supporters as Croatian Spring, or in the old regime's jargon, the "Croatian Mass Movement" (1967-1972). The Croatian national movement, triggered by a Serbo-Croatian linguistic dispute in 1967, expanded into spheres of culture, economy, education, foreign and military affairs, inter-ethnic relations, constitutional politics, and so on. Croat communists and noncommunist came tighter, bound by the appealing nationalist agenda. Thus, the secretary of the league of communists of Croatia, Miko Tripalo, said that "national and class interests were the same as nation and class had become identical." The movement's leaders believed that Croatia without the rest of Yugoslavia (especially if released from the "Balkan burden" of Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia), would attain the prosperity of western European countries. The movement reached its pinnacle in the spring of 1971. Croatia was on the verge of revolution. Street protests and strikes took place in several Croatian cities.¹⁰¹

The Croatian Spring lasted until December 1971, when Tito intervened.

Between 1972 and 1973 the regime jailed a large number of the Croatian National Movement's leaders and activists. Tito purged Croatia's League of Communists and established a rigid structure of power. The period from roughly 1973 to 1989 would come to be known as the "Croatian silence." During the same period, however, the Catholic Church in Croatia was agile and outspoken as both the carrier

¹⁰⁰Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 56.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

of the national idea and fighter for greater religious liberty.¹⁰²

In retrospect, Tito's handling of the "Croatian Question" was a failure. Rather than weakening the bond between the Croatian people and the Roman Catholic Church, the restrictions served to strengthen the relationship.

In the early postwar years, Tito tinkered with the idea of encouraging the establishment of a schismatic national Croatian Catholic church that might be more amenable to regime manipulation and pressure. Instead of pursuing this, however, the communists decided to attempt to brand the Catholic Church as fascist and thus to sever it from the wellsprings of Croatian nationalist feeling. The attempt failed, and the assaults on the good name of Archbishop Stepinac produced a backlash, transforming a sincere and reputable churchman into a Croatian national hero, a symbol of Croatian national aspirations. Worse yet, from the regime's point of view, the crushing of the so called Croatian spring in December 1971, and suppression of all institutions (such as *Matica Hrvatska* and the newspaper *Tlo*) that had served as forums for Croatian's exclusivist nationalists, had as a by-product the strengthening of the Church's role as guardian of Croatian national interests.¹⁰³

After the collapse of the Croatian (secular) nationalist movement, the Church became the only driving force of Croatian ethnic nationalism. Many secular nationalist leaders recognized the church's leadership and became practicing Catholics.¹⁰⁴ At the heart of the struggle in the early 1970s were the competing objectives of the Yugoslav drive for shared self-determination among all the South Slav nationalities and that of those who wanted an independent Croatian self-determination. Whereas the former came to be identified with the communist government, the latter came to be identified with the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰⁵ In the struggle for the hearts of the Croatian nation, the Roman Catholic Church won.

By the end of the twentieth century, the struggle between the Yugoslav movement and independence movement among Croats seeking self-determination had ended. The Yugoslav approach was discarded due to its association with the Serbian

¹⁰²Ibid., 57.

¹⁰³Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 156.

¹⁰⁴Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 63.

¹⁰⁵Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, 164.

ethnic majority. Further, in the wake of the suppression of the Croatian Spring's secular leaders, the Roman Catholic Church stepped in to lead the movement towards independence. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church became the face of the independence movement. In the words of Zagreb Archbishop Franjo Cardinal Kuharić, in the early 1980s, "If anyone can speak of the history of the Croatian people it is the church which lives in their midst and which has been present in all centuries of this often difficult and painful history so that this Church becomes quite simply the soul of that history."¹⁰⁶

At the end of the twentieth century, a Croatian could not be a Yugoslav, and could therefore not be an atheist. A Croatian could only be Roman Catholic. When the Homeland War began in 1991, the Roman Catholic Church became the soul of the struggle against Serb hegemony and communism in Yugoslavia. The Homeland War was fought primarily over economic concerns, the so-called "Balkan Burden;" the economic disparity between the western Yugoslav republics, such as Croatia and Slovenia, and the eastern republics, such as Serbia and Macedonia.¹⁰⁷ However, while the war was not primarily a religious conflict, religious symbols became the defining symbols in the war. Henkel and Šaksa wrote of the conflict:

Although the war in Croatia can in no way be defined as a religious war, we claim that religion, on its symbolic-semiotic level, functioned as a manipulative instrument in national mobilization. The adversary was marked by the use of religious symbols, spatial strategies of purification and exclusion were realized by obliterating the material signs of the other religions/cultures.¹⁰⁸

From 1991 to 1995 the Homeland War was fought between ethnic Croats and Serbs residing in the Yugoslav republic of Croatia. The seeds to the conflict are found in Croatian desire for an independent national state, as discussed previously. However,

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 56.

¹⁰⁸Richard Henkel and Laura Šakaja, "A Sanctuary in Post-Conflict Space: The Baptist Church as a "Middle Option" in Banovina, Croatia," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 91 (2009): 40.

attaining a nationalist Croatia state was seen as a threat to the security, prosperity, and identity of Serbs residing in Croatia, feeling that they would be disenfranchised. The first steps taken towards attaining independence from Yugoslavia were legal. In April and May of 1990 Croatian nationalists won a majority in the Croatian parliament. On July 25, 1990 the newly elected Croatian parliament moved to abolish socialist symbols and to begin working on a new constitution.

In response to these steps, elements of the Serb ethnic population in Croatia began taking moves to distance themselves from the emerging Croatian state. On August 17, 1990 Serbs living in the area of Knin, in southern Croatia, set up barricades and began checking identifications of those entering the town.¹⁰⁹ Known as the *Balvan Revolution*, this action was repeated in other Serb majority areas of Croatia. The Croatian authorities did not immediately move to remove these illegal barricades, however once they did so, events quickly escalated.

On March 1, 1991 in the western Slavonia town of Pakrac three Croatians were wounded as they sought to retake the local police station.¹¹⁰ On March 31, 1991 the first casualty of the conflict occurred, when a Croatian policeman was killed near the town of Korenica in southern Croatia.¹¹¹ The following day, April 1, 1991, the Serbian Republic of the Krajina, was announced in Knin, and the call to separate from the emerging Croatian republic was answered in other Serbian majority areas.¹¹² For the Serbian rebels the borders of their state were to be drawn from Virovitica in the north,

¹⁰⁹“Prije 20 Godina Počela je ‘Balvan-revolucija,’” *Danas.hr*, August 17, 2010, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://danas.net.hr/hrvatska/prije-20-godina-pocela-je-balvan-revolucija>.

¹¹⁰Janja Sekula Gibač “Početak Agresije na Hrvatsku,” *Matica Hrvatska*, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.matica.hr/vijenac/522/Početak%20agresije%20na%20Hrvatsku%20/>.

¹¹¹Vesna Pintarić, “Uskrs na Plitvicama 1991,” *Hrvataski Vojnik*, last updated April 30, 2015, accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.hrvatski-vojn timer.hr/hrvatski-vojn timer/0282005/plitvice.asp>.

¹¹²Davor Pauković, *Usp on i Pad Republike Srpske Krajine: Dokumenti*, (Zagreb: Centar za Politološka Istrazivanja, 2005), 23.

south to Pakrac, west to Karlovac and then south to Karlobag on the Adriatic coast.¹¹³

From Karlobag the line moved east to Knin and the Bosnian Border.

On July 25, 1991 the Croatian and Slovenian parliaments voted to succeed from the Republic of Yugoslavia. At this point the Serbians of the Krajina were no longer rebelling against a sympathetic government in Belgrade, but against an independent Croatian state based in Zagreb and efforts on both sides of the tense standoff began to intensify. In addition to securing their territory through the erecting of barricades, a new effort emerged, “ethnic cleansing.” On July 7, 1991 the town of Čelije in eastern Slavonia was burned and two weeks later the first massacres of civilians occurred in Banovina.¹¹⁴ The goal of these actions was to create terror which would cause the Croatian population to exit the Krajina. Over the following months, as fighting intensified, approximately 500,000 Croats fled the Krajina and remained refugees for the next four years.¹¹⁵ The war came to a conclusion in August 1995, when the Croatian military launched a massive assault on the Krajina, known as *Oluja*, defeating the Serbian forces and prompting approximately 250,000 Serbians to flee to Bosnia and Serbia.¹¹⁶ Most would never return to Croatia, and those few that did return did not do so before the end of the decade.¹¹⁷

By the year 2000, the Croatian national state was firmly established in the wake of the Homeland War. In this nationalist state the Roman Catholic Church played a

¹¹³ Ante Nator, “Pokušaj Uvodjenja Izvanrednog Stanja u Hrvatsku,” Hrvatski Vojnik, last updated April 30, 2015, accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.hrvatski-vojn timer.hr/hrvatski-vojn timer/4072012/domovinski-rat.asp>.

¹¹⁴ “Na Današnji Dan,” Braniteljski Portal, July 7, 2013, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.braniteljski-portal.hr/Novosti/HRVATSKI-BRANITELJI/Na-danasnji-dan-u-velikosrpskoj-agresiji-na-Hrvatsku-dogodio-se-strasan-zlocin-do-temelja-zajedno-s-crkvom-spaljene-su-Celije-prvo-hrvatsko-spaljeno-selo-u-Domovinskome-ratu>.

¹¹⁵ Neven Crvenkovic, “Home Again, Ten Years After Croatia's Operation Storm,” UNHCR, August 5, 2005, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/42f38b084.html>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

pivotal role, to the point that the line between church and state was often blurred: Christendom had been restored.¹¹⁸ Yet, Croatia's story had not ended. Just as this century-old goal of an independent Croatian state had been achieved, ascension talks began with the European Union.¹¹⁹ Change, it seems, is the one thing that remains the same in the history of Croatia.

Summary

The focus in this section has been on the interplay between the political and religious history of the Croatian people, with the goal of understanding how the Croatian people at the end of the twentieth century came to pursue a last Christendom, referred to in the introduction. In this section it has been noted that over the course of the past millennia and a half the Croatian people, due to their geopolitical location, have developed a self-identity based on rejection of the "other." Further, identification of the "other" has been in religious terms, so that to be a Croatian is to hold to a particular religious expression contrary to the "other:" to be a Croatian is to be a Roman Catholic.

This Roman Catholic religious self-identification among Croats was intensified due to the nationalist movements throughout the twentieth century. In 1945 the first Yugoslavia was rejected for a fascist state, the Independent State of Croatia, a state that identified itself closely with Roman Catholicism. In the wake of World War II, this Croatian state fell to a communist state, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

¹¹⁸The relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Croatian government included returning properties confiscated by the Yugoslav government, the state's financing the rebuilding of Roman Catholic churches destroyed during the Homeland War, and building new churches in areas that had previously been Serbian enclaves, such as the town of Kistanje which had before the war been exclusively Serbian. The Roman Catholic Church reciprocated by bestowing an unprecedented number of Papal visits to Croatia as well as providing endorsements to both political parties and individual candidates. For and in-depth treatment of this subject, see Vjekoslav Perica's *Balkan Idols*, in particular chaps. 4, 10, and 11.

¹¹⁹Formal talks began June 1, 2000, and Croatia joined the European Union July 1, 2013. This process was delayed by a number of years due to wrangling over Croatia's refusal to turn over indicted war criminals to International War Crimes Tribunal. "Croatia," European Commission, last modified June 28, 2013, accessed November 22, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/croatia/index_en.htm.

Then, in 1991 the second Yugoslavia was rejected for a national state, the Republic of Croatia. Both of these political changes served to intensify religious identification with the Roman Catholic Church among the Croatian people at the end of the twentieth century.

However, by identifying with the Roman Catholic Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Croatians found themselves at odds with the secularism of the European Union. Right at the time that Croatians were establishing a new Christendom, a nation that united the religious and national aspirations of their history, the nations of Western Europe, who had created the first Christendom, had by this point rejected Christianity. This divergence has created a tension within Croatia can be seen in the 2010 census data, revealing a trend towards atheism and agnosticism. Further, this tension has been revealed in opposition to Croatia's entrance into the European Union, in protests, and in graffiti in the cities of Croatia against joining the Europe Union.¹²⁰ At the time of this writing, this tension has yet to be resolved.

The Croatian Baptists

In the face of this dominant Roman Catholic Croatian religious self-identification stand the Croatian Baptists. Croatian Baptists are Croatians who are not Roman Catholic. Croatian Baptists live in Croatia, they speak the Croatian language, and

¹²⁰While leaders of the major political parties, including both Christian Democrats (HDZ) and Social Democrats (SDP), have moved ahead with Croatia's ascension to the European Union, many Croatians are not optimistic about the impact that this move will have for the country. "A recent poll [in Croatia] shows that support for the EU has dropped to 49.4 percent - the lowest ever. Only 25 percent saw membership as a positive economic step." Vesna Perić Zimonjić, "Rising Anti-EU Sentiment," Global Policy Forum, last modified February 23, 2011, accessed November 21, 2014, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/nations-a-states/political-integration-and-national-sovereignty-3-22/49872-rising-anti-eu-sentiment.html>. Opposition to Croatia's European Union integration went beyond opinion polls and extended to public demonstrations. "About 1,000 protesters, many of them independence war veterans, gathered in Zagreb's central square, carrying banners saying "No to EU" or "I love Croatia," and chanting anti-EU slogans. Using loudspeakers, activists demanded postponement of the vote, arguing that political leaders had failed to explain to citizens all that the EU entry entails." "Police Clash with Anti-EU Protesters in Croatia," Voice of America, last modified January 20, 2012, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.voanews.com/content/police-clash-with-anti-eu-protesters-in-croatia-137819638/150950.html>. I have witnessed numerous instances of the slogan "EU = YU" (European Union = Yugoslavia) graffitied in cities throughout Croatia beginning in 2011.

they are ethnically Croatian. Culturally, Croatian Baptists are Croatian except for the fact that they reject the teachings and authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Due to this fact, Croatian Baptists are truly counter-cultural.

While they live in the Croatian society, Croatian Baptists are outsiders. They are outsiders to the birth, marriage, and burial ceremonies. They are outsiders on the major religious holidays: Christmas, Easter, Assumption Day, as well as holidays associated with patron saints. During the week their children are outsiders to the religious education taught in the public schools. Every weekend they are outsiders to the Sunday religious services. This exclusion is mutual; they have both withdrawn from society and they have been marginalized by society.

At the core of this exclusion lies their conversion. Croatian Baptists are different because their understanding of God has changed; they have turned to God. This change has caused them to withdraw from the elements of society that they feel are at odds with their new understanding of God. Further, since they have decided to speak about this change, and to call on others to change, to witness, they have come to be perceived as “other” by mainstream Croatian society. As “other,” they have come to be excluded.

This section will cover the first century of Baptist presence, the period preceding the focus of this study. The goal is to lay the foundation for an understanding of what occurred during the period that the field research covers. John David Hopper, in his study of the history of Baptists in Yugoslavia, stated that early developments in Baptist conversion in this region consisted of three major phases: first, Baptist converts among German settlers, second, Baptist converts among ethnic minorities (for example Slovaks or Hungarians), and third, Baptist converts among the Slavic majority, including Croats.¹²¹

¹²¹John David Hopper, “A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 2.

The First Baptists in Croatia

The first Baptist converts in Croatia were German settlers. The first Baptist to live in Yugoslavia was Franz Tabory, from Novi Sad (modern day Serbia).¹²² He was converted in Romania through the ministry of Germans and moved to Sarajevo in 1862.¹²³ German settlers had moved into the northern areas of the Balkan Peninsula as a result of the expansion of the Austrian Empire in the late seventeenth century.¹²⁴ The first Baptist to live in the region of modern Croatia was Heinrich Meyer, who served in Zagreb while working among the German community living in that city in the early 1870s.¹²⁵ The first Baptist baptisms occurred November 16, 1875.¹²⁶

Within a few decades after the emergence of German Baptists in Croatia, response began among the ethnic minorities living in northern Croatia. This area of northern Croatia, prior to the two World Wars was multi-ethnic, with Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, and Romanians in addition to the German settlers. At that time, all of these nationalities lived within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, making migration within this area easy. The first Baptists from among these ethnic minorities living in Croatia were converted in the far western region of Slavonia in the years immediately preceding the First World War.¹²⁷

During this early period, there appears to have been little movement among the Croats themselves. All German and ethnic minority Baptists were in the north, in the regions of Međimurje and Slavonia. Bibles were distributed along the Dalmatian and

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., 14.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., 11-12.

¹²⁶Ruben Knezović, *Pregled Povijest Baptizma na Hrvatskom Prostoru* (Zagreb: Savez Baptističkih Crkava u Republici Hrvatskoj, 2001), 46.

¹²⁷Knezović, *Pregled Povijest Baptizma na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 51-55.

Istrian coast prior to 1867, from a depository in Dubrovnik.¹²⁸ Known as colporteurs, these Bible salesmen were supported by the British and Foreign Bible Society.¹²⁹ The Bibles they sold were in the German, Croatian, Czech, Hungarian, and Serbian languages. However, they faced a difficult task, with an indifferent populace and hostile religious authorities. There are no reports of conversions or churches established as a result of this ministry.¹³⁰

Beginnings of a Proto-Indigenous Movement

Oddly enough, the origins of an indigenous Croatian Baptist movement can be traced to the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan in the early twentieth century.¹³¹ Two prominent figures in Croatian Baptist history crossed paths due to the job opportunities in Detroit in the years just prior to the First World War. These two figures served to unite the existing German and ethnic-minority Baptists in Croatia, as well as begin organized outreach efforts among ethnic Croats. It is important to note that neither of these individuals was converted in Croatia. Likewise, neither of these individuals was “purely” Croatian; therefore this third stage must be considered proto-indigenous. The gospel would have to penetrate this people group in multiple stages.

The first individual, Vinko Vacek, was the grandson of a Czech immigrants to Croatia, and Vacek’s father married a Croatian woman.¹³² The Vacek family lived near Daruvar in northern Croatia. In 1908 Mr. Vacek moved to Detroit, where he began

¹²⁸Hopper, “A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia,” 61.

¹²⁹Ibid., 30.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹When Vacek left his job at the Ford Motor Company to take on the role of pastor of the Serbo-Croatian church in Detroit, Henry Ford himself invited Vacek into his office to personally wish him success. Knezović, *Pregled Povijest Baptizma na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 63.

¹³²Hopper, “A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia,” 69.

working at the Ford Motor Company.¹³³ In Detroit he heard the gospel at a Czech Baptist church and was baptized in 1913.¹³⁴ In 1920 he was ordained pastor of a Serbo-Croatian Baptist church in Detroit.

It was in this congregation that the second individual, Jovo Jekić, heard the gospel. Mr. Jekić was a Serb who had been born in central Croatia. In 1913 he moved to Detroit, where he came into contact with a Baptist church where “services were held in Serbo-Croat, Russian, Polish, and English.”¹³⁵ Mr. Vacek was the pastor of this church. Mr. Jekić was converted and soon felt convicted to return to Croatia. In 1919 he returned and began missionary outreach in Central Croatia. Contact was maintained with Mr. Vacek, who himself felt convicted to return in 1922.¹³⁶ Mr. Vacek returned to his homeland as a missionary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, receiving a stipend of one hundred dollars a month.¹³⁷ In 1924 the first Baptist church building was dedicated in the town of Mosčenica, a result of Mr. Jekić’s evangelistic efforts.¹³⁸

Summary

The early history of Baptist conversion is not a story of an organized, premeditated missional effort. Rather, it is the result of emigration and immigration, of the influence of ethnic minority groups living among the Croat majority population, and of the sacrificial witness of individuals and small groups living in the midst of a hostile

¹³³Ibid., 70.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid., 68.

¹³⁶Ibid., 72.

¹³⁷Knezović, *Pregled Povijest Baptizma na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 63.

¹³⁸Hopper, “A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia,” 75.

environment. Amidst extremely turbulent times, wars, revolutions, and shifting political and social boundaries, the gospel took root and continued to grow up to the point that his research project covers.

The origins of Baptists in the region of modern-day Croatia emerge in three stages. In the first stage, German settlers converted from either Catholicism or Lutheranism in the mid to late nineteenth century. During this period, the region of modern day Croatia was under the rule of the Hapsburg Empire. German Baptist missionaries worked to evangelize their countrymen in their own language and culture, though in what was to the Germans a frontier setting.

In the second stage, ethnic minorities (Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians) converted from either Catholicism or the Hungarian Reformed church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These conversions occurred in one of two ways: as a result of contact with German Baptists inside the region; or as a result of contact with Baptists while outside the region, and the faith was then brought back into the region after conversion.

In the third stage, ethnic Croatians converted from Catholicism in the early twentieth century. This occurred primarily through contacts with Baptists while abroad, particularly in Hungary, Austria, and the United States. The initial formation of the Croatian Baptist Union occurred as a direct result of the evangelistic activity of two influential Croatians in Detroit, Michigan, in the years immediately following the First World War. The first gathering of Baptists occurred in March 1921, at which time individuals from all three stages of Baptist work were brought together.¹³⁹ It was from this point that a truly indigenous Croatian movement can be seen to emerge.

This indigenous movement faced many challenges between its first decades and 1970, the beginning point of this research project. Many records of this period were

¹³⁹Knezović, *Pregled Povijest Baptizma na Hrvatskom Prostoru*, 64.

lost as the fascist NDH government outlawed Baptists during World War Two and some pastors were imprisoned.¹⁴⁰ Following the war, the Baptists had to deal with a communist government. This communist government proved less hostile than the NDH government, as Baptists were not associated with national aspirations of the traditional religions.¹⁴¹ However, the movement continued to slowly grow. In 1923 there were 160 Baptists in Yugoslavia, including children, in 1948 1,157, and in 1962 1,796.¹⁴²

Conclusion

In this chapter the physical and social contexts of the Croatian people have been introduced. By ending their migration in the physical space of south Europe the Slavic tribes that were the forerunners of the Croatian people entered into a geopolitical space that would result in constant crisis and change. Ever at the flashpoint of global struggles the Croatian people found themselves under the dominance of external forces. In the search for a national self-identity, a religious self-identity was constructed that equated being Croatian with being Roman Catholic. Today this religious self-identity stands as a stumbling block for Croatians to accept the gospel.

With an evangelical population of less than 0.2%, the Croatians can be characterized as being resistant to the gospel. In the face of this resistance, Croatian Baptists represent a minority segment that has responded to the gospel, overcoming this resistance. Understanding how this population segment responded to the gospel could aid in reaching the whole population. The goal of this research project is to understand how these individuals have converted, in spite of the challenges associated with conversion. By focusing on the four decades from 1970 to 2010, the period in which the

¹⁴⁰Hopper, "A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia," 155.

¹⁴¹Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 14.

¹⁴²Hopper, "A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia," 156.

Croatian national aspirations were achieved, insight will be provided into conversion under conditions of heightened social challenges. However, before attempting to understand how Croatian Baptists have converted, first a clear understanding of conversion must be achieved.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

Having explored the various answers to the question, “Who are the Croatians?” I will now turn attention to the second question in this study, “What is conversion?” This second question is more difficult to answer than the first. The first question may be answered objectively, as the Croatians are a people of a specific culture who have lived in a particular shared location and have experienced a particular shared history. An objective definition may be formed for the Croatians based on observed geographic and cultural realities.

The same, however, cannot be said about conversion. The topic of conversion is extremely broad, long studied and often contentious, crossing numerous academic fields. The goal of this chapter will not be to explore conversion generally, but rather to provide a framework for analyzing the data gathered through the field research. First, a definition for conversion will be established. Second, based upon this definition, a typology for conversion among Croatians will be established. Finally, the two major components of the typology will be detailed: context and means.

Differing Perspectives on Conversion

“He converted.” What does this apparently simple statement mean? One person will hear this statement and think, “He changed *religions*.” Another person will hear this and think, “He began to *believe* in the teachings of a religion.” A third person will hear and think, “He began to *practice* the teachings of a religion.” Finally, a fourth person will hear this and think, “No, you’ve got it all wrong; he *was* converted.”

The fact that all four of these answers could potentially be correct reveals the

complexity of dealing with the issue of conversion. As linguist Eugene Nida cautioned, a message's meaning is dependent both on the meaning assigned to the words of the message by the messenger, as well as on the meaning assigned to the words of the message by the recipient.¹ Words matter because meanings matter, and no meaning is more important than that of conversion, as no event is more important in life than conversion. As J. I. Packer has stated, "Conversion [is] the most significant thing that ever happens to any human being."²

If conversion is so important, so vital and significant, then why is there so much uncertainty over its meaning? Louis Rambo provides an answer to this question from an academic perspective:

Varied use of the word by many people in many situations leads one to believe that it means just what a given individual or group wants it to mean, neither more or less. It is this *laissez-faire* character of the word (and by extension, the experience itself, for the word only stands in for the experience) that has distanced scholars from each other over centuries of concern for the phenomenon of conversion. This built-in ambiguity makes it hazardous indeed for anyone to undertake a survey of the subject, to try applying an interconnected model that might define patterns and reveal relationships among the various scattered bits of material, pieces of research, shards of anecdotal experience, slivers of theory, and crumbs of inductive or deductive commentary available to the researcher.³

Another perspective on understanding conversion is provided by the apostle Paul in the New Testament: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14 ESV). In other words, the differences in the understandings of conversion are based not merely on differing academic perspectives, but also on differences in spiritual perspectives. In order to clearly interpret the data

¹Eugene A. Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language* (New York: Harper, 1952).

²J. I. Packer, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Conviction and Conversion," in *Proclaim Christ until He Comes: Calling the Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990), 103.

³Lewis Ray Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 3.

presented in the following chapters, a clear definition of conversion must be stated. Therefore, in the following section a general definition of conversion will be specified and examined to provide a basic understanding that may be used in interpreting the results of this study of conversion among Croatians.

Defining Conversion

Wayne Grudem provides a basic theological definition of conversion:

“Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation.”⁴ This definition consists of four primary elements: conversion, a willing response, the gospel call, and trust (or repentance and faith).⁵ I will explore each of these elements individually below.

Conversion

Grudem notes, “The word *conversion* itself means ‘turning’ – here it represents a spiritual turn, a turning *from sin to Christ*. The turning from sin is called *repentance*, and the turning to Christ is called *faith*.”⁶ Key to this definition is that the change that occurs, the “turning,” is first and foremost spiritual in nature.⁷ Describing conversion, author David Wells states that, “Conversion is *supernatural*.”⁸ In other words, conversion is a phenomenon that is dependent on something from outside of the natural,

⁴Grudem, 709.

⁵Grudem uses “trust” and “faith” somewhat interchangeably, though with the following caveat: “Because saving faith in Scripture involves personal trust, the word ‘trust’ is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word ‘faith’ or ‘belief.’” Ibid., 710.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Eckard Schnabel succinctly summarizes the biblical conversion vocabulary while describing the work of the Early Church. “The early Christian missionaries called listeners to ‘turn’ (*epistrephein*) – that is, to abandon false convictions and behavior patterns (*metanoein*) and to accept and rely on God’s revelation in Jesus Christ (*pisteuein*). Eckard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission. Vol. 2: Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1564. For word studies related to conversion, see R. T. France, “Conversion in the Bible,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (1993): 291-310, William Barclay, *Turning to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1964.

⁸David F. Wells, *Turning to God: Biblical Conversion in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 21. Italics added.

material world. Wells provides four biblical supernatural causes for conversion:

1. Without God's saving action in Christ, conversion would not be possible.
2. Without the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, conversion would not be desirable.
3. Without the function of the Scriptures, conversion would not be Christian.
4. Without regeneration, conversion would be unthinkable, for regeneration and conversion are related as cause and effect. The creative, regenerative work of God produces an overwhelming desire to turn from sin and conveys the ability to believe in Christ, though initially God's regenerative work may take place below the level of consciousness.⁹

In these four causes, the supernatural elements include the existence of God, the reality of sin and judgment (saving action), the triune nature of God, seen in the roles of the Son (Christ) and the Holy Spirit, the "living" and active nature of the Christian Scriptures, and finally the issue of regeneration, "rebirth," or more specifically "spiritual birth." All four of these require both a general view on the existence of a spiritual reality, as well as a specific view on this spiritual reality that is uniquely Christian.

A willing response

The willing response that occurs in conversion is a response to the gospel message. God enables this willing response. "As the gospel comes to us, God speaks through it to summon us to himself (effective calling) and to give us new spiritual life (regeneration) so that we are enable to respond in faith."¹⁰ "Effective calling is an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith."¹¹ "Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us."¹² Grudem summarizes these two acts as working together in the following manner: "Effective calling is God the Father *speaking powerfully to us*, and regeneration is God

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 700.

¹¹Ibid., 693.

¹²Ibid., 699.

the Father and God the Holy Spirit *working powerfully in us*, to make us alive.”¹³

The gospel call

The effective calling of God is different than the gospel call. “The gospel call is general and external and often rejected, while the effective call is particular, internal, and always effective. However, this is not to diminish the importance of the gospel call – it is the means God has appointed through which effective calling will come. Without the gospel call, no one could respond and be saved.”¹⁴ Grudem cites three elements of the gospel call: 1) Explanation of the facts concerning salvation 2) Invitation to respond to Christ personally in repentance and faith. 3) A promise of forgiveness and eternal life.¹⁵ The gospel call takes various forms, which I refer to as means of conversion. The means of conversion will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

Trust

Finally, true conversion will result in the bearing of fruit in the life of the convert (Matt 3:8, Luke 8:15, John 15:8, and Rom 7:4). The fruit of conversion is trust in God, or repentance and faith. Grudem defines repentance as, “a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it, and walk in obedience to Christ.”¹⁶ Repentance is the aspect of turning that is away from the former existence of sin, death, and rebellion to God. Repentance is recognizing that both temporal and eternal happiness are not found in the ways of the world, but in another direction, that of God. Faith therefore is the turning to God, recognizing that both temporal and eternal happiness are found only in him. Grudem specifies saving faith, in opposition to simply

¹³Ibid., 700.

¹⁴Ibid., 693.

¹⁵Ibid., 694-695.

¹⁶Ibid., 713.

faith or belief.¹⁷ He defines saving faith as “trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.”¹⁸

Two Conversion Typologies

Having arrived at a definition for conversion, I will now seek to provide a framework to apply this definition to the data obtained in the field research. In this section I will examine two conversion typologies. The two typologies are distinct, but complementary. Taking these two typologies together will provide a framework for understanding conversion in Croatia.

Insiders and outsiders

The first typology to be examined is that of R. T. France in his article *Conversion in the Bible*.¹⁹ In this article France distinguishes between “insider conversion” and “outsider conversion.” In both cases, for France the phenomenon of conversion is understood in the term of “turning.” In the Old Testament, the term used is *shubh*, while in the New Testament the term *epistrepho*.²⁰ Insider conversion is primarily seen in the Old Testament in terms of “the people of God being summoned to be true to the covenant relationship already established.”²¹ However, with the arrival of Jesus

¹⁷See footnote 5 above.

¹⁸Ibid., 710.

¹⁹R. T. France, “Conversion in the Bible,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (1993): 291-310.

²⁰Note France’s focus on the initiative of God in conversion. “We have observed that the verb *epistrepho* when used in the sense of religious conversion is generally an intransitive verb – people ‘convert’ rather than ‘are converted.’ Superficially this might suggest that conversion is simply a matter of human decision and persuasion. Here is a point where simple word-study can be dangerously misleading, and the NT writers would have been horrified at such a conclusion. Theologians sometimes try to mend matters by distinguishing rigidly between ‘conversion’ (what a man does) and ‘regeneration’ (what God does), and then discussing whether the chicken or the egg comes first. But this is to try to tie down living language to an artificial system. The NT has many ways of indicating that it is the Spirit of God that moves a person to ‘turn,’ and that the resultant new life is born of God;” it would be irresponsible to allow the accident that the Greek verb *epistrepho* functions differently for our verb ‘convert’ to obscure the basic NT theological truth of the divine initiative in conversion.” Ibid., 304-5.

²¹Ibid., 294.

Christ, and the spread of the gospel beyond the Jewish religious community, insider conversion was not an option for those turning to Christ. Pagan Greeks were not people of the covenant; they could not return to a previously established relationship with God, as they had no knowledge of God. Therefore, a new conversion experience is seen, that of outsider conversion.

Whereas insider conversion is seen as a returning to the “old” God, outsider conversion is a turning to the “new” God. Initially in the New Testament outsider conversion is experienced by the individual who previously had no relationship with the God of the Old Testament. However, France notes that this dynamic changes over time as the Jewish followers of Jesus and the Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah, recognize what Jesus means to Judaism.

What had begun as a movement calling Jews to return to God (‘insider conversion’) eventually came to demand not only a new experience of God, but also a change of religious affiliation (‘outsider conversion’). This development was due not to any change in the nature of the gospel or in the basis of a saving relationship with God, but to the recognition both by the Christians themselves and by the Jewish community from which they derived that a new community had come into existence, which demanded a loyalty incompatible with continuing adherence to the parent group.... The symbolism already inherent in John’s demand that Jews should be baptized to become true Israel had worked itself out to the point where Christian baptism marked for the Jew a decisive break with the old and the entry to a new community.²²

Insider conversion, however, does not disappear with the advent of Christianity. In the New Testament context insider conversion remains a valid conversion experience. In this context, the Old Testament covenant, of Abraham and Moses, is replaced with the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Insider conversion is experienced by the second generation of converts, the children of outsider converts, who grew up in the community of the New Testament covenant.

The ‘once-born,’ those brought up within a Christian context who need no conversion experience, are not so likely to appear directly in Acts, which deals largely with the first generation of converts, but there seems no reason to suppose

²²Ibid., 301.

that the NT writers would have viewed them with suspicion. What matters is not so much the means or the experience of conversion, but rather the state of ‘convertedness,’ however reached. The tests of true Christian status proposed in 1 John focus not on a past event but on present characteristics of ‘walking in the light,’ ‘keeping his commands,’ ‘loving the brothers,’ ‘doing what is right,’ and the like.²³

In this conversion typology, the focus of the conversion phenomenon remains the movement of God. The differences between insider and outsider conversion is not in the phenomenon, but rather in the context in which an individual lived prior to the conversion experience. “‘Outsider/insider’ is a distinction in terms of a person’s previous situation, not in terms of the end-product; all stand equally in need of ‘convertedness,’ and through it all become one ‘in Christ Jesus.’”²⁴ This outsider/insider distinction, therefore, is the context in which an individual lived prior to conversion.

Alternation, conversion, and transformation

B. R. Gaventa provides a second conversion typology, in her book *From Darkness to Light*.²⁵ Gaventa’s typology is complementary to France’s typology, yet providing a more nuanced understanding of the experience of conversion.²⁶ Gaventa identifies three conversion experiences: alternation, conversion, and transformation.

Gaventa identifies alternation as “a relatively limited form of change which actually develops out of one’s own past.”²⁷ With alternation, the individual converting is not rejecting their past, but is rather making a behavioral or mental decision that is in line with their past. In an alternation conversion experience, an individual alters his life to

²³Ibid., 307.

²⁴Ibid., 308.

²⁵Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986). Gaventa’s typology remains useful, regardless of the conclusions she draws from them in this book.

²⁶Gaventa’s typology precedes France’s typology by seven years, and Gaventa heavily influences France’s typology. However, France’s work is discussed first as it serves as a useful introduction to the concepts.

²⁷Ibid., 12.

bring it in line with his spiritual heritage; he or she embraces and personalizes their spiritual background. Alternation therefore may be seen as similar to insider conversion. Alternation is not present in the New Testament, as the gospel message represents a radical departure from Judaism with the Incarnation. However, alternation is present in the Old Testament, in the accounts of the people of God returning to the God of their fathers. Contemporary examples of alternation conversion experiences would include the child of Christian parents making a “decision for Christ,” or a nominal, cultural Christian applying the spiritual teachings of his family or community to himself.

Gaventa identifies conversion as “a pendulum-like change in which there is a rupture between past and present, with the past portrayed in strongly negative terms.”²⁸ In this typology, conversion is a radical change, where one’s spiritual background is completely rejected, and a new spiritual reality is accepted. Conversion therefore may be seen as similar to outsider conversion. Conversion is present in the New Testament in the example of the Philippian jailer, where there is no reported Jewish religious heritage. In the New Testament context, conversion occurs when a pagan “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:9). A contemporary example of conversion experiences would be an atheist, who rejects any spiritual existence, accepting the reality of spiritual existence generally and Jesus Christ as Lord of that spiritual reality specifically.

In Gaventa’s typology there is a third kind of conversion experience, transformation. Gaventa defines transformation as, “a radical change of perspective which does not require a rejection or negation of the past or of previously held values, but nevertheless involves a new perception, a re-cognition of the past.”²⁹ In this typology, transformation is a less radical change, where one’s spiritual background is not

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

completely rejected, but is given a new meaning or understanding. Transformation therefore exists on the line between insider and outsider conversion.

Transformation is the most common conversion experience in the New Testament. Transformation is seen in the experience of pagan God fearers, but also in the experience of Jews who came to a new understanding of the God Yahweh in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. A contemporary example of a transformation conversion experience would be a practicing Roman Catholic who rejects a works based salvation system to accept salvation by grace alone.

Summary. In summary, two complementary conversion typologies have been presented and examined. The first, of R.T. France, consists of two components, insider conversion and outsider conversion. The former consists of an individual converting to one's own spiritual background. The latter consists of an individual converting away from one's spiritual background, and towards an alien spiritual perspective. B. R. Gaventa's typology consists of three components: alteration, transformation, and conversion. In Gaventa's typology there is an increasing level of rejection of one's spiritual background, as one moves from alteration to conversion.

It should be noted that in each of these typologies, the phenomenon of the spiritual birth is identical. Conversion is the spiritual vivification given by God, granting the *exousia*, the ability, to accept spiritual truth and reject spiritual and physical falsehood. However, based upon one's background, and the manner in which one encounters the gospel message, the experience of conversion will differ. The phenomenon of conversion is singular, yet the experience of conversion is varied. Therefore, in order to more fully appreciate the uniqueness of conversion experiences, I will now turn to an examination of conversion contexts and means.

The Contexts of Conversion in Croatia

What then are the parameters for insiders and outsiders in the Croatian

context? And further, as this study seeks to determine the impact of the dynamic of change upon conversion, what were the parameters for insiders and outsiders in the Yugoslavian context? In this section the three primary spiritual worldviews will be examined: Traditionalist, Materialist, and Baptist. In order to compare these three worldviews three fundamental questions regarding conversion will be posed to each of the contexts. The answers to these questions will provide the basis for determining the parameters of conversion. The first question deals with knowledge of conversion; how does one know that one needs to convert and how does one know the proper way to convert? The second question regards the mechanics of conversion, or spiritual birth; how does one actually convert? The second question regards the maintenance of spiritual life; having converted, how does one then live and act to continue in their conversion? These three questions may be summarized as relating to revelation (spiritual knowledge), regeneration (spiritual birth), and sanctification (spiritual life). Therefore, in this section each of the three primary spiritual worldviews will be examined in these three fundamental questions.

Traditionalist

The Traditionalist worldview is the overwhelmingly dominant context in both Yugoslavia and Croatia. This worldview is defined as Traditional as it is the status quo worldview, and has been so for at least a millennium. In 1980, at the height of Yugoslavia, 87% of the residents living in Croatia held to the Traditionalist worldview.³⁰ In 2000, in the first census following the creation of the Republic of Croatia, 91% held to the traditionalist worldview.³¹ The focus of this section will be to answer the questions, “Are Traditionalists insiders or outsiders to the gospel?” and “Would Traditionalists experience conversion as alternation, transformation, or conversion?”

³⁰Based upon 1981 census data of Croatian and Serbian ethnic groups.

³¹Based upon 2001 census religious data of Roman Catholics and Orthodox.

The Traditional worldview consists of three sub-worldviews. First, there is the official Roman Catholicism as found in the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. Second, there is the folk Catholicism or popular understanding and application of the religion that exists among the people. And third, there Eastern Orthodoxy, which is the national religion of the Serbian people living in Croatia. Two of these three sub-worldviews will be examined in terms of spiritual knowledge, spiritual birth, and spiritual life. Folk Catholicism is too broad to fit within these three terms, and will be discussed primarily for its divergence from Roman Catholic dogma.

Traditionalist: Roman Catholic dogma. Roman Catholic dogma contains the formal positions of the Roman Catholic Church as collected through the centuries. The most current form is presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.³² The purpose of the Catechism is stated as follows:

This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium.³³

Spiritual knowledge. Roman Catholic dogma holds to a spiritual reality which can be known. Knowledge of spiritual reality comes through revelation, consisting of both the Christian Scriptures and Roman Catholic Church tradition. "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches."³⁴ Revelation of spiritual knowledge, however, must be interpreted for Roman Catholics authoritatively. "The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been

³²The Roman Catholic Church, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, accessed December 10, 2014, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P4.HTM.

³³Ibid., 11.

³⁴Ibid., 97.

entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.”³⁵ Proper understanding of spiritual reality therefore consists of accepting the revelation of Christian Scripture and Roman Catholic tradition. “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, *and that Holy Church proposes for our belief*, because he is truth itself.”³⁶

Spiritual birth. Contrary to the teachings of the New Testament, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that spiritual birth occurs at the moment of baptism, or rather sprinkling.³⁷ This sprinkling is to occur at the earliest opportunity; in the case of a child of Roman Catholic parents within the first few weeks following birth.³⁸ There are two results of baptism, justification and the imparting of grace. First, “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.”³⁹ However, while justifying the individual baptized, baptism does not complete the salvation of the individual. “Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and

³⁵Ibid., 100.

³⁶Ibid., 1814. Italics added.

³⁷“The RCC denounced these Protestant views of salvation [in the Council of Trent, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation]. Mixing together justification, sanctification, regeneration, conversion, and baptism, the Council of Trent asserted this view of salvation: ‘Justification itself. . . is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and the gifts by which an unjust man becomes just.... Of this justification, the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which [faith] no man was ever justified.’ Relying upon the concept of prevenient grace, the council insisted that this salvation is the result of cooperative effort between God, who supplies grace, and human beings who take advantage of that grace.” Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 487-8.

³⁸The Catholic Church, *Code of Canon Law*, 867 “§1. Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks; as soon as possible after the birth or even before it, they are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared properly for it. §2. An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay.” Accessed December 10, 2014, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P2X.HTM.

³⁹CCC, 1992.

summon him to spiritual battle.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the relationship with God must be maintained through life, and even beyond.

Spiritual life. For Roman Catholics, baptism is the beginning of the spiritual, a life that is maintained through a sacramental system. This sacramental system is key to understanding the Roman Catholic worldview; “Roman Catholicism stands or falls with the sacramental system.”⁴¹ The sacramental system consists of seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, marriage, and holy orders. The first five are universal for Roman Catholics; the last two are specific based upon an individual’s life. The sacramental system continues the process of imparting grace, maintaining the status of the individual baptized:

The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. “Sacramental grace” is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament. The Spirit heals and transforms those who receive him by conforming them to the Son of God. The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior.⁴²

The sacramental system reveals the contemporary worldview of the Roman Catholic Church; salvation is not by grace alone. “The Second Vatican Council confirms: “The bishops, successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord... the mission of teaching all peoples, and of preaching the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments.”⁴³ Salvation is achieved through a combination of faith, the work of others (such as saints or by the actions of family members or friends, such as lighting candles and repeating prayers), in sacrament of baptism, as well as one’s own work of confessing and atoning

⁴⁰Ibid., 405.

⁴¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 126.

⁴²CCC, 1129.

⁴³Ibid., 2068.

for both venial and mortal sins.⁴⁴

Traditionalist: Folk Catholicism. Having examined Roman Catholic dogma, it would be an oversimplification to state that this official view is the view held by every Traditionalist.

No matter where we go in Europe, no matter how large or small our unit of analysis, we inevitably discover the coexistence of several competing, mutually derivative systems of religious beliefs and practices. If it would be oversimplifying matters to speak of Australian aboriginal religion, Trobriand religion, or Ife religion, then it is an even graver injustice to refer to Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy as if these each reflected homogeneous, undifferentiated cosmologies, world views, and sets of ritual behavior. European religious systems are intricately patterned and highly elaborated. They have emerged over the course of centuries in response to an infinite variety of social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances.⁴⁵

While the Croatian religious system is overwhelmingly influenced by and participates in the Roman Catholic dogma worldview, this system is not a monolith. In the ways that the system is adjusted, modified, and ignored, this alternate system will be referred to as Folk Catholicism. Folk Catholicism represents the worldview where the popular practice of the Catholicism diverges from the official dogma. Folk religion is a type of folk system, where individuals adapt the predominant religion's worldview to

⁴⁴“Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God's wisdom. These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer. Prayer attends to the grace we need for meritorious actions.” CCC, 2010. “Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not set us in direct opposition to the will and friendship of God; it does not break the covenant with God. While he is in the flesh, man cannot help but have at least some light sins. But do not despise these sins which we call ‘light:’ if you take them for light when you weigh them, tremble when you count them. A number of light objects makes a great mass; a number of drops fills a river; a number of grains makes a heap. What then is our hope? Above all, confession.” CCC, 1863. “Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe ecclesiastical penalty, which impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them.” CCC, 1463.

⁴⁵Stanley Brandes, “Conclusion: Reflections on the Study of Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in Europe,” in *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 185.

meet their worldview.⁴⁶ Folk Catholicism diverges from Roman Catholic dogma in two primary directions. The first is in direction of superstition; the second is the direction of secularization.

Regarding the direction of superstition, Jaroslav Pelikan writes, “The tendency of Roman Catholicism is to debase the mystery into magic.”⁴⁷ This debasement occurs where the “partakers” of the sacramental system are not “faithful partakers,” but rather merely “takers.”⁴⁸ In this sense, the sacramental system is abused by those who believe that the simple physical participation in the sacramental system will mechanically bring a spiritual result. The sacramental system then becomes a form of “magic,” seeking to manipulate the spiritual sphere through physical actions.

The Roman Catholic Church has a nebulous relationship with those who diverge from dogma through superstition. On the one hand there is a concern that Roman Catholics hold to the orthodoxy of dogma. On the other hand there is a concern that Roman Catholics remain within the Roman Catholic Church. The result is that so long as Roman Catholics are faithful to the Roman Catholic Church, superstitious bents are endured, if not ignored.

Catholics... often remain formally contained within the bounds of the church, while privately espousing ideologies and enacting rituals that are at least partially contrary to it. Within Roman Catholicism... there exists an authoritative clerical standard, an orthodox version of faith. It is the stable, long-term coexistence of such a formal religious standard with a plethora of rebellious but essentially loyal heterodoxies that produces a kind of layered division of religion.⁴⁹

However, just as the Church seeks to impose the orthodoxy of dogma on Folk

⁴⁶“Folk systems consist both of the people’s ideas of what is ‘proper’ and what is ‘acceptable’ behavior and of their awareness of the ways in which their society deviates from these ideals.” Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 47.

⁴⁷Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*, 111.

⁴⁸“The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes *the faithful partakers* in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior.” CCC, 1129. Italics added.

⁴⁹Brandes, *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, 188.

Catholicism, Folk Catholicism likewise imposes its view on the hierarchy of the Church. This is nowhere more evident in the development of Roman Catholic Mariology. While Mariology has long had a place within the Roman Catholic Church, over the past century there have been moves to further develop dogmas concerning Mary, in particular regarding that of *Mediatrix* and *Co-Redemptrix*.⁵⁰ In a public address in Rome, in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI pointed towards the interaction between the Folk Catholicism and official dogma, stating that the Holy Spirit spoke to the Church through the voice of the “People of God.”

Thus faith both in the Immaculate Conception and in the bodily Assumption of the Virgin was already present in the People of God, while theology had not yet found the key to interpreting it in the totality of the doctrine of the faith. The People of God therefore precede theologians and this is all thanks to that supernatural *sensus fidei*, namely, that capacity infused by the Holy Spirit that qualifies us to embrace the reality of the faith with humility of heart and mind. In this sense, the People of God is the “teacher that goes first” and must then be more deeply examined and intellectually accepted by theology.⁵¹

The second direction of divergence in Folk Catholicism is that of secularization. Where superstition seeks to accommodate the sacramental system to an individual’s desire to manipulate the spiritual, secularization seeks to accommodate the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church to a worldview that is at odds with many of its teachings. One example of an issue in which secular Folk Catholicism is at odds with Roman Catholic dogma is in the area of sexuality. Zrinka Stimac said:

Croatia is an example of a country where it is possible to identify various conflicts regarding the role of religion. On one hand, there are different ideological standpoints on the role of religion, as evidenced by a strong association with the new social order which is presumed to have retroactively played a part in the high level of religiosity as well. On the other, many puzzling dilemmas have arisen from the perceived discrepancy between a high level of confessional and religious

⁵⁰For a popular presentation of this view, see *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, <http://www.fifthmariandogma.com>.

⁵¹Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, Wednesday, 7 July 2010, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100707.html.

identification and a low level of conforming to certain religious norms, for example, in the field of morality.⁵²

Some sociological investigations reveal that, where religion is concerned, young people in Croatia are extremely conservative. Little difference is apparent between the religious conduct of the young and that of the generation of their parents. Croatian young people are consequently more authoritarian, more intolerant, and more traditional in their outlook than are young people of the same age in Western European countries. However, they do not accept the church moral teachings and especially not those on sexual morality. The process of re-sacralization among the young people in the 1990's until today has been interpreted by the sociologists as a consequence of the secularization of the 20th century.⁵³

The end result of this process is syncretism, to the point where Folk Catholicism ceases to be dogmatically Roman Catholic, yet remains culturally Catholic in the eyes of many Croats. Stimac continues:

In other words this means that although the majority of Croats declare themselves to be Catholic, only 45 per cent accept all the teachings of the Church and 79 per cent even declare themselves to be individualistic in terms of the practice of their religion. Another recent investigation shows that the term "Catholicism" may not be understood strictly in the sense of the Catholic congregation. This means that many Croats definitely accept practices, rituals and various "New Age" postulates. What enabled such a development? Popular Religion highly accepted in the past and present can be seen as preserving and conveying religious ideas through different periods and as a link between the former religious situation and the present one.⁵⁴

Traditionalist: Eastern Orthodoxy. Eastern Orthodoxy is the third sub-worldview of the Traditionalist worldview. This worldview is identified with the Serbian ethnic minority in Croatia. Just as there are elements of popular divergence from Roman Catholic dogma among Croats, so too there is popular divergence from the official positions of Eastern Orthodoxy among Serbs. Many of the divergences mentioned in the previous section would apply to Serbs, in particular in terms of secularization. In

⁵²Dinka Marinović Jerolimov and Siniša Zrinščak, "Religion Within and Beyond Borders: The Case of Croatia," *Social Compass* 53 (2006): 281-82.

⁵³Zrinka Štimac, "Catholic Tradition and New Religious Movements: What is New in the Present Religious Landscape in Croatia?" in *Religion and the Conceptual Boundary in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Thomas Bremer, ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008), 223.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 224.

this section, the similarities and differences between Roman Catholic dogma and Eastern Orthodoxy will be briefly discussed.

Spiritual knowledge. Eastern Orthodoxy holds to a spiritual reality which can be known, though not as fully as with Roman Catholicism. Mystery is a central element to Orthodoxy; in fact their sacraments are referred to as “mysteries.”⁵⁵ Knowledge of spiritual reality comes through revelation, consisting of both the Christian Scriptures and tradition.⁵⁶ In the Croatian context, the differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism are as much about tradition as they are about interpretation of Scripture.⁵⁷

Spiritual birth. The Orthodox religion teaches baptismal regeneration. Spiritual birth occurs at the moment of baptism. “By the means of baptism one crosses the threshold of the earthly Kingdom of God through forgiveness of sins, and becomes a member of the Church, the body of Christ.”⁵⁸ The baptism ritual however is not complete, but is fulfilled through the ritual of chrismation, or chrism; “while baptism grants a new, or spiritual, nature in Christ, chrism further expands it, shaping the newly baptized into the form, the mold of Christ.”⁵⁹ Second, the Orthodox religion holds to seven sacraments, the same seven as the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁰ “The whole meaning

⁵⁵Demetrios J. Constatelos, *Understanding the Greek Orthodox Church: Its Faith, History, and Practice* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 61.

⁵⁶“The present Church evidences an unbroken continuity that, by way of the ecumenical synods and the Church Fathers, reaches back to the apostolic Church and our Lord himself. Her Orthodoxy is not a static element that makes her a dormant body of creeds and traditions. It is rather a living attribute that receives its inspiration from the Holy Scriptures, the sacred tradition, and the Church Fathers; that is, it is the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Church. Orthodoxy, then, provides a continuous reinterpretation and vibrant communication of the revelation of God.” Ibid., 60.

⁵⁷These traditions include which direction one begins when crossing oneself (Orthodox begin right, Catholics begin left) and on which finger one wears a wedding ring (once again, Orthodox wear on the right, Catholics on the left).

⁵⁸ Constatelos, *Understanding the Greek Orthodox Church*, 61.

⁵⁹John Karmiris, “Concerning the Sacraments,” in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Western Perspective*, ed. Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 25.

⁶⁰The Orthodox sacraments consist of baptism, chrismation, Holy Eucharist, repentance, ordination to the priesthood, marriage, and Holy Unction. Ibid., 22.

of the church is realized in the sacraments, the church being, at the same time, the fullness of the body of Christ and the members in particular.”⁶¹

Spiritual life. Eastern Orthodoxy holds to a less rigid “authoritative clerical standard” with a more vague application of the sacramental system.⁶² While the Roman Catholic Church spent centuries debating, compiling, and crafting a salvation system based upon logic and reason, the Eastern Church suffered under Ottoman overlords, tending more towards a mystical view of salvation.

The Orthodox church accepts the seven sacraments, which were known from antiquity in the Orthodox East. They were always believed in, as testified by liturgical practice. The teaching concerning them, however, was not written down, as it was considered to be secret. Neither did any cause impel the church to officially define the number of sacraments as being seven, inasmuch as no one ever happened to express any doubt concerning this.⁶³

Therefore, the Orthodox system is less formal and avoids the mechanical approach of the Roman Catholic Church. “Totally contrary is the Latin teaching of penalties and punishments, external and temporal remission, the treasury of merits, the superabounding grace of our Lord’s passion, the works of supererogation performed by the saints, and purgatorial fire, all of which the Orthodox church most strenuously rejects.”⁶⁴

Summary. Individuals from all three of the Traditionalist sub-worldviews are in need of conversion. However, the type of conversion experience will vary. An individual in a Roman Catholic dogma context would not need to change his general attitude towards spiritual reality, and would need primarily an adjustment of their

⁶¹Nicholas Cabasilas, “Interpretation of the Divine Liturgy,” in *Patrologia Graeca* 37-38, (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1857-66), 150.

⁶²Brandes, *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, 188.

⁶³Karmiris, “Concerning the Sacraments,” 23.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 29.

understanding of revelation, from Scripture and tradition, to Scripture only. The primary adjustment in terms of conversion would be the acceptance of salvation by grace alone, apart from any work on his part. In these terms an individual from the Roman Catholic dogma background could potentially be an insider or an outsider, and would experience alternation or transformation. The same would be true of an individual from an Eastern Orthodox background. However, as the Folk Catholic context is very broad, an individual from that worldview could range from a very near insider to a distant outsider, and there are those whose worldview would be so at odds with the gospel that the conversion that they would experience would be the conversion of Gaventa's typology.

Materialist

The second dominant worldview in Yugoslavia and Croatia is Materialist.⁶⁵ While this worldview has never been fully dominant among the Croatian people, it was the official worldview of Yugoslavia for forty years, including two decades included in this research. The focus of this section will be to answer the questions, "Are Materialists insiders or outsiders to the gospel?" and "Would Materialists experience conversion as alternation, transformation, or conversion?" I will first examine the nature of conversion from a Materialist perspective, and then examine the meaning that this perspective applies to conversion.

Natural Conversion. The supernatural view of conversion stands in stark contrast to natural views of conversion, particularly psychological and sociological views. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will briefly examine these alternate views of conversion in contrast to the understanding I will use in this work. The psychological view of religion has in general has been negative, and therefore suspicious of conversion particularly. Louis Rambo writes, "A substantial amount of the

⁶⁵The term Materialist is used following Wells, *Turning to God*, 119.

psychological literature on conversion processes is influenced by psychoanalysis. This approach tends to interpret conversion as a form of pathology. From this perspective, the motivation to convert is a deficiency generated from fear, loneliness, or desperation.”⁶⁶

The focus of the psychologist is on the internal environment of an individual’s mind, and there is no reference made to an external supernatural influence. The psychological view is fully materialistic. Rambo continues that much of the research that formed the foundation for psychological literature is drawn from a database of those who were undergoing therapy, i.e. they were mentally ill.⁶⁷ Therefore, from the psychological perspective, conversion is understood as a coping mechanism that an individual uses in dealing with a mental illness.

A representative definition of conversion from a sociologist of religion’s perspective may be found in the writings of Meredith B. McGuire. McGuire defines conversion as “a transformation of one’s *self* concurrent with a transformation of one’s basic *meaning system*. It changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in the social situation. Conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one’s view of the world.”⁶⁸ As opposed to the psychologist, the focus of the sociologist is on the external social environment and its impact on the individual. However, both are materialistic in their approach to conversion. In fact, as McGuire states, conversion is not limited to the religious context:

Throughout this discussion we will emphasize the broad concept of *meaning system* more than the specific term *religion*. This usage is helpful because the processes described here apply to other comprehensive meaning systems as well as to specifically religious ones. The processes of conversion and commitment can apply

⁶⁶Lewis Ray Rambo, and Steven C. Bauman “Psychology of Conversion and Spiritual Transformation,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61 (2012): 883.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, 5th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2002), 73-74.

not only to religious changes but also to psychotherapeutic and political transformation.⁶⁹

Therefore, what sociologists of religion mean by conversion is much broader than what I mean in this dissertation. For the sociologist conversion is “a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life.”⁷⁰ It is the “process of changing a sense of root identity.”⁷¹ With this definition, conversion could be equally used for two Croats living in the late 1930s: one who became a Baptist and another who became a Communist. For the former, a worldview determined by Christian Scriptures becomes the “root identity.” For the latter, a worldview determined by the writings of Marx and Engels becomes the “root identity.” Both are seeking meaning, but each finds meaning in a different location.

This search for meaning is central to the sociological view of conversion. Whereas in psychology, the cause of conversion is fully internal, in sociology the view of conversion is a result of the social context impinging on the individual. Rambo writes, “Context shapes the nature, structure, and process of conversion.”⁷² Context is both external and internal, and conversion occurs when these two sides of a context begin to experience stress.⁷³ Anthony Wallace’s article “Revitalization Movements” describes this process for a culture, but the same dynamics are evident in sociology’s view of conversion in the individual.⁷⁴

⁶⁹Ibid., footnote 73.

⁷⁰Richard Travisano, “Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations,” in G. P. Stone and H. Farberman, *Social Psychology through Symbolic Interaction* (Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell, 1970), 594.

⁷¹Max Heirich, “Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion,” *American Sociologist Review* 83 (1977): 674.

⁷²Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 20.

⁷³Ibid. “Conversion is a process influenced not only by objective, external forces but also by subjective, internal motivations experiences, and aspirations. To deny either is to truncate our understanding of conversion.”

⁷⁴Rambo discusses Wallace’s work in the context of conversion in his book *Understanding Religious Conversion* on pages 23-26.

In this article, Wallace details the process of a worldview (“mazeway”) that no longer has meaning or function for a society, which leads to “cultural distortion.” The society then must “revitalize” in order to cope with this distortion, finding a new “reformulated mazeway” that explains reality better than the obsolete “mazeway.”⁷⁵ An individual who then advocates the new formulation to others within his society creates this new “mazeway.” This first individual’s experience can be conceived of as an individual conversion that then leads to societal conversion, or “revitalization.”⁷⁶ In this context then, conversion may be seen as an individual’s efforts to come to terms with a worldview which no longer adequately explains their social context.

Meaning. David Wells describes the Materialist worldview in the following way:

Materialism is the view that there is nothing but matter: there is no spiritual dimension, no moral world, no supernatural, and no God. Materialists are therefore opposed to idealists, who think that reality is ideas, and to any understanding of the world that see in it a spiritual dimension.⁷⁷

Wells identifies two kinds of Materialists: “philosophical” and “unthinking.”⁷⁸ The former are “theoretical atheists;” they are conscious in their rejection of a spiritual reality.⁷⁹ The latter are “practical atheists.”⁸⁰ “For them, materialism is not a system of

⁷⁵Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” *American Anthropologist* 58, 2 (April 1956):269.

⁷⁶Ibid., 270. “With a few exceptions, every religious revitalization movement with which I am acquainted has been originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory visions by a single individual. A supernatural being appears to the prophet-to-be, explains his own and his society’s troubles as being entirely or partly a result of the violation of certain rules, and promises individual and social revitalization if the injunctions are followed and the rituals practiced, but personal and social catastrophe if they are not. These dreams express: 1. the dreamer’s wish for a satisfying parental figure (the supernatural, guardian-spirit content), 2. world-destruction fantasies (the apocalyptic, millennial content), 3. feelings of guilt and anxiety (the moral content), and 4. longings for the establishment of an ideal state of stable and satisfying human and supernatural relations (the restitution fantasy or Utopian content). In a sense, such a dream also functions almost as a funeral ritual: the “dead” way of life is recognized as dead: interest shifts to a god, the community, and a new way. A new mazeway Gestalt is presented, with more or less innovation in details of content.”

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

thought that has inclined them to exclude God from consideration but a whole web of relationships in life whose interests are centrally affluent and whose cognitive horizons make the pursuit of the 'good life' normative."⁸¹

The government of Yugoslavia was based upon theoretical atheism. Following the communist movement that grew out of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, the Yugoslav communist movement, following a Marxist ideology, served as a "surrogate for religion."⁸² The Marxist ideology "was supposed to substitute for religion in satisfying the psychological and spiritual needs of people to free themselves of uncertainty and doubt."⁸³ Yugoslavia's Marxists were strictly atheist in their worldview, and their view of the role and influence of religion in history and society matched that of Karl Marx.

Since Marx rejected spiritual reality, his view of religion was negative and hostile. For Marx, spiritual knowledge in the form of Christianity did not emanate from God, through Scriptures by revelation, but rather was the imaginings of man. His view of religion was that, "Man makes religion, religion does not make man."⁸⁴ Further, the relationship between mankind and religion was ultimately unhealthy for society. Religion offered a false hope, a false hope which distracted its adherents from facing their true problems, and seeking to overcome. As Marx famously wrote, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."⁸⁵

In the Yugoslav context, where religion had for so many centuries divided the

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Radmila Radić, "The Proselytizing Nature of Marxism-Leninism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, nos. 1-2 (1999): 80.

⁸³Ibid., 81.

⁸⁴Karl Marx, *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1843-44*, trans. Jack Cohen, vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers, 2005), 175.

⁸⁵Ibid.

South Slavs, the Materialist worldview sought to bring an end to conflicts seen as artificial constructs based upon myth. The goal of the Materialists was not to remove religion intrinsically, but rather to remove what they felt to be the intrinsic dangers of the traditional religions.⁸⁶ Therefore, a substitute needed to be found. In the same way that Marxism served as a surrogate religion in Russia, in Yugoslavia the communists constructed a “civil religion of brotherhood and unity.”⁸⁷ This was a “religion” with a very practical purpose. This civil religion sought to replace the Traditional worldviews among the South Slavs and unite them under the Marxist Materialist worldview. “The main tenet of the new patriotic ideology was the idea of brotherhood and unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). This idea bound together Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims, Montenegrins, and Macedonians, recognized as ethnically distinct groups, and over came their differences in language and dialect, religion, customs, mentality, and so forth.”⁸⁸

However, just as there are degrees within the Traditional worldview, there are also degrees within the Materialist worldview. In a survey conducted in Zagreb in 1984, only 45% of individuals identifying with the Yugoslav Materialist worldview stated that they were atheists.⁸⁹ Even leading figures of the Yugoslav state were not strictly atheist. Milovan Đilas, a Partisan leader during the Second World War, reported a mystical encounter with Jesus during a battle in 1943.⁹⁰ Further, Đilas describes Tito himself as an agnostic rather than an atheist.⁹¹ In his memoirs of his time with Tito, he describes

⁸⁶“Concerning Yugoslav communism, no evidence exists that the Tito regime, from its Partisan years to its collapse, ever intended to eradicate religion.” Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 224.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, x.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁸⁹Nikola Dugandžija, “Religija i Nacija u Zagrebackjoj Regiji,” in *Religija i društvo*, ed. Štefica Bahtijarević and Branko Bošnjak (Zagreb: Centar za Idejno-teoretski Rad Gradskog Komiteta Saveza Komunista Hrvatske, 1987), 99-100.

⁹⁰Milovan Đilas, *Wartime* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1980), 285.

⁹¹Milovan Đilas, *Druženje s Titom* (Harrow, UK: Aleksa Đilas, 1980), 118.

him as having “a sense of committing sin, with qualms of consciousness and a need for meditation and reflection, and a doubt about the basic premises of materialist philosophy.”⁹²

In the eyes of the Materialists in Croatia, “Brotherhood and unity was the faith of Yugoslavia’s golden age. Faiths that preceded and succeeded it are faiths of this country’s dark ages.”⁹³ The erecting of a Materialist worldview with the religious trappings of a Traditional worldview was an experiment in uniting disparate and antagonistic peoples. Ultimately, the experiment failed and the nationalistic forces, which each found their unity in the various Traditional worldviews, overwhelmed the Materialist worldview of Yugoslavia in the last decade of the twentieth century. Today, in modern Croatia, the Materialist worldview lives on through secularism.

Summary. Based upon their rejection of a spiritual dimension, Materialists will likewise reject all aspects of conversion. There can be no revelation of spiritual truth, there can be no spiritual birth, and there can be no spiritual life. Materialists are therefore strictly outsiders to the gospel. For the Materialist there could be no alternation or transformation, there could only be conversion. In fact, the Materialist would first need to experience conversion in two stages. First, they would need to come to the general point of view where they accepted the belief in a spiritual reality. Second, they would need to come to the specific point of view where they accepted the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord, and all of the spiritual, historical, and moral implications of this apparently simple statement.

Baptist

The third worldview cannot be described as dominant as only 0.004% of

⁹²Ibid., 118-19.

⁹³Perica, *Balkan Idols*, x.

Croatians adhere to this worldview. However, this is the dominant worldview in this study, as this study is focused on this worldview. Further, a majority of those who participated in this worldview were actually born and raised in families that held to this worldview. The focus of this section will be to answer the questions, “Are those from a Baptist religious background insiders or outsiders to the gospel?” and “Would those from a Baptist religious background experience conversion as alternation, transformation, or conversion?”

When approaching these questions, one finds within this tiny minority a surprising level of diversity. Liberal, conservative, and charismatic influences from outside Croatia have found their way into this community, as well as varying interpretations of Scripture. This diversity can be seen in such issues as proper worship, the role of women in the church, and interaction with other faith communities. However, by reviewing Yugoslav and Croatian Baptist documents, and conducting interviews with pastors from both liberal and conservative bent, who have served in the ministry in both Yugoslavia and Croatia, there is a unity of understanding on conversion.

Membership into the Baptist community is based on personal experience of conversion and testimony, including baptism. The following statement is taken from the Constitution of the Baptist Churches in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:

The Baptist church is the general body which consists of all those who have believed in and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and personal savior, and have testified to their faith by baptism in the biblical form of baptism (immersion in water), and further orient their life according to the Holy Scriptures, based upon religious principles, and as such are received as members of the Baptist church adding their voices to the church body.⁹⁴

⁹⁴*Ustav Baptističke Crkve u SFR Jugoslaviji* (Novi Sad, Yugoslavia: Savez Baptističkih Crkava u Jugoslaviji, 1964), 4-5. I was provided with this document by the general secretary of the Croatian Baptist Union despite its age and the fact that it was published by a Baptist Union that no longer exists in a country that no longer exists. This is considered a legitimate statement of current Croatian Baptist views. Author's translation.

Spiritual knowledge. Croatian Baptists accept a spiritual reality which can be known, with this knowledge coming by the revelation of God. This revelation is contained only in the Scriptures. In their *Religious Principles* statement, they write, “Baptists exist on the field of faith, in community life, based solely on Biblical principles.”⁹⁵ This automatically places them at odds with the Roman Catholic view of Scripture and tradition. Further, Croatian Baptists hold that God inspired the Scriptures, contained only in the Old and New Testaments, rejecting the apocryphal writings. “Baptists believe that the Holy Scriptures were given by the will of God to mankind and were written by people who were filled with the Holy Spirit and that contain the treasure of God’s righteousness and teaching. This God is its author, and it is an endless spring of God’s knowledge, and thus leads people to salvation and holiness.”⁹⁶

Spiritual birth. Croatian Baptists hold that spiritual birth is necessary for relating to God. “Baptists believe that only through God’s word and the Holy Spirit can mankind recognize sin. Repenting honestly of one’s own sin and turning to Christ, one receives forgiveness of sin and justification before God. In this way, through the Holy Spirit, an individual is born again and as a result despises sin and lives a new life.”⁹⁷ Croatian Baptists reject baptismal regeneration, holding that baptism is a physical sign of spiritual conversion and not a trigger for conversion. “On the basis of Holy Scripture Baptists believe that baptism is a commandment of Christ, which is to be performed in the biblical manner of one short immersion under water in the name of the Father, Son,

⁹⁵*Vjerska Načela Baptističke Crkve* (Novi Sad, Yugoslavia: Savez Baptističkih Crkava Općina Novi Sad, 1953), 5. Once again, despite the age of this document, it was recommended by the General Secretary of the Croatian Baptist Union as a representative document for current Croatian Baptist views. Interesting to note, relating to its date of publication, is the statement in the opening section relating that Baptists “have always existed in the spirit of Christ’s great ideal: truth and justice, *brotherhood and unity*.” Author’s translation, italics added. “Brotherhood and unity” was the Yugoslav dictum.

⁹⁶*Vjerska Načela*, 8.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

and Holy Spirit. Baptism is only for those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior and whom before the local church have given testimony of their own faith.”⁹⁸

While performing the field surveys, I asked the pastors of the churches I was surveying about their definition of conversion. The four following responses come from pastors who have each served for more than thirty years. One of the pastors would be considered conservative, one pastor a pragmatic moderate, and two would be considered liberal. Here are their responses to the question, “What is conversion?”

Change... from a focus on the world to a focus on God in the world.⁹⁹

A meeting with God, by where the person becomes a new person... the result of this will be that they will begin seeking God in His Word and in His community the Church... baptism is the confirmation of complete submission.¹⁰⁰

A change of course, of 180 degrees, turning away from darkness towards light... a meeting with Truth and with Jesus, as a person does not know the Truth until they come into contact with Jesus... and then you have to see a change in the life, there must be a changed life.¹⁰¹

Simply put, turning to Jesus... but also an event that has multiple layers, which the person experiences and which changes a person and their view on God. An individual recognizes that there is a God, who has an expectation of them; that they repent. Conversion is about change; change that affects the whole person, not just one segment. It changes the picture of the self, of God, of other people, and of one's responsibilities. It is a meeting with Jesus that completely changes a person's perspective based on Christ's sacrifice.¹⁰²

Spiritual life. As seen in the previous comments, Croatian Baptists see spiritual birth as the beginning of the spiritual life, not its culmination. However, they

⁹⁸Ibid., 16.

⁹⁹Grgio Grli, pastor of the Rijeka Baptist church, interview by the author, Rijeka, May 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁰Josip Špičak, pastor of the Sirač Baptist church, interview by the author, Sirač, July 20, 2014.

¹⁰¹Ladislav Ružička, pastor of the Karlovac Baptist church, interview by the author, Karlovac, April 6, 2014.

¹⁰²Toma Magda, president of the Croatian Baptist Union and pastor of the Osijek Baptist church, interview by the author, Zagreb, September 11, 2014.

reject the Roman Catholic view that they have something to add to their spiritual life through the sacraments. Holiness is critical to the spiritual life, but holiness is achieved by faith, not by works. “Baptists believe on the basis of the Holy Scripture that the spiritual new birth souls received from the Holy Spirit are sanctified, and because of this are able to fight against sin and proclaim the Kingdom of God in this world. Sanctification begins at the new birth and continues throughout the entire life, towards the end that one is conformed into the image of Christ.”¹⁰³ For Croatian Baptists, the spiritual life is a life of grateful obedience to the teachings found in the Scriptures. “The Christian life does not consist only of faith confessions and the performing of ceremonies; it is not only teaching, but rather life.”¹⁰⁴

Summary. Baptists are insiders to the gospel yet still need conversion.

Growing up in a faith community that holds to a focus on a primacy of Scripture over tradition, faith over works, and the centrality of Christ in reconciliation, when confronted with the gospel they will find a very familiar message. Therefore, the conversion that individuals from a Baptist religious background experience, in Gaventa’s typology, will be alteration, the personal application of their inherited worldview.

Summary

In summary, based upon the contexts in which the gospel finds an individual, their conversion experience will be different, as there will be various worldview adjustments that the message of the gospel will demand. Table 3 summarizes the approximate position of each of the three major worldviews, detailing their relationship to the gospel prior to conversion and the type of conversion which they will experience.

¹⁰³*Vjerska Načela*, 16.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

Table 3. Conversion experience context map

Insider		Outsider
Baptist	Traditionalist	Materialist
Alternation	Transformation	Conversion

The Means of Conversion

Having examined conversion contexts, I will now turn to the second component of the conversion experience, which is that of conversion means. Conversion means are the manner in which the gospel call is communicated to an individual. The means of conversion in the Yugoslav and Croatian context are much easier to discuss, as they are not unique to this context. Further, means of conversion are not specific to one religious background. Therefore, this section dealing with means will be significantly shorter than the previous section that dealt with contexts.

The means of conversion generally consist of a form of message relating the gospel about Jesus Christ. In the words of Paul, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). The means of conversion are the specific form in which the mystery of Christ is revealed to one who is as yet spiritually dead. There are a wide variety particular forms in which the gospel is transmitted. These forms will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. However, the particular form that the means take is not as important as the inner revelation, by the Holy Spirit, to an individual that the gospel message is true.

J. I. Packer discusses this variety of conversion means as of consisting not only of the Scriptures, but also of channels through which the truth of the Scriptures are carried:

The external means of conversion, as has already become clear, is the gospel message, the word of God, preached, taught, read, made visible in the sacraments, explained in books, and embodied in the life of the Christian community.

Experiences of Christian worship and fellowship can mediate the reality of the things of which the message speaks, or rather they may become the occasion of the Spirit's action in creating awareness of the this reality.¹⁰⁵

The Holy Spirit is truly God the evangelist: He brings sinners to conversion. He does this through a variety of means. The Western habit of theological abstraction might lead us to believe (as evangelical theologians have said for four centuries) that the means in question are: (a) the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, along with its visible embodiment in the two sacraments, and also with signs and wonders; (b) the demonstration of the Gospel in the worship, fellowship, holiness, love, and good deeds of the church and Christian individuals; and (c) back all of this - prayer. Such a statement would not be false – it is, indeed, profoundly true – but it could blur our awareness of the reality behind it, that sinners saved by grace are called to become the means of evangelism as we preach, teach, witness, serve, and pray. In this sense, we are fellow workers with God. God lays upon us the awesome privilege and responsibility of being used evangelistically because in evangelization the Holy Spirit respects human nature as God made it. The Spirit employs a mode of communicating the Gospel that is truly convincing simply because it is authentically incarnational.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, the means of conversion are found not only in the Scripture and in the proclamation of preachers, but also in personal relationships where the gospel is both spoken and incarnationally lived. The means of conversion for one individual may be a book, for another a neighbor, and for a third a radio broadcast. The means of conversion are all the resources of the Church fully at the disposal of the Holy Spirit, which are used to point to the reality of the Jesus Christ as Lord. I will describe the five primary means of conversion in greater detail in the following chapter.

One final note regarding the means of conversion. Grudem notes that there are three necessary components of the gospel call: facts concerning salvation, and invitation, and the promise of eternal life. It is important to recognize that not all means will contain all of these three components. For example the facts of salvation and the promise of salvation may be highlighted, but no clear invitation offered. Or, for instance, a gospel encounter may stress certain facts concerning salvation, while others not mentioned.

¹⁰⁵J. I. Packer, "The Means of Conversion," *Crux* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 1989): 21.

¹⁰⁶J. I. Packer, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Conviction and Conversion," in *Proclaim Christ until He Comes*, 103.

Therefore, the various means of conversion should not be seen as a distinct, but rather as working together to create a composite gospel call to which the recipient responds.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the variety of interpretations of the conversion phenomenon. I have argued for a strictly supernatural understanding of conversion. Following Grudem's definition of conversion, I sought to create a framework for the variety of conversion experiences in light of the reality of a single conversion phenomenon. Having examined the topologies of France and Gavena, I discussed the unique contexts of Yugoslavia and Croatia as well as conversion means. In the following chapter, the results of the field research will be presented. The results will be presented in terms of the conversion experiences of Croatian Baptists based upon their context prior to conversion and the means by which they encountered the gospel.

CHAPTER 4

HOW HAVE CROATIANS CONVERTED?

Having explored the epistemological questions “Who are Croatians?” and “What is conversion?,” in this chapter the survey findings will be examined, seeking the answer to the question, “How have Croatians converted?” Furthermore, the data yielded by the field research will be mined to answer two more specific questions. First, “Did the conflict of the Homeland War affect conversion, and if so, how?” And second, “Did the successive decades of change preceding and following the emergence of the Republic of Croatia affect conversion, and if so, how?” The goal of these three questions is to work towards the answer to the teleological question, “How do Croatians convert?,” which will be addressed in the following chapter.

This chapter will consist of three sections. First, the results from the entire survey will be presented. This will consist of an examination of the demographics of Croatian Baptists followed by conversion experience and the means of conversion. Second, specific geographic regions affected by conflict in the 1990s will be examined for variations in conversion experience and means of conversion. Third, the two decades preceding and the two decades following after the emergence of the Republic of Croatia will be examined for variations in conversion experience and means of conversion.

Before proceeding further, a little more detail about the demographic section will be helpful for the reader. Demographic information comprises the age and gender breakdown of respondents as well as religious background and geographic location. This demographic data will be compared to census data in order to seek variations between the Baptist community and Croatian society in general. Further, the demographic information enables specific lines of inquiry central to the focus of this study, specifically

how conflict and change have impacted conversion in Croatia. First, the data will be viewed geographically in order to examine the impact of conflict on conversion, by examining the conversions of those who converted in areas directly affected by the Homeland War. Second, the data will be viewed temporally in order to examine the impact of political and social change on conversion, by comparing and contrasting conversions occurring in each of the four decades which comprise the focus of this study.

Conversion experience consists of the age at which one converted, the time frame in which conversion occurred, and the recurrence of the message which led to conversion. The time frame of conversion is marked by the point of first hearing the Gospel followed by the point of conversion and then the point of baptism. The point of baptism is important as it reveals the delay, if any, in one's public identification with the personal conversion experience. Also important to the time frame is the individual's recognition of a specific date of conversion. The message recurrence consists of the degree and nature of gospel witness present in the individual's life prior to conversion. This degree of witness is marked by the number of times an individual heard the Gospel and the number of born again believers with whom the individual had contact. Also important to the social environment is whether the individual converted alone or in a group, for example, in a family.

Finally, the means of conversion are comprised of the primary instruments used by the Holy Spirit to bring about conversion. Fifteen means were listed on the survey and each respondent was asked to identify the impact of each mean on their conversion. The means consist of relational witness (family, friend, neighbor, and co-worker), oral witness (sermon, small group Bible study, TV/radio), written witness (Bible, religious book, magazine/tract), formal evangelistic outreach (evangelism event, street evangelism, and youth camp), and finally witness through deed (humanitarian aid, education).

Total Survey

The total survey results are comprised of 842 surveys from thirty-two churches. The smallest church surveyed has five members, while the largest church surveyed has approximately two hundred members. The average church size among the thirty-two churches surveyed is thirty-four members.

Data from the 2011 national census reports 2,266 Baptists in Croatia.¹ This number would imply that this survey represents only 37% of Croatian Baptists, well below the target of 90%. The primary reasons that I missed this target are the inability to access all the churches and problems performing the survey once access was achieved.

The surveys were conducted between November 2013 and November 2014 in each of the thirty-one cities, towns, and villages where these thirty-two churches are located.² The Croatian Baptist Union recognizes forty-five churches, however, not all of these are actually functioning as churches. Seven churches were deemed too small to survey, when considering the limited amount of time available and the distance necessary to perform the survey.³ Further, I was unable to survey three churches due to natural disasters at the time of surveying, and was unable to reschedule within the time frame allotted for surveying.⁴ Finally, one church was experiencing a change in pastors and another church's pastor was experiencing major health problems.⁵

The majority of the surveys were completed immediately following the worship service, in the location where the service was held. This proved the ideal

¹"Census for Residents, Households, and Dwellings 2011," *Croatian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed October 9, 2014, available at <http://www.dzs.hr>.

²Two of the churches surveyed, Dubrava and Radićeva, are located in Zagreb.

³Držimurec-Strelec, Ilok, Kozaperovica, Peteranec, Piškorevci, Severin na Kupi, and Virovitica. The decision to exclude these churches was made in discussion with Zeljko Mraz and Toma Magda, respectively the General Secretary and the President of the Croatian Baptist Union, November 9, 2014. Each of these churches has five or less members.

⁴Malešnica, located in Zagreb, and Belica experienced flooding, and the pastor of the church in Bačuga was away for several months providing flood relief in eastern Slavonia.

⁵Mursko Središće and Varaždin, respectively.

manner in which to perform the survey as the vast majority of those present completed the survey. However, in five of the churches, the pastor determined that it would be better to have the surveys conducted outside of the church.⁶ The reasons for this decision varied in each church, from the desire to allow the members greater time to focus on their answers to the desire not to disrupt the worship service. Unfortunately, in these five locations the percentage of response was significantly lower than in the churches where the surveys were completed following the service. Further, as three of these churches were significantly larger than the average of thirty-four members, not completing the surveys during the service negatively impacted the overall survey results. Finally, in one church, the pastor allowed the survey to be performed in the church, but the leadership of the church, and their families, refused to participate, providing a smaller response.

Despite missing the 90% target, I am highly confident that the results of this survey accurately represent Croatian Baptists. I believe that this number of 37% is misleading for two reasons. First, census data includes children, those under the age that Baptists would consider to be baptized members of the church. This survey was conducted only for members, and excluded any respondents who reported being younger than thirteen years of age. Therefore, based on national census data, which states that 15% of the population is below this age, it is estimated that approximately three hundred and forty of those who are Baptists in the eyes of the national census should not be considered Baptists for the purpose of this survey.⁷ This would leave a total Baptist population of approximately 1,900, of which this survey represents 44%.

Second, I estimate that the actual attendance, as opposed to membership, in the thirty-two churches surveyed is 1,365, of which this survey represents 62%. This

⁶Čakovec, Duga Resa, Karlovac, Petrinja, and the first service of the Radićeva church in Zagreb. A second opportunity was provided at the Radićeva church, however, the response again proved to be limited. This is unfortunate as Radićeva is the largest Baptist church in Croatia.

⁷In the 2011 census, 652,428 individual registered at fifteen years or younger. "Census for Residents, Households, and Dwellings 2011," *Croatian Bureau of Statistics*.

estimate is based on having visited each of the churches and performing a headcount, preaching in the majority of them during the services, and visiting with the pastors following the services and discussing the size and makeup of the congregation. Further, based upon discussions with Croatian Baptist leaders, I estimate that of the twelve churches not surveyed, the total membership is approximately 175.⁸ This would bring the total estimated membership to approximately 1,540, of which this survey would represent 55%. I believe that the difference between this number of 1,540, and the adjusted adult population of 1,900, can be accounted for by those who self-identify with the Baptist faith, but are no longer in fellowship with a local Baptist church. This can be seen in the case of the Split Baptist church, as discussed in the introductory chapter, where 50% of those baptized are no longer in fellowship with this church.

Sixty-two percent of the churches surveyed, 55% of the estimated membership numbers, and 37% of the 2011 census numbers are all still significantly lower than target of 90 %. However, utilizing a sample size calculator, the results of this research is still shown to be highly trustworthy.⁹ For the 2011 census numbers, in order to gain a confidence level of 95%, with a margin of error of +/- 3%, 726 surveys are needed. For the estimated total membership numbers, in order to gain a confidence level of 99%, with a margin of error of +/- 3%, 840 surveys are needed, nearly the exact number collected. And for the estimated membership numbers of the actual churches surveyed, in order to gain a confidence level of 99%, with a margin of error of +/- 3%, 786 surveys are needed. Therefore, I feel highly confident that the results of this survey are representative of Croatian Baptists.

⁸Toma Magda and Željko Mraz, interview by author, Zagreb, November 9, 2014.

⁹“Sample Size Calculator,” Creative Research Systems, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>.

Demographics

In this section I will examine the demographic makeup for the total survey. This consists of geographic region, gender, age, and religious background. Ethnicity must be assumed from religious background. Even twenty years after the Homeland War, questions of ethnicity remain a sensitive topic. However, as seen in the previous chapter, in Croatia ethnicity and religious background are generally synonymous.

Geographic location. Croatian Baptists are unevenly spread throughout Croatia. The following map will orient the reader to the regions of major Croatian Baptist concentration.



Figure 3. Regions of Croatian Baptist concentration

The largest concentrations of Croatian Baptists are in the central northern part of the country.¹⁰ Twenty percent live in Međimurje, 17% in western Slavonia, and another 17% in the city of Zagreb. These three areas of primary concentration are followed by Banovina (13%), eastern Slavonia (8%), and Dalmatia (7%). The remaining 18 % of Croatian Baptists reside primarily to the southwest of Zagreb, in the cities of Rijeka and Karlovac. The two regions of Istria and Lika have almost no Baptist presence.¹¹ Concentrations of Croatian Baptists do not align with the major population concentrations of Croatsians. The following graph illustrates this point.¹²

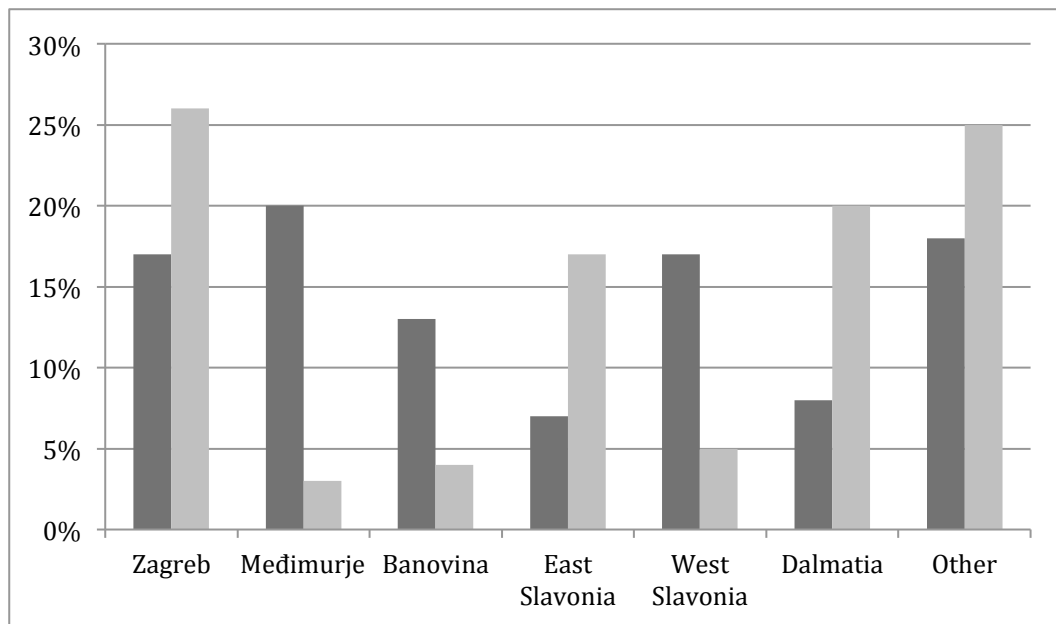


Figure 4. Concentrations of Croatian Baptists vs. Croatian population

¹⁰In this section I am utilizing my estimate of 1,560 adult Baptists.

¹¹In the early 2000s there was a Baptist church plant in Pula, on the Istrian peninsula, however it failed to become established. There are approximately twenty Baptists in the two villages of Plaški and Blato in Lika.

¹²All data is based on 2011 census. Zagreb data consists of city and county of Zagreb. Data for Međimurje consists of county of Međimurje. Data for Banovina consists of county of Sisak-Moslavina. Data for eastern Slavonia consists of the counties of Virovitica-Podravina, Slavonski Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja, and Vukovar-Sirmium. Data for western Slavonia consists of the counties of Koprivnica-Križevci and Bjelovar-Bilogora. Data for Dalmatia consists of the counties of Zadar, Šibenik-Knin, Split-Dalmatia, and Dubrovnik-Neretva.

While 20% of Croatian Baptists reside in the Međimurje region, this region is home to only 3% of Croatia's overall population. Similar disparities are apparent in the regions of Banovina and western Slavonia. These three regions of Međimurje, Banovina, and western Slavonia were areas of early Baptist work, beginning in the 1920's. Referenced in chapter two, Vinko Vacek's hometown was in Daruvar, central to the western Slavonia region, and Jovo Jekic worked throughout Banovina. A third early evangelist, Aleksa Novak, had been active during the same period in Međimurje.¹³ Fifty percent of Croatian Baptists live in these areas, which is home to only 12% of Croatians. In contrast, the region of Dalmatia, with 20% of the Croatian population, has just 7% of Croatian Baptists. Whereas the three former regions have seen nearly a century of Baptist outreach, major work in Dalmatia only began approximately twenty years ago.

Looking at the data in this manner is relative, as the two numbers, total of Croatian Baptist and total of Croatian, do not directly correspond. There are more than four million Croatians, and just two thousand Croatian Baptists. Another way to view this disparity is through ratio of Croatian Baptist to Croatian. In Međimurje there is one Croatian Baptist for 363 Croatians. In Banovina, the number rises to 824 Croatians per Baptist, and in western Slavonia 888. In Zagreb, this number rises to 4,271 Croatians per Baptist. In eastern Slavonia there are 6,742 Croatians per Baptist, and in Dalmatia this number rises to 7,331.

The last demographic issue to examine is the issue of mobility. In other words, is the Baptist population indigenous to their current environs? This question was asked in two ways on the survey, first, asking if they currently lived in the community that they were born, and second, if they currently lived in the community in which they converted. The answer to this first question is that almost exactly half were born in the community in

¹³John David Hopper, "A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia: 1862-1962" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 126-27.

which they completed the survey, while the other half did not.¹⁴ When asked about their conversion, 62% stated that they had converted in the community in which they currently lived.

Gender. The total survey reported 487 (58%) female and 355 (42%) male. These percentages are slightly varied from the national averages of 52% female and 48% male, and are beyond the margin of error for the survey.¹⁵ Croatian Baptists have a slightly higher proportion of females than the does the national average.

Age. The average age of respondents at the time of the survey was 49.8 years. The average age for female respondents was 50.8 years, and the average age for male respondents was 48.5 years. These three figures are significantly higher than the national average based on 2011 census data. The average age in Croatia in 2011 was 41.7 years of age.¹⁶ The average for females was 43.4 years of age, and the average for males was 39.9.¹⁷ However, once again, allowance must be made for the fact that approximately 15% of the national population is below the age to participate in this survey.

Yet, when examining the age breakdown of this survey in comparison with the 2011 census, it is clear that Croatian Baptists are represented slightly lower among those under the age of thirty-five. Likewise, Croatian Baptists are represented slightly higher among those over the age of thirty-five. The following table displays the age breakdown for the total survey.¹⁸

¹⁴Four hundred and eleven were born in the community in which they currently live, 410 do not. Twenty-one respondents did not complete this question.

¹⁵*Croatian Bureau of Statistics*, “Census for Residents, Households, and Dwellings 2011.”

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Eleven respondents failed to list their date of birth; therefore only 831 surveys are included in this table.

Table 4. Total survey age breakdown

Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total
Less than 15	10	1%
15-19	31	4%
20-29	110	13%
30-39	123	15%
40-49	141	17%
50-59	148	18%
60-69	157	19%
Greater than 70	111	13%

Figure 5 illustrates the higher representation of those over the age of 35 among Croatian Baptists. In each of the five-year segments between 15 and 35, a few percentage points underrepresent Croatian Baptists. In each of these cases, the difference is within the margin of error. In the five-year segments between 35 and 70, Croatian Baptists are over-represented in five of the seven segments. All but two of these segments are within the margin of error.

However, when combining all of the segments below 35 years of age, and all of the segments above the age of 35, the totals exceed the margin of error. 38% of Croatians are between the ages of 15 and 34, while only 32% of Croatian Baptists are within this age segment. Forty-one percent of Croatians are between the ages of 35 and 69, while 46% of Croatian Baptists are within this population segment. Therefore, the portion of Croatian Baptists between 15 and 35 is 6% less than the national average, while the portion of Croatians between 35 and 69 is 5% greater than the national average, both of which are beyond the margin of error. Croatian Baptists are slightly older than the national average.

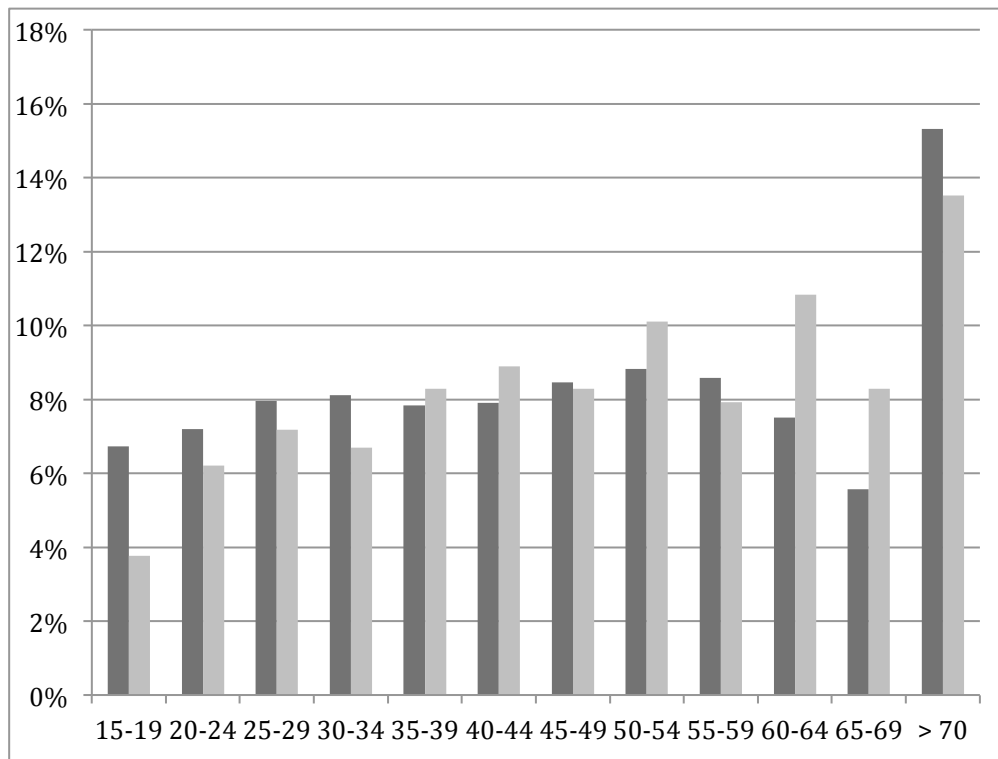


Figure 5. Age structure, 2011 national census vs. survey findings

Religious background. The greatest percentage of Croatian Baptists were born and raised in Protestant families. Nearly one in two Croatian Baptists come from a Protestant heritage. The remaining half is comprised of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and atheist. The following table displays the religious background for the total survey.¹⁹

¹⁹I am surprised at the result for Muslim background, as I personally know two individuals who completed the survey who are of Muslim background. One may have marked “Atheist,” as her parents were secular Muslim. However, the other grew up in a practicing Muslim family in central Bosnia. I can only assume that his response falls under category “No answer.”

Table 5. Religious background for total survey

Religious Background	Number of Respondents	%age of Total
Protestant	415	49.3%
Roman Catholic	297	35.3%
Orthodox	56	6.7%
Atheist	41	4.9%
No Answer	33	3.9%
Muslim	0	0%

Figure 6 displays the dramatic difference between Croatian Baptists and the general Croatian population. Whereas the vast majority of Croatians are Roman Catholic (86 %), and less than 1% are Protestant, half of Croatian Baptists were raised in Protestant households. Figures for Croatian Baptists are slightly higher than the national average for Orthodox and atheist, however are within the margin of error of the survey.

The vast majority of respondents from the Protestant religious background grew up in Baptist households. Of the total of 415 Protestant responses, 327 stated that they came from a Baptist religious background, or 79%. This represents 39% of the total survey. Fifty respondents did not provide an answer as to their specific Protestant background. Seven respondents cited Evangelical and another seven cited Pentecostal. As these two groupings are synonymous in the Croatian Protestant context, the second largest Protestant group after Baptist is Pentecostal, with less than 2% of the total survey. The remaining Protestant responses were as follows. Four respondents cited Methodist and another four cited a generic “Protestant.” Each of the following categories received two responses: Adventist, Church of God, Church of Christ, and a generic “Christian.” There were two responses for Jehovah’s Witnesses. Finally, each of the following categories received a single response: Reformed, Lutheran, Calvary Chapel, Evangelical

Free, Followers of Christ, and the Brethren Church. Based upon this research it would appear that Baptist growth in Croatia has been from internal growth and from evangelism outside of the Protestant communities, and not from transfer growth.

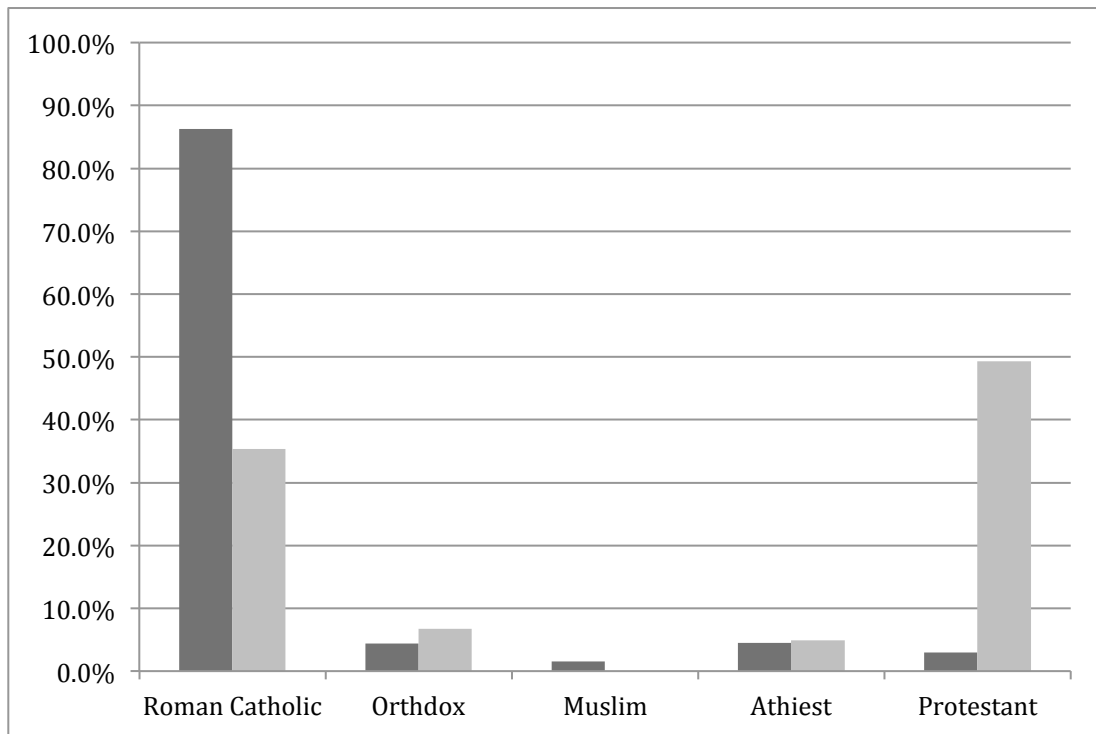


Figure 6. Religious background, 2011 census vs. total survey

In order to better understand the issue of transfer growth, respondents were asked if they had converted in a Baptist church and then if they had been baptized in a Baptist church. Twenty-one percent stated that they had not converted in a Baptist church. These respondents may have taken this question literally, and considering a conversion experience at home or at a camp to not literally be “in a Baptist church.”²⁰ However, when asked if they had been baptized in a Baptist church, approximately the

²⁰ The survey question asked, “Jeste li se obratili u baptističkoj crkvi?” This translates to “Did you convert in a Baptist church?”

same number of respondents, 19.4%, stated that they had not been baptized in a Baptist church. Once again the question could be asked if respondents took this question literally. Most Baptist churches do not have a baptistery, and many perform baptisms in rivers, lakes, or the Adriatic Sea. In examining the results from the Split Baptist Church, where baptisms occur in the sea, 100% stated that they had been baptized in a Baptist church. The question was clearly understood by respondents.

Therefore, I believe that it is safe to assume that there is a relatively sizable minority of 20% within the total survey which consists of transfer growth. The question would then arise, what is the nature of this transfer growth? Is this transfer to Baptist due to theological or personal reasons, or simply due to the limited availability of evangelical churches in Croatia? In many of the towns surveyed there are several other varieties of evangelical churches, but in some of the towns the Baptist church is the only evangelical church for many miles. Examining respondents who stated “no” to both converting and being baptized in a Baptist church, these respondents tend to be more mobile than the survey average, with 60% stating that they lived in a different community than the one in which they were born, and 46% stating that they lived in a different community than the one in which they had converted. These figures are respectively 11% and 14% higher than the results for the total survey. Therefore, it is possible that transfer growth maybe due to availability.

A third option is that there were visitors in the churches the day that the surveys were completed. For the total survey, only 10% of respondents stated that they were not members. However, when examining respondents who stated “no” to both converting and being baptized in a Baptist church, this figure rises to 33%. While higher, this is still a minority of the total survey. The majority of these respondents, 51%, come from a Roman Catholic religious background. Twenty-nine percent come from a Protestant religious background. It would be assumed that those from a Protestant religious background would transfer to the Baptist church due to availability. The

remaining number, less than 10% of the total survey, could then consist of standard transfer growth, those who come to Christ in a non-Baptist evangelical church, were baptized, and then later became Baptists.

Conversion Experience

Focus will now turn away from the background contexts of respondents and towards their conversion experiences. In this section the contours of conversion will be examined: the age at which conversion occurred, the milestones of conversion, the recurrence of the gospel message prior to conversion, and social environment in which conversion occurred.

Age at conversion. The average age at conversion for the total survey is 25.4 years of age. However, there are two major subgroups within the survey with broad variations; those from a Protestant religious background and those from non-Protestant. In the former group the average age at conversion is significantly lower, while for the latter group the age is higher. For Protestants, the average age at conversion is 19.4 years of age. Fifty-one percent of Protestants stated that they converted at less than 16 years of age. The total for those converting below the age of 20 was 68%. Approximately 12% converted between 20 and 29 years of age, with the remaining 11% converting after age 30.²¹

For non-Protestants, the average age at conversion is significantly higher than Protestants with an average of 31.6 years of age. Within the non-Protestant group, those from an Orthodox background had the highest average age at conversion, 39.8 years of age. In general, non-Protestants convert later in life. Only 20% of non-Protestants converted by age 20. Twenty-nine percent of respondents converted in their twenties and 18% converted in their thirties. Twenty-three percent of non-Protestants converted after

²¹Thirty-six respondents (8.7 %) failed to complete this question.

age 40.²² The following chart displays the difference in age at conversion between respondents of a Protestant religious background and non-Protestant religious background.

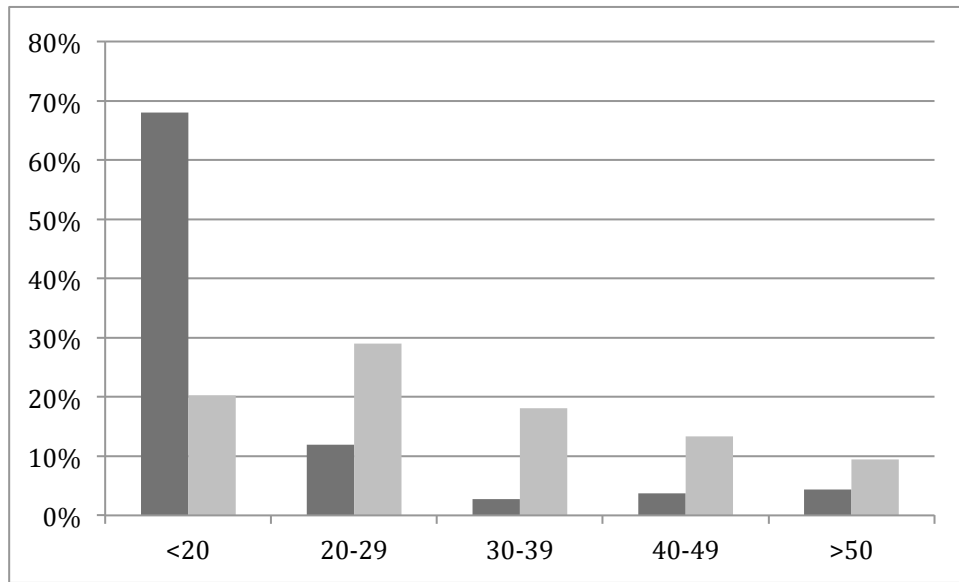


Figure 7. Age at conversion, Protestant vs. non-Protestant religious background

Conversion timeline. There are three primary milestones of conversion that were examined in this survey. The first is the point at which an individual heard the gospel for the first time. The second is the point of conversion. The third point is the point of baptism. While salvation occurs at the second point, the first and third points are also critical in understanding the conversion experience. Measuring the distance between the first point and the second point provides an insight into how long an individual wrestled with the claims of the gospel before accepting Christ. This first segment may be considered the stage of evangelism. Measuring the distance between the second point and the third point provides insight into how long an individual waited before making a

²²Forty-two respondents (9.9 %) failed to complete this question.

public announcement of their conversion and their identification with the Baptist movement. This second segment maybe considered the stage of initial discipleship. These three points, and two segments, taken together will be referred to as the conversion timeline. Respondents were asked to provide the calendar year of each point and averages were based on these responses.

The average conversion timeline for the total survey, from first hearing until the point of baptism, is 8.4 years. The average time from first hearing the gospel until conversion is 7.2 years, and from conversion to baptism is 1.2 years. However, once again, religious background has a significant impact on the length of the conversion timeline. Respondents from a Protestant religious background had an average length of 10.8 years, from first hearing to baptism, while respondents from a non-Protestant religious background had an average length of 7 years. The average time from first hearing the gospel to conversion was 9.2 years for Protestants and 5.9 for non-Protestants. The difference in time between conversion and baptism was not significant between the two groups, however, with 1.6 years for Protestants and 1.1 years for non-Protestants.

Among non-Protestant groups, those from an Orthodox religious background had the longest conversion timeline at 11.4 years, while those from an atheist religious background had the shortest, at 3.2 years. Once again, there was not a significant divergence in the time between conversion and baptism. Roman Catholics averaged 1.1 years, atheist 1.8 years, and Orthodox 1.9 years. The difference between Orthodox and atheist is primarily in terms of the amount of time between first hearing the gospel and the point of conversion. For Orthodox, the average time between first hearing and conversion is 9.5 years, while for atheist it is only 1.4 years.

In looking at the length of the first segment of the conversion timeline, the question must be asked, “Why is the conversion timeline longer for those from a Protestant religious background than those from a non-Protestant religious background?”

The answer to this question is found first in the age at which an individual first hears the gospel and second in the age deemed acceptable by Baptists for an individual to seek baptism. For those from a Protestant religious background, the average age for first hearing the gospel is 10.2 years of age. However, this average age of 10.2 is adjusted based on the way that many respondents answered the question of when they first heard the gospel. Many respondents answered this question by placing the same year as their year of birth. Others simply placed a comment in the field, rather than a year, implying that they had heard the gospel “from birth.”²³ For these respondents I added five years to the age of birth to arrive at a year for their first exposure to the gospel.²⁴ Children born and raised in a Protestant family environment receive the gospel before they can understand it, and most probably accept it subconsciously long before they do consciously. As these children mature, they begin to personalize the message as they experience the reality of sin in their lives.

Baptism practices also have an impact on the length of the conversion timeline. As seen above, there is not a significant difference between Protestant and non-Protestant religious backgrounds in terms of time between conversion and baptism. Therefore, the reason for a longer Protestant conversion timeline is due to a longer period of evangelism. Among Croatian Baptists, I would argue that there is an appropriate time for conversion. This can be seen in their view of baptism. While there is no official statement regarding the acceptable age for baptism among Croatian Baptists, living in the context of a dominant Roman Catholic religious context, there is a hesitancy to baptize children. There were a few respondents who stated that they had been baptized at age

²³“Od rođenje” translates to “from birth.” Other responses included “od malena” (from infancy), “od djetinjstva” (from childhood), “od rođenje slušam” (from birth I am listening), and “od rođenje mama me vodila u crkvu” (from birth mama led me to church).

²⁴I chose to begin the timeline at age five, as that age is recognized by psychologists as the point by which a child has become fully self-aware. See Philippe Rochat, “Five Levels of Self-awareness as they Unfold Early in Life,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 12 (2003): 717–31.

nine and ten, but generally baptisms begin at age fourteen or fifteen.²⁵ Therefore, while a child may actually convert at an earlier age, they will not be formally expected to convert, or to confess their conversion publically, until they are near the acceptable age of baptism. This delay in recognizing conversion serves to extend the conversion time line among respondents from a Protestant religious background.

For those from a non-Protestant religious background, the average age at which they first heard the gospel was 25.7 years of age. This age is well past the appropriate age for conversion and baptism for Croatian Baptists. Yet, on average, those from a non-Protestant religious background took six years before converting. However, there is a wide variation among respondents. Twenty-six percent of respondents converted the same year that they first heard the gospel. Another 17% converted the following year. However, 27% took five years or longer and nearly 20% stated that there were ten years between first hearing the gospel and conversion.

Specific date. As conversion is the critical point on the conversion timeline, the question then arises as to the awareness of individuals as to that point. On the survey respondents were asked if they had converted on a specific date.²⁶ While this would seem to be a straightforward question, 37% of respondents did not answer. Thirty-six percent of respondents stated that they had not converted on a specific date, and only 26% of respondents stated that they had. It could be assumed that those who did not respond to the question did not do so due to the fact that they had not converted on a specific date, and therefore did not understand the question. Either way, only one in four

²⁵All of these baptisms of ten and younger occurred in two churches, Rijeka and Mačkovec. There were several baptisms at age five and six, but it was determined that these surveys were completed by American missionaries serving in Croatian churches. My son was baptized in America at age eleven and we were questioned about this decision in the leadership and members of the Split Baptist Church. Young people in this church were baptized beginning at age fourteen.

²⁶This was a “yes-no” question asked just to the side of the space where respondents placed the year of their conversion.

Croatian Baptists are aware of the moment of their conversion.²⁷

Examining the demographics of the group that stated that they had converted on a specific date, it became evident that there are no outstanding differences between this group and those who stated that they had not converted on a specific date. Gender, age, religious background, and geographic location were all in line with the total survey. The only difference between this subgroup and the whole group is the fact that they are aware of the moment of conversion, and they can mark it on a calendar. It may be worth nothing that even the Protestant/non-Protestant issue did not show up differently here, just since it was mentioned in pretty much every section above.

Witness recurrence. The third element of conversion experience is the recurrence of the gospel message prior to conversion. There are two aspects to this recurrence. First, there is the recurrence of the spoken or written gospel in the life of the individual. This is the direct gospel witness, defined arbitrarily by the respondent as “having heard the gospel.”²⁸ The second aspect of witness recurrence is the witness of believers and churches in the life of the individual.²⁹ This second aspect may be the social environment in which conversion occurs.

The great majority of Croatian Baptists stated that they heard the gospel more than ten times prior to their conversion. Seventy-three percent of respondents stated that

²⁷C. S. Lewis addresses this in describing his own conversion experience: “I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion.” *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955), 237.

²⁸The actual question was “Koliko puta ste čuli evanđelje prije obraćenje?” This translates to “How many times did you hear the gospel prior to conversion?”

²⁹Once again, definition of “believer” and “church” are arbitrary, and were left up to the respondent to determine. The actual questions were “Koliko ste vjernika poznavali prije svog obraćenje?” and “Koliko ste različitih crkava/zajednica pohađali prije obraćenje?” These questions translate to “How many believers did you know before your conversion?” and “How many different churches/fellowships did you attend prior to conversion?” “Believer” is the common term used in evangelical communities in Croatia, to differentiate between traditional religious persons (mainstream Roman Catholic) and non-traditional evangelicals, such as Baptists.

they heard the gospel ten times prior to conversion. Seven percent stated that they heard the gospel between four and ten times. Fourteen percent stated that they heard the gospel less than three times and only 6% stated that they heard the gospel only once.³⁰

Results are similar for recurrence in terms of the number of believers known prior to conversion. Sixty-one percent of respondents stated that they had known more than ten believers prior to conversion. Twelve percent stated that they had known between four and ten believers, and another 12% stated two or three. Only 8% stated that they had known only a single believer prior to conversion.³¹

While the majority of Croatian Baptists had encounters with multiple believers prior to conversion, very few had encounters with multiple churches. Fifty-three percent of respondents stated that they had contact with only one church prior to conversion. Twenty-three percent stated that they had had contact with two or three. Only 8% stated that they had contact with more than three churches.³² This data would tend to support the statement above that there has been very little transfer growth among Croatian Baptists.

As with other elements of the conversion experience, there are variations between respondents of differing religious background. For example, an individual born into a Protestant family will at least have known a minimum of two believers, a mother and a father. Further, they will have known the members of their parents' church. Likewise, growing up in a Protestant family and being involved from an early age in a local church, they will have had hundreds of opportunities to hear the gospel by the age of nineteen, the average age of conversion for those from a Protestant religious background. Not surprisingly, 87% of those from a Protestant religious background

³⁰Six percent of respondents did not respond to this question.

³¹Seven percent of respondents did not respond to this question.

³²Fourteen percent of respondents did not respond to this question.

stated that they heard the gospel more than ten times. Further, 82% stated that they knew more than ten believers prior to conversion. The numbers for those from a Protestant religious background were nearly identical as those of the total survey for number of churches, with 50% stating they had contact with only one church and 22% stating that they had had contact with one or two.

Among those from a non-Protestant religious background there is greater variation in responses. While these respondents did not grow up in an environment saturated by the gospel, they still tended to encounter the gospel numerous times before conversion. Fifty-nine percent stated that they heard the gospel more than ten times. However, in contrast to respondents from a Protestant religious background, there was some variation below this threshold of ten gospel encounters, with 24% stating that they had heard the gospel less than three times and 10% stating that they had heard it only once prior to conversion. Figure 8 displays the non-Protestant religious background variation and the contrast with those from a Protestant religious background for the number of times hearing the gospel prior to conversion.

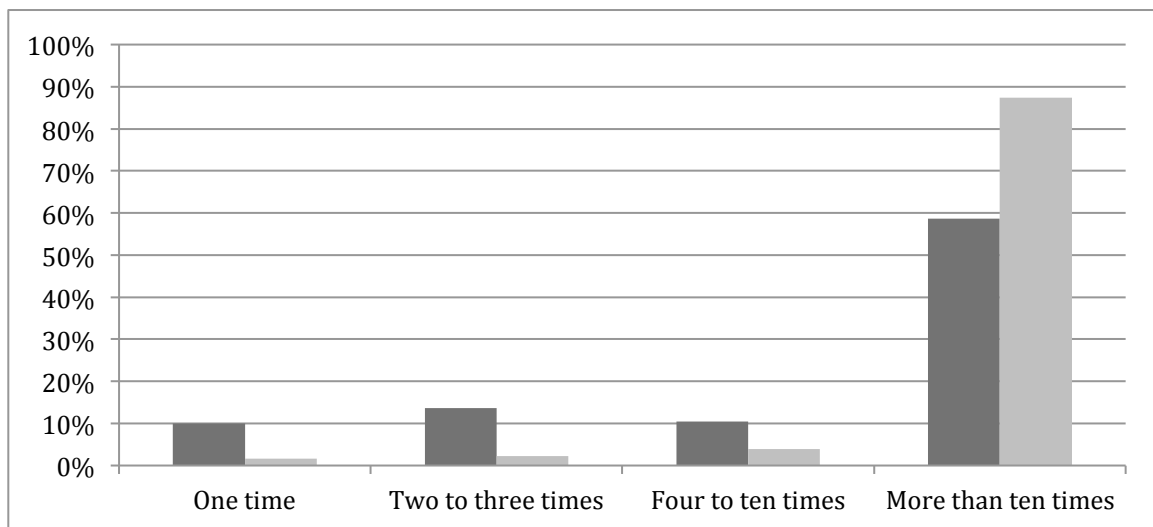


Figure 8. Number of times to hear the gospel prior to conversion, non-Protestant religious background vs. Protestant religious background

A similar trend is found among number of believers known prior to conversion for respondents from a non-Protestant religious background. Forty percent stated that they had known more than ten believers prior to conversion. This is less than half the figure for those from a Protestant religious background. Twenty percent stated that they had known between four and ten and 33% stated that they had known less than three believers. In a context such as Croatia, where in many regions there is only one Croatian Baptist to every five thousand Croatians, it should not be surprising that an individual only knew one or two believers. The following chart illustrates the difference in number of known believers prior to conversion between religious backgrounds.

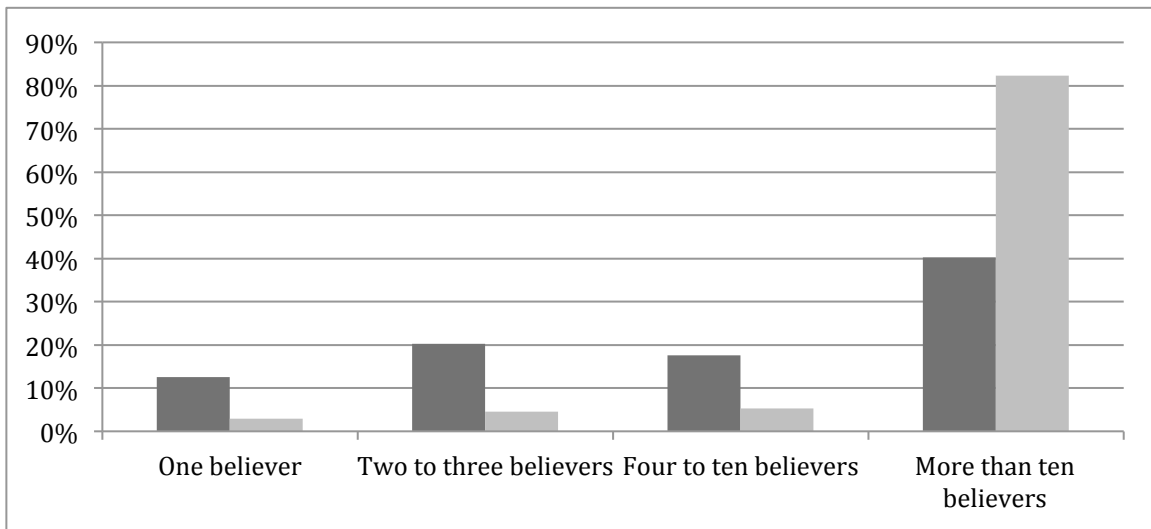


Figure 9. Number of believers known prior to conversion, non-Protestant religious background vs. Protestant religious background

In terms of number of churches attended prior to conversion, there is not as great a divergence between religious backgrounds. While 50% of those from a Protestant religious background had attended only one church prior to conversion and 22% two or three churches, 57% of those from a non-Protestant religious background attended only

one and 25% attended two or three. Regardless of their religious background, Croatian Baptists generally had contact with only one or two churches prior to conversion.

Group conversion. In addition to the number of believers and churches that an individual had contact with prior to conversion, another aspect of the social environment of conversion is whether or not an individual converted alone or with others. On the survey respondents were asked whether they had converted alone, and if not, to state the relation of those with whom they converted. This question regarding individual conversion created serious concerns among many Croatian Baptists, due to the baptistic view of soul competency. In nearly every church surveyed, at least one individual, often the pastor, sought clarification on this question. When I explained that it was possible for two or three individuals to convert “alone” within the same immediate context, those with concerns were satisfied.

Sixty-eight percent of respondents stated that they had converted alone, while 25% responded that they had converted with another.³³ Of the 25% that had not converted alone, 22% did not provide details as to with whom that they had converted.³⁴ The remaining 80% responded in the following manner: 19% stated that they converted with a husband or wife; 18% stated that they had converted with a parent;³⁵ 17% stated that they had converted with their family; 8% stated they had converted with a friend; 6% stated they had converted with a brother or sister. The remaining responses consist of

³³Six percent did not answer this question.

³⁴The initial question asked was “Jeste li obratili sami?” This translates to “Did you convert alone?” The follow up question was “Ako ‘Ne,’ u kojem odnosu (suprug(a), roditelji, braća i/ili sestre...)” This second question translates to “If ‘No,’ in which relation (spouse, parents, brother and/or sister...)”

³⁵For respondents from a Protestant religious background this may have been understood as having a parent lead them to Christ as a child. However, many of those who stated that they had converted with their parents do not come from a Protestant religious background, implying that they converted as adults along with a parent. One example, taken from the narrative section, is as follows, “I followed my mother through the study of several different religions, and when she started to believe in God I did too. When she was saved, she witnessed to me and I was saved as well.” This individual states that she had been involved in New Age, Hare Krishna, and Jehovah’s Witnesses prior to conversion.

various extended family members (cousin, aunt, grandparents), and boyfriend or girlfriend. Note that 80% of the subgroup equates to just 20% of the total survey. This means, for example, that only 5% of the total survey respondents stated that they converted with their spouse.

Means of Conversion

This section will move from the conversion experience to the content of the gospel encounter. The means of conversion are the instruments used by God to bring about conversion in the life of an individual. This section will examine five categories of means and their level of importance in conversion as viewed by Croatian Baptists. These five categories consist of relational witness, verbal witness, written witness, formal evangelistic outreach and finally witness through deed. The survey asked respondents to list, on a scale of one to five, how each of fifteen different means were instrumental in their conversion. These fifteen means were then classified according to the five categories.

While in the survey these categories are distinct, in reality it must be assumed that there is great overlap and interaction between these categories. One example might be a book given by a neighbor. The book would fall under a written witness, while the neighbor who gives it would be a relational witness. Another example would be a faith based humanitarian program in which participants are invited to a meeting where the gospel is shared through a sermon. The individual impacted through this sermon might not recognize the importance of the humanitarian program in bridging to the gospel.

Another note regarding reporting the means of conversion is that this data not only reflects the effectiveness of a mean, but may also reflect the commonness of a mean as an evangelistic strategy. If a local church has had a consistent strategy of street evangelism for twenty years, and none of the converts in that church who have converted in the past twenty have cited street evangelism as being instrumental in their conversion,

then one may state that street evangelism is not effective. However, if a church does not engage in street evangelism, it should not be surprising that street evangelism would not be cited as a critical component of their conversion. In order to fully understand this dynamic, additional research would need to be conducted, comparing historical evangelistic strategies with these results. With these caveats, in the following sections each of the five categories will be introduced along with the survey results and variations between demographic subgroups, such as gender, religious background, geographic.

Relational witness. Relational witness responses consist of witness through family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Among these four categories there is a decreasing level of intimacy and trust, with the highest levels found among family and the lowest among neighbors and co-workers. In Croatia, it is common for there to be multi-generational families living together in the same home. Therefore, the category of family consists of parents, siblings, children, and extended family members. This category is the most intimate, where the individuals see each other daily and in an informal setting. The category of friends, while not as intimate as family, is unique in that it is a relationship based on choice, and involves shared history and interests. The categories of neighbor and co-worker are relations in which individuals generally have little choice. The individual may choose to interact or to avoid, but has no control over who lives beside them or who works with them.

Not surprisingly, the categories of means with the highest perceived impact are the categories which have the highest level of intimacy and trust. Fifty-two percent of respondents stated that family was very important or critical in their conversion. Thirty-six percent cited friends as being instrumental in their conversion. For the categories with the lowest level of intimacy and trust, there was almost no impact at all. Seven percent cited co-workers and only 5% cited neighbors. With a margin of error of 3%, both of these categories appear then to have almost no impact at all.

An examination of the demographic subgroups yields several insights. There was little variation for gender. No more than 3 percentage points separate males from females in all four of the categories.³⁶ There were slight variations when examining areas with a higher Baptist presence as compared with those with a lower Baptist presence. The following chart displays the results from Međimurje, the region with the highest level of Baptist presence, with Dalmatia, the region with the lowest Baptist presence.

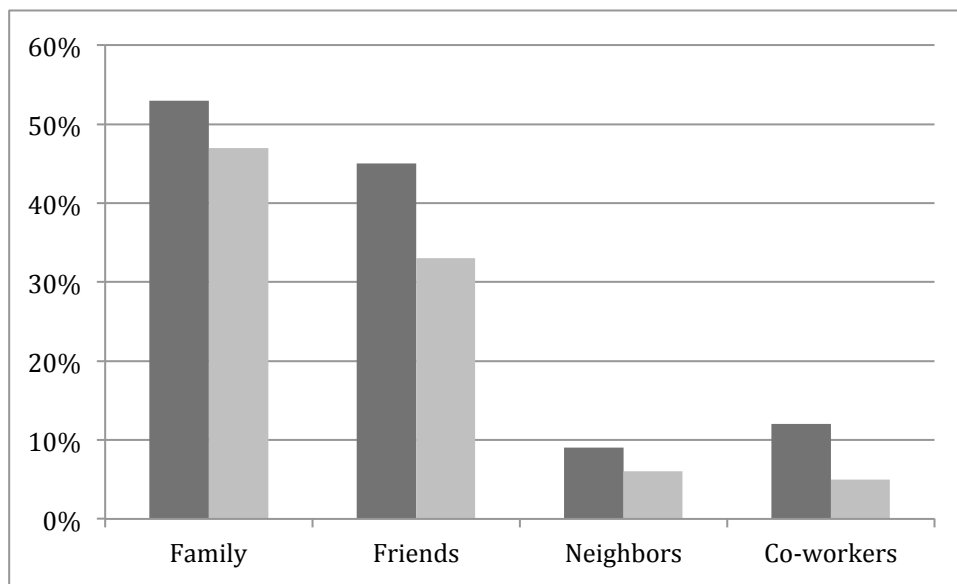


Figure 10. Importance of relational witness in conversion, Međimurje vs. Dalmatia

In the data displayed in figure 10, while the overall trend regarding intimacy remains the same, there are differences between the two regions. In every category, respondents in Međimurje reported a higher influence of relational witness in conversion, particularly in the categories of friends and co-workers. This difference could be due either to the greater relative notoriety of Baptists in Međimurje or to a

³⁶The numbers for gender are as follow: family (52% male, 51% female), friends (34% and 38%), neighbors (3% and 6%), and co-workers (7% and 6%).

greater effectiveness in personal evangelism among Međimurjijian Baptists.

Even greater variation is found when examining relational means from the perspective of religious background. This should be expected as religious background entails family background. In the chart below, results are compared of those of Protestant religious background with those of Roman Catholic and atheist religious background. In the categories of Protestant and non-Protestant religious backgrounds, the importance of family and friends are reversed. Family is highly important to those of a Protestant religious background, while friendship is more important among Roman Catholics and atheists. Once again, neighbors and co-workers are not significant. It may be assumed that the relative importance of family among those of a non-Protestant religious background is due to children reaching their parents.

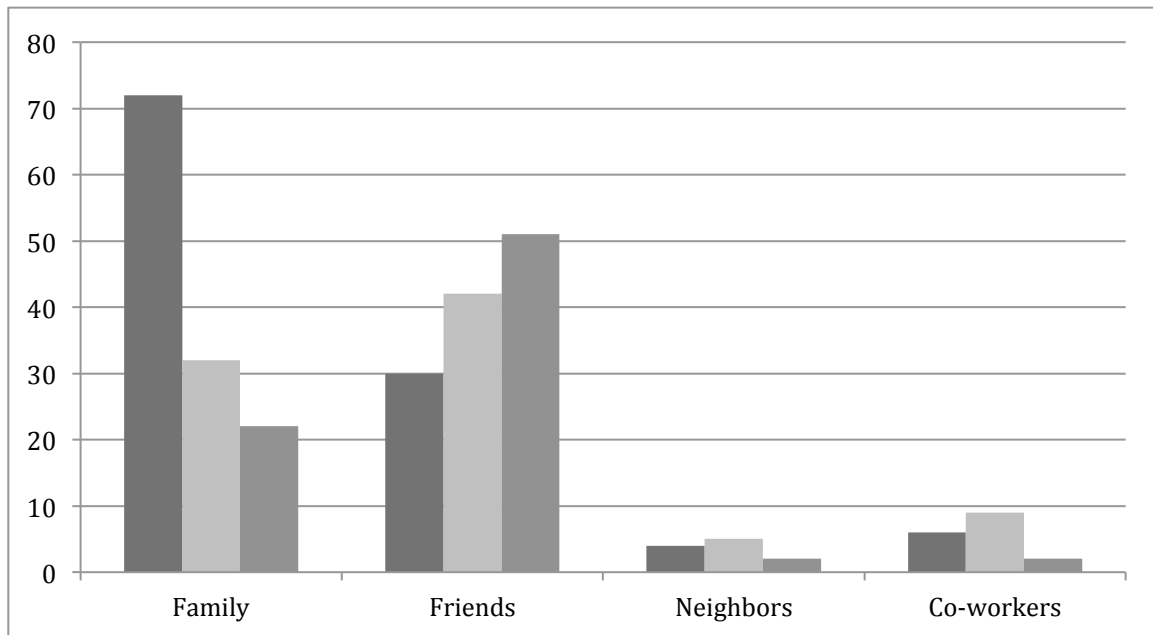


Figure 11. The importance of relational witness in conversion among religious backgrounds, Protestant vs. Roman Catholic vs. Atheist

Verbal witness. The next category of conversion means is that of oral witness, consisting of sermon, small group Bible study, and TV/radio. The first two of these means have a relational component; an individual must intentionally go to a location where a sermon is preached, or where a Bible study is being held, in order to be influenced by these means. Hearing the gospel from a television or radio broadcast may occur when an individual is completely isolated from evangelical believers. Not surprisingly, once again the higher the relational component, the higher the influence on conversion.

Fifty-eight percent of Croatian Baptists cited a sermon as very important or critical in their conversion experience. This is the second highest reported means. Twenty-eight percent cited a small group Bible study while only 6% cited TV/radio. There was no significant variation based on gender, except for small group Bible study.³⁷ One in three women cited this means, while only one in four men did so. In examining regional variations, the primary difference is found in the sermon category. In Međimurje 70% cited sermon as being instrumental, while in Dalmatia only 40% did so. In the oral category there were no significant variations based upon religious background.

Written witness. Written witness responses consist of Bible, religious book, and magazine/tract. The highest ranked means in this category, and the highest ranked means in all categories was the Bible. Sixty-nine percent of respondents cited the Bible as being very important or critical to their conversion. There are a number of different Bible translations available, however most Baptists use the *Kršćanska sadašnjost* version, which holds the imprint of the Roman Catholic Church as authorized.³⁸ Therefore, an

³⁷The numbers for gender are as follow: sermon (56 % male, 60 % female), small group Bible study (23% and 31%), and TV/radio (5% and 6%).

³⁸*Kršćanska sadašnjost* translates to “Christian contemporary,” and the “KS” seal on books serves as a note of authenticity as does Imprimatur. The Croatian Baptist Union publishes their own version of the KS Bible without the Apocrypha.

individual would not have to have had contact with an evangelical to obtain a Bible.

Twenty-five percent of respondents cited books as critical or very important to their conversion. Of this 25%, 66% provided additional information. The most cited book was Billy Graham's *Peace with God*, with 24% from this category, and 36% of those who gave additional information. Those citing *Peace with God* ranged from individuals converting prior to 1970 to after 2010, and came from Protestant, Roman Catholic, and atheist religious backgrounds. The second highest book was Wilhelm Busche's *Jesus: Our Destiny*. Fourteen percent from this category cited this book, and 22% of those who gave additional information. Other books cited include Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*, Josh McDowell's *More than a Carpenter*, and Rabi R. Maharah's *Death of a Guru*. Nine percent of respondents cited tracts and magazines as significant in their conversion. The majority of these respondents did not provide enough information to separate the importance of tracts from magazines.

There were no significant variations in the written witness category in terms of gender or geographical location. When examining this means category in the view of religious background there were two variations. First, for those from a Protestant religious background there was a slightly higher response for the Bible as compared with this from a non-Protestant religious background.³⁹ Second, there was a slightly higher response from those with a non-Protestant religious background for books.⁴⁰ Finally, tracts were slightly higher among those from a Roman Catholic and atheist religious background, but still within the margin of error of those from a Protestant religious background.⁴¹

³⁹Seventy-three percent of those from a Protestant religious background cited the Bible as very important or critical as opposed to 66% of those from a Roman Catholic background, 68% atheist, and 45% Orthodox.

⁴⁰Twenty percent of those from a Protestant religious background cited the books as very important or critical as opposed to 31% of those from a Roman Catholic background and 32% atheist.

⁴¹Twelve percent of those from a Roman Catholic background and 10% of those from an atheist background cited tracts as important or critical, as opposed to 8% of those from a Protestant

Formal evangelistic outreach. Formal evangelistic outreach responses consist of evangelism event, street evangelism, and youth camp. Twenty-nine percentage of respondents cited an evangelism event as being very important or critical to their conversion. Evangelism events cited by respondents included campaign type events as well as evangelical concerts. These events included functions at a local church as well as those held in public spaces. Once again, respondents in this category cited Billy Graham as well as German evangelist Ulrich Parzany.

Twenty percent of respondents cited youth camp as being very important or critical to their conversion. Croatian Baptists maintain camps at Crikvenica, on the northern Adriatic coast, Činta, on the island of Ugljan off the central Adriatic coast, and Zelina Doljina, in Banovina. Only 6% of respondents cited street evangelism as being very important or critical to their conversion. This is not to say that street evangelism was completely without impact. Rather, those who were impacted by this means did not see it as being very important or critical. When expanding the parameters to include all responses except “none,” a slightly different perspective emerges. Twenty percent of respondents cited some influence of street evangelism on their conversion. Oddly, a significant number of these respondents came from a Protestant religious background. A word about why you find this odd would be good.

There was little variation in this category for gender. There were some significant variations based on region and religious background, in particular in regards to youth camp. First, Banovina and Dalmatia were significantly lower than the national average for this category, while Međimurje was slightly above the national average.⁴² The variation was even greater when looking at urban settings, where 30% of respondents

background.

⁴²8% of respondents in Banovina cited youth camp as very important or critical to their conversion, 7% in Dalmatia. 22% of respondents in Međimurje cited youth camp.

cited youth camp as very important or critical.⁴³ The greatest variation in this category was found in religious background. While 29% of respondents from a Protestant religious background cited youth camp as very important or critical to their conversion, only 10 % of those from a non-Protestant religious background did so.⁴⁴

Witness through deed. The responses for witness through deed consist of humanitarian aid and education. In the wake of years of underdevelopment due to communism and the devastation of the Homeland War, witness through deed provided Croatian Baptists, and international religious workers, the opportunity to reach out by meeting non-spiritual needs. From almost every perspective, it would appear that these efforts were very limited in their ability to lead to conversion. In only two specific segments of respondents did this category rise to about 10%. First, among respondents from an atheist religious background, 12% cited humanitarian aid as being very important or critical to their conversion. Second, in the Banovina region, 11% cited education as being very important or critical to their conversion. In particular, English as a second-language courses were cited in Sisak and the surrounding towns and villages.

This is not to say that witness through deed was without impact. Rather, those who were affected by this means did not see it as being very important or critical. When expanding the parameters to include all responses except “none,” a slightly different perspective emerges. Sixteen percent all respondents stated that humanitarian aid had some level of impact on their conversion. Twenty-three percent of all respondents stated that education had an impact on their conversion. Therefore, while not central to conversion, witness through deed has played a role in conversion among Croatsians.

⁴³Five churches surveyed fall into this category, located in the four Croatian cities with a population greater than 100,000: Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, and Osijek. Each of these four cities is located in diverse geographical regions with a variety of Baptist historical presence.

⁴⁴12% atheist, 11% Roman Catholic, and 4% Orthodox.

The Impact of Conflict on Conversion

Having reviewed the entire survey, we will now turn to two specific questions, how conflict and change may have impacted conversion. This section will focus on the impact of the Homeland War conflict on conversion. First, the location of conflict will be discussed, and the Croatian Baptist churches in these areas affected by the war. Second, the demographics of those affected by the war will be compared to the entire survey. And finally, those who were affected by conflict will be examined to see if conversion experience and means of conversion vary from the entire survey.

Conflict Zones

As discussed previously in chapter two, the Homeland War lasted from 1990 to 1995 and was fought between forces of the newly declared Republic of Croatia and ethnic Serbians who did not want to be part of a Croatian national republic. While the entire nation experienced the effects of the war, the primary conflict zones were in Slavonia, Banovina, and Dalmatia. Therefore, two of the three centers of Croatian Baptist life, eastern Slavonia and Banovina, were directly affected by the war.⁴⁵

The effects of the Homeland War in the conflict zones were not limited only to the period of the war. After the *Oluja* offensive in August 1995, the effects of the war remained, in some cases even to the present. While the majority of Croatian refugees returned to their homes following *Oluja*, *Oluja* was the beginning of flight for the Serbian refugees, many of whom did not begin to return until the early 2000s. Both returned to homes that were either looted or completely destroyed.⁴⁶ There are visible scars in many

⁴⁵See figure 4.

⁴⁶Respondent PT16 states in her narrative, “I was a child from a Catholic family, but I didn't know God, I got married and had a baby girl. We were run out of our home, ruined in every sense of the word and my husband was badly wounded and in my desperation God called to me: Don't be afraid, I am with you, I will make you brave, lead you and protect you. I never understood those words because I didn't know God. God allowed me to fall and drown during those times, but He was always with me. When I returned to my city after the war, I came to the ruins of my home, but I found God's home-where I find peace, happiness, love, but above all I found my savior whom I serve and I am faithful to Him for 17 years now, ever since I met Him.”

of the towns, in particular Pakrac, Glina, and Karlovac. There is a mass grave on the outskirts of Petrinja, and monuments to the war dead in nearly all of the towns in Croatia. War invalids are also present in nearly every town, as are the invisible scars of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴⁷ The War has also remained politicized, through annual national observances of the declaration of independence, the massacre of the Vukovar hospital, and the launching of operation *Oluja*.⁴⁸

Conflict Zone Demographics

Sixteen of the thirty-two churches surveyed are located in these conflict zones. Nine of these churches are located on the lines of conflict.⁴⁹ The remaining seven churches are located behind the lines of conflict.⁵⁰ 356 surveys were completed in these sixteen churches, representing 42% of the total survey. These churches are nearly identical to the total survey in terms of gender and but their members are slightly older.⁵¹ When examining the religious background of respondents, these churches report a significantly higher number of those with an Orthodox background. For the total survey, 6.7% of respondents stated that they came from an Orthodox background. For

⁴⁷For post-traumatic stress disorder rate see, “Highest Suicide Rate in Election Years,” *Dalje*, accessed November 11, 2011, <http://dalje.com/en-croatia/photo--highest-suicide-rate-in-election-years/67056>. For suicide rate, “Quality of life in Croatian Homeland War (1991-1995) Veterans who Suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Chronic Pain,” *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, accessed November 11, 2011, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3157409/>.

⁴⁸These respective holidays are *Dan državnosti* (Day of nationhood, June 25), *Dan pobjede i domovinske zahvalnosti* (Day of victory and homeland gratitude, August 5), *Dan grada Vukovara* (Day of the city of Vukovar, November 20).

⁴⁹These nine churches include Dubrovnik, Duga Resa, Golubinjak, Karlovac, Mošćenica, Osijek, Sirač, Sisak, and Zadar. Being “on the line” is an imprecise term, but basically means that they experienced the conflict directly. Dubrovnik, which did not have a church at the time of the conflict, was under siege and bombardment for an extended period. Sisak, Mošćenica, and Karlovac were within a few miles of the front line and suffered from bombardment, and the churches in these areas engaged in direct humanitarian support during the war.

⁵⁰These seven churches include Daruvar, Glina, Nova Gradiška, Pakrac, Petrinja, Plaški, and Žirovac. Some of these towns were “behind the lines” for the entire conflict, others, such as Daruvar and Pakrac were occupied for part of the war.

⁵¹The average age in these churches is 54 years instead of 50 for the total survey.

respondents in the conflict zone, 11.8% stated that they came from an Orthodox background. This is in line with the percentage of Serbians living in Croatia prior to the war, 12.1%.⁵²

Conflict and Conversion Experience

Having examined the demographics of the churches in the conflict zone, we will now look to see how the conflict may have impacted conversion. In this section we will examine conflict and the conversion experience, examining the same elements of the conversion experience as in the total survey. These elements include age at conversion, the conversion timeline, whether the individual is aware of a specific date of conversion, witness recurrence, and group conversion.

The average age of conversion for respondents in conflict zone churches is 27.1 years of age. This is slightly higher than for the total survey, which is 25.3 years of age. The total conversion time line, from first hearing the gospel to baptism, for respondents in conflict zone churches is 9.4 years. This is slightly longer than for the total survey, which is 8.4 years. The time from first hearing the gospel to conversion in conflict zone churches is 8.4, and the time from conversion to baptism is just under one year. In relation to the total survey, conflict zone churches have a longer period between first hearing the gospel and conversion, but a shorter period of time between conversion and baptism. In fact, baptisms occur significantly quicker in the conflict zone churches than in the total survey. Forty-one percent of Croatian Baptists were baptized the same year that they converted, while the rate is 57 % in the conflict zones.

Twenty-four percent of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that they were aware of a specific date of conversion, which is within the margin of error for the

⁵²Twelve percent of the residents of the Yugoslav Republic of Croatia stated that they were Serbian. *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011* (Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku, Republike Hrvatske, 2011), 55.

total survey. Seventy-two percent of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that they had heard the gospel more than ten times prior to conversion. Fifteen percent stated that they had heard the gospel less than three times prior to conversion, and 7% stated that they had heard the gospel only once prior to conversion. Once again, these numbers are within the margin of error for the total survey.

Sixty-three of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that they had known more than ten believers prior to conversion. Twenty-two percent stated that they had known less than three believers prior to conversion. These numbers are nearly identical to the total survey. Seventy-one percent of respondents stated that they had converted alone, which is within the margin of error for the total survey.

In summary, examining the conversion experiences of respondents from conflict zone churches, there are no significant differences other than in the period between conversion and baptism. Nearly 20% of individuals who were baptized the same year that they converted did so during the five-year period of the Homeland War. This raises the question, “Did conflict play a role in increasing the desire for baptism following conversion?” However, there were other factors at play during this time, not the least of which was the end of the Yugoslav communist regime. In order to address this question then, the entire survey must be examined in terms of periods of time, not only in geographical zone of conflict. This topic will be examined in a later section, but first we will look at means of conversion among churches in the conflict zone.

Conflict and Conversion Means

Having examined conversion experiences among churches in the conflict zone, we will now examine the means of conversion. Means of conversion will be examined in terms of relational witness, oral witness, written witness, formal witness, and witness through deed. Results for conflict zone churches will be compared with the results for the total survey. In general, results were similar, though they tended to be of a higher

degree in the conflict zone churches.

Relational witness consists of family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors. Sixty percent of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that the witness of family members was critical or very important in their conversion. Thirty-eight percent stated that the witness of friends was critical or very important. Seven percent cited co-workers and 5% cited neighbors.⁵³ These results are similar to the total survey; however, family is 8 percentage points higher in the conflict zone churches. The other three means are either identical or within the margin of error.

Oral witness consists of preaching, small group Bible study, and radio or television broadcast. Sixty-eight percent of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that preaching was critical or very important in their conversion. Twenty-six percent stated that a small group Bible study was critical or very important. Six percent cited radio or television broadcast. The results for preaching are 10 percentage points higher in the conflict zones than for the total survey. The other two means are identical or within the margin of error.

Written witness consists of the Bible, books, and tracts or magazines. Eight-two percent of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that the Bible was critical or very important in their conversion. Twenty-nine percent stated that books were critical or very important. Thirteen percent cited tracts or magazines. The results for Bible are significantly higher among conflict zone churches than for the total survey, 13 percentage points. Books and tracts are each 4 percentage points higher than for the total survey.

⁵³ Neighbors were not without their influence however, as respondent DR02 states in his narrative. "During the war, 1993, our town had barricades and it was a state of war. I was afraid for my very life, everything I had had disappeared, and in my loneliness I said "now all I have left is God who didn't betray me-if You exist, God, show yourself to me NOW." That same night, during the sirens, in the dark, a new person came to live in our building, a new neighbor, and he talked about God, love, salvation, about sinfulness and redemption. I understood in the depths of my failures and I really wanted to grab on to that "straw of salvation." I didn't even know that what was happening to me was salvation, and today I praise the Lord, twenty years have passed since that day and I am so thankful for that neighbor's testimony."

Formal evangelism consists of evangelistic events, street evangelism, and summer camp. Twenty-nine percent of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that an evangelistic event was critical or very important in their conversion. Sixteen percent stated that summer camp was critical or very important. Six percent cited street evangelism. The results for evangelistic event and street evangelism are identical to the total survey. Summer camp is 4 percentage points lower, the only case in which a means was lower for the conflict zones than the total survey.

Witness through deed consists of humanitarian aid and education. With the needs brought about by the Homeland War, and the international aid agencies and local churches engaged in humanitarian aid, it would be expected that among conflict zone churches that humanitarian aid would have had a significant impact. However, this was not the case. Only 4% of respondents in conflict zone churches stated that humanitarian aid was critical or very important in their conversion.⁵⁴ This was 1% less than for the total survey. Ten percent cited education as critical or very important. This was 2 percentage points higher than the total survey.

Summary

In summary then, once again there are no significant differences between the responses of individuals in conflict zone churches and the general survey. While in general the responses from the conflict zone churches tended to be higher, the patterns of significant means remain the same. The Bible remains the primary mean of conversion, followed by sermon, family, friends, and evangelistic event. Perhaps the primary result of this examination is that respondents do not view the humanitarian response to the

⁵⁴Humanitarian aid was not without impact; however, the impact was limited. Respondent GL02, an atheist female from one of the conflict zone churches wrote in her narrative, "After the war, in my town, [redacted], some people came from Zagreb and they had Bibles as part of their humanitarian donation. One neighbor invited me to go with her to hear them speak, she said I would love what they had to say. It was as she said it would be and from that moment God was my God and Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and I live together in love and fullness." This respondent heard the gospel during the war, in 1994, and converted and was baptized in 1995.

conflict as playing a significant role in their conversion experience.

The Impact of Change on Conversion

Having reviewed the question of the impact of conflict on conversion, we will now address the question of the impact of change on conversion. As noted in chapter two, the four decades between 1970 and 2010 brought significant political and social change to the Croatian people. The 1970s began with the Croatian Spring and Tito and the Yugoslavian government's firm response to this nationalist movement. The decade of the 1970s saw a rise in identification with the non-ethnic identity of Yugoslavian. The 1980s once again saw a rise in Croatian nationalism; particularly towards the end of the decade the east-west tension related to the Cold War began to wane.

The 1990s saw the emergence of the Croatian Republic and the conflict of the Homeland War. The 2000s began with Croatian nationalism at an all time high. As 1980 was the high-water mark of Yugoslavism, 2000 was the high-water mark of Croatian nationalism. However, as the economic and political costs of the war were counted this began to dissipate. The first four years of the 2010s have shown the signs of a gradual waning of nationalistic intensity, and Croatia's integration into both NATO and the European Union.

Throughout these varying periods of social and political upheaval, Croatians have encountered Christ and converted. In this section, the conversions of Croatian Baptists will be examined by each decade. First, the general statistics by decade will be discussed. Second, conversion experiences will be compared among the four decades. And finally, means of conversion will be examined in each of the four decades.

Conversion By Decade

Two caveats must be made prior to examining the data of conversion by decade. First, when examining a period of forty years, it must be conceded that the data will be skewed towards more recent conversions, simply because of life expectancy.

With the average conversion age of Croatian Baptists standing at 25.3 years, an individual born in 1940, who converted in 1966, and completing the survey in 2013 would be 73 years of age. With a life expectancy of 76.4 years, this respondent would be towards the end of life.⁵⁵ Therefore, it should be expected that there would be many less respondents from the earlier decades. However, as this section focuses on the date of conversion, with a primary focus beginning in 1970, the average age of respondents would be 69. This age is below the expectancy for both males and females in Croatia.⁵⁶

Second, as stated in the first chapter, Croatian Baptist churches have experienced loss of members following conversion and baptism. Therefore, there the possibility exists that those who converted more recently are overly represented in this survey, while those who converted earlier would not be under represented. However, it would be exceedingly difficult to obtain information from individuals who departed the Baptist churches over the past four decades.

Number of conversions by decade. Based upon survey data, the number of conversions among Croatian Baptists has increased with each decade, though unevenly so. The breakout of conversion by decades is as follows. 120 respondents stated that they converted prior to 1970. 83 respondents stated that they converted during the 1970s. 88 respondents stated that they converted in the 1980s. 212 respondents stated that they converted during the 1990s. 161 respondents stated that they converted during the first decade of the twenty-first century. 102 respondents stated that have converted in 2010 or later. Thus, 62% (475) of Croatian Baptists converted following the establishment of the Republic of Croatia in 1991.

These figures work out to approximately 8 conversions per year in the 1970s

⁵⁵*Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2011*, 57.

⁵⁶The life expectancy for males is 72.8 years and 80.2 years for females. Ibid.

and 1980s, 21 conversions per year during the 1990s, and 16 conversions per year during the first decade of the 2000s. While there are only four years of data for the second decade of the 2000s, the average for these four years is 25.5 conversion per year.

Therefore, after a spike in the 1990s, there was a slight decline in the first decade of the 2000s. However, the rate for the 2010s would indicate that the current decade will eclipse both the 1990s and 2000s. The following chart depicts these numbers by percent of the total survey.

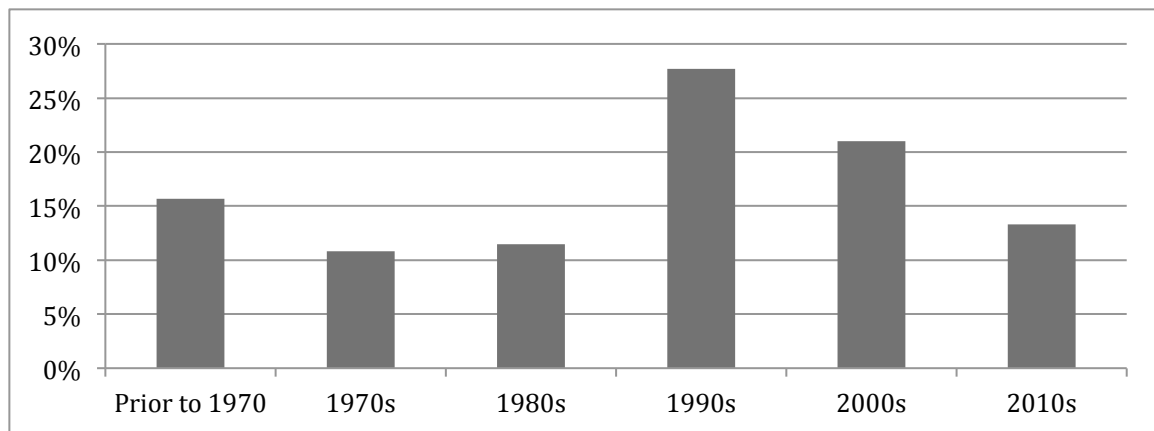


Figure 12. Percentage of conversions by decade

Religious background. The religious background of Croatian Baptists has shifted over the decades. Prior to 1980 there is a strong predominance of individuals from a Protestant religious background. Approximately 70% of Croatian Baptists come from a Protestant religious background. Just fewer than 20% of Croatian Baptists come from a Roman Catholic religious background, and just under 10% from an Orthodox religious background.

In the 1980s there is a sharp change in the religious backgrounds of Croatian Baptists. There is a sharp increase, from 18% to 38%, among individuals from a Roman Catholic background, and a drop from 71% to 58% among individuals from a Protestant background. This trend continues in the 1990s with an apparent sharp decrease, from

58% to 34%, among individuals from a Protestant religious background. However, while there is a decrease in percentage, in fact, in terms of actual conversions, there is an increase of nearly 30% from the 1980s to the 1990s. The drop in percentage is due to the fact that the total number of conversions double in the decade of 1990s and there are a greater number of individuals with Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and atheist religious backgrounds. Statistics for conversion by decade in terms of religious background are displayed in the following table. Bars represent each of the four primary religious backgrounds: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, atheist, and Protestant.

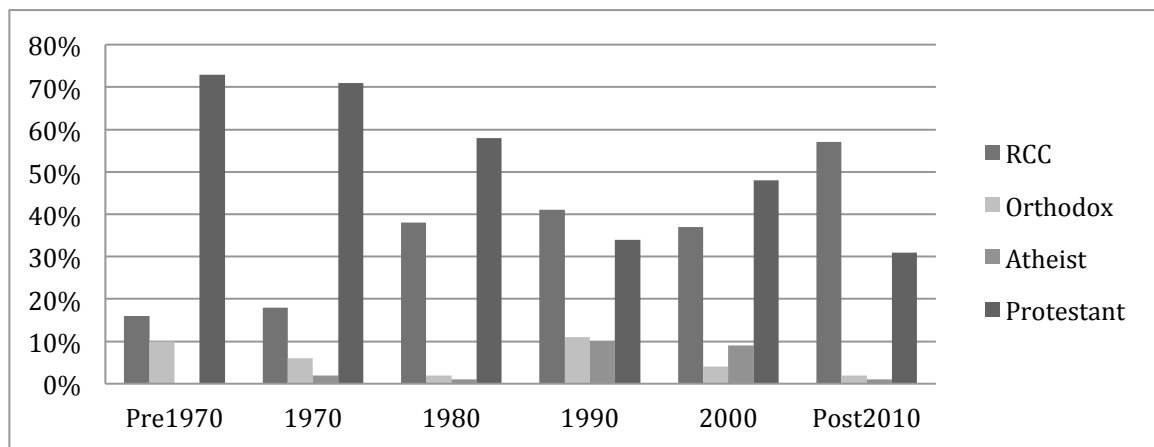


Figure 13. Conversion by decade in terms of religious background

In the 1990s, for the first time, there are more converts from a Roman Catholic religious background than from a Protestant religious background. During this decade there are also significant increases in conversions from among Orthodox and atheist religious backgrounds, with 10% of conversions coming from each of these two groups. During the following decade, the numbers revert, with more converts from a Protestant background than Roman Catholic background. However, based upon the data from the first four years of the current decade, it appears that once again more converts will come from a Roman Catholic background. In fact, in the entire decade of the 2000s there were

59 converts from a Roman Catholic background. For the first four years of the current decade there are already 58 converts from a Roman Catholic background.

Variations in Conversion Experience

In this section, conversion experience will be contrasted by decade. First, the conversion timeline will be examined. Second, the convert's awareness of a specific moment of conversion will be reviewed. Third, the effect of witness recurrence will be examined, both in terms of recurrence of message and number of known believers. Finally, the issue of group conversion will be reviewed.

Age at time of conversion. The average age at the time of conversion has generally increased with each decade. Prior to 1970, more than half of respondents stated that they had converted before the age of 16. Since the 1990s, roughly the same numbers have converted after the age of 25. The following chart provides the percentage of respondents in each age group.

Table 6. Age at conversion by decade, by percentage

Age	Pre-1970	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Post-2010
<16	56	41	39	24	31	21
17-24	32	38	35	22	21	27
25-54	7	20	25	48	37	43
>55	0	0	1	6	10	10

Conversion timeline. In general there has been a gradual shortening of the conversion timeline. This is due primarily to a shortening of the number of years between first hearing the gospel and conversion. The time between conversion and baptism has generally remained steady. The following chart displays the first half of the conversion timeline, from the year of first hearing the gospel to conversion.

Table 7. Number of years from first hearing the gospel to conversion, by percentage

Years	Pre1970	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
0-1	12	11	13	29	17	19
1 to 3	11	13	20	30	22	22
3 to 9	18	24	17	9	18	18
> 10	47	41	39	25	34	40

Prior to 1990, nearly two thirds of Croatian Baptists took more than three years from first hearing the gospel to their conversion. This changed dramatically with the 1990s. During the 1990s nearly two thirds of Croatian Baptists converted within three years of first hearing the Gospel. During the 1990s, nearly one third converted the same year that they first heard the gospel. Following the 1990s, the average has been evenly divided above and below the three-year mark.

In general, the second half of the conversion timeline has remained steady throughout the four decades. Nearly half of Croatian Baptists are baptized the same year as conversion, and the majority of the remaining individuals are baptized in the first few years following. The following chart displays the average number of years between conversion and baptism.⁵⁷

Table 8. Number of years from conversion to baptism, by percentage

Years	Pre-1970	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Post-2010
None	54	49	43	46	41	38
1 to 3	30	33	43	42	44	33
3 to 9	7	14	6	5	10	5
> 10	2	4	7	5	2	1

⁵⁷ Data is incomplete for the 2010s, as 24% of respondents who converted during the first four years of this decade did not give a date for baptism. This is mostly like to due to their recent conversion, and therefore not having been baptized yet.

Specific date. The awareness of a specific date of conversion among Croatian Baptists has generally remained unchanged throughout the four decades. The highest response to this question is found in the 1970s, when 39% of respondents cited a specific date of conversion. In all other periods, the average was just below 30%. Throughout all periods, a significant number did not answer this question, leading to the assumption that they likewise are not aware of a specific date of conversion. The following chart provides the average responses by decade.

Table 9. Awareness of a specific date of conversion, by percentage

	Pre-1970	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Post-2010
Yes	23	39	28	30	28	26
No	24	25	49	38	43	36
N/A	53	36	23	33	29	37

Witness recurrence. Through the past four decades there has been a trend towards conversions with fewer witness recurrences. This is true both for number of times hearing the gospel as well as the number of believers known prior to conversion. Throughout all four decades the majority of Croatian Baptists report more than ten gospel encounters prior to conversion. However, there is also an increasing trend of those who responded to the gospel after only three or less encounters. The following chart displays the witness recurrence in of percentage by decade.

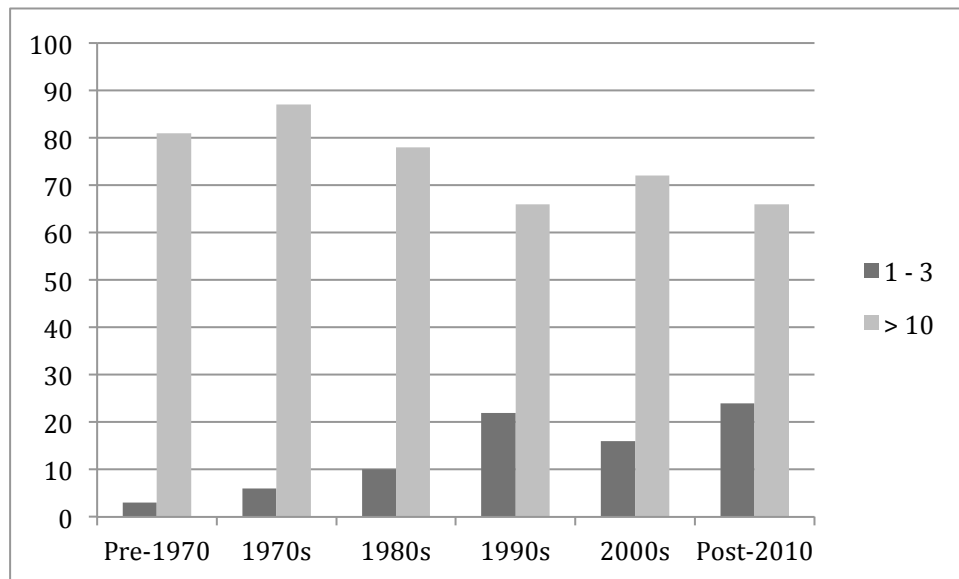


Figure 14. Number of gospel encounters prior to conversion, by percentage

The same trend is true for the number of believers known prior to conversion. Once again, the majority of Croatian Baptists report having known ten or more believers prior to conversion. However, with the exception of the first decade of the 2000s, there is a steady increase in those who report having known three or less believers. Figure 15 displays the number of known believers prior to conversion by decade.

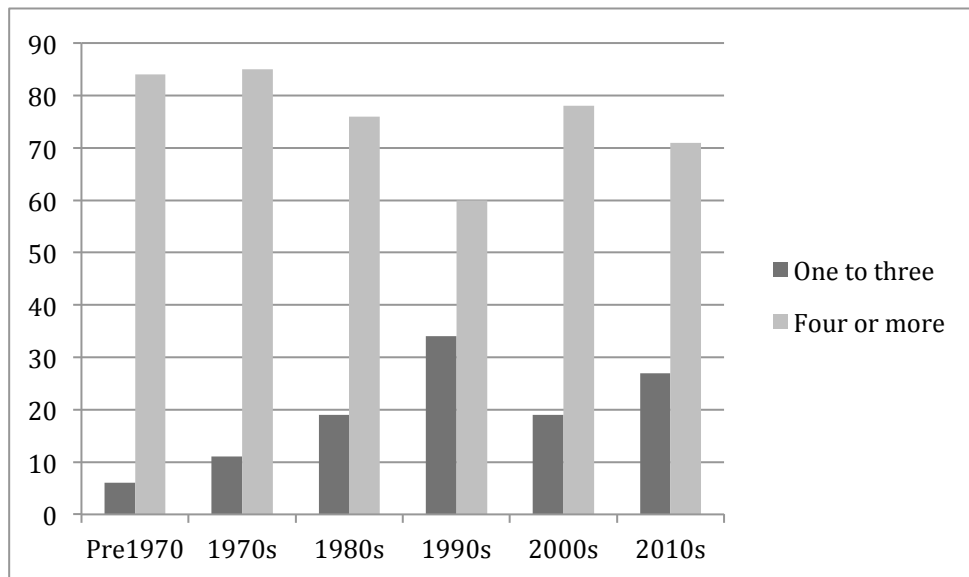


Figure 15. Number of believers known prior to conversion, by percentage

Group conversion. There is no variation between decades for Croatian Baptists in terms of group conversion. In each period roughly 75% report having converted alone, while 25% stated that they converted with others.

Summary. Two primary trends are evident in examining the conversion experience of Croatian Baptists by decade. The first is the number of conversions. The second is the nature of conversions. In general, while there has not been a massive wave of conversions, as one would expect to see in a time of spiritual awakening, there has been a consistent increase in the number of conversions. Further, these conversions are not occurring merely as a result of spiritual reproduction following physical reproduction. Rather, through the past twenty-five years there is an increase in the number of individuals converting from a non-Protestant religious background. The greatest growth is found in the 1990s, with a slight reduction in the first decade of the 2000s. However,

examining the growth during the first four years of the current decade present a picture by which current growth could easily outstrip that of the 1990s.

Second, just as there has been an increase of growth in conversion, the amount of time and exposure to the gospel has decreased. Over the periods covered there has been a decrease in length of time from first hearing the gospel to the point of conversion. Further, there has been a decrease in the number of believers known prior to conversion. However, what these trends may indicate, rather than a change in the way that Croatians convert, is that individuals of different religious backgrounds experience conversion differently, based upon their contexts at the time of conversion.

Variations in Means of Conversion

In this section the means of conversion by decade will be examined. Each of the six time periods will be discussed individually, and then a summary of trends will be presented.

Prior to 1970. Prior to 1970, the most significant means of conversion was family with 68% of respondents citing this means. This high response for this means reflects the fact that 73% of Croatian Baptists from this period were raised in a Protestant religious background. The second and third responses were relatively close with 53% for Bible and 50% for sermon. Twenty-five percent cited an evangelistic event as being significant in their conversion, while 22% cited friends.

1970s. Beginning in the 1970s, the Bible becomes the primary means of conversion for all remaining periods of the survey. Seventy-seven percent of respondents from this time period cite the Bible as being critical or very important to their conversion. Sixty-five percent of respondents cite sermon and 60% cite family. Thirty-six percent cite an evangelistic event and 27% cite a small group Bible study. This fifth means is closely followed by summer camp, with 25% of respondents citing this category.

1980s. The primary means for this time period is the Bible, with 75% of respondents citing this category. Following the Bible, there are an equal number of responses for sermon and family, each with 64%. Next are evangelistic event (42%), small group Bible study (39%), and finally friends (38%). The 1980s are significant in that in this decade tracts are relatively significant in their importance, with 18% of respondents from this time period marking this means.

1990s. Once again the primary means for this time period is the Bible, with 70% of respondents citing this category. The other significant means from this period are sermon (56%), friends (42%), family (38%), and evangelistic event (28%). There are two significant notes for this time period, as it coincides with the previous section's discussion of conflict and conversion. First, during this period of significant humanitarian aid in the wake of the Homeland War, this means of conversion is cited by less respondents than in any other time period. Second, during this period, for the first time, the category of friends becomes more significant to conversion than family.

2000s. During this period the most cited means of conversion is once again the Bible, with 71%. The category of Bible is followed by the categories of sermon (58%), family (52%), and friends (43%). The categories small group Bible study, books, and summer camp are all cited by 27% of respondents.

Post 2010. While the sixth period covers only approximately four years (2010 through the period of the survey, late 2013 to late 2014), this data reflects the most contemporary view of conversion among Croatian Baptists. The responses during these four years are similar to the responses during the 1990s. The most cited means is the Bible (79%), followed by sermon (75%), friends (48%), family (44%), and small group Bible study (43%). Evangelistic events and summer camp are both significant with each having 28% of respondents citing these means.

Summary. Upon reviewing this data, several trends become evident. The first is the overwhelming importance of Scripture in conversion. Since 1970, 70% or more of respondents cite the reading of the Bible as being critical or very important to their conversion. From my perspective of seeing the Bible as the inspired Word of God, this high percentage is not surprising. In fact, the opposite is surprising, that there is not an even higher level of respondents citing the Bible. What may account for this is the tendency of Croatian Baptists to respond more to oral means than written. When comparing non-Bible written means to oral means, in almost every period except for the 1990s, the categories of sermon and small group Bible study score higher than written means.

The second trend is the relative decline in the importance of family in conversion and the rise in the importance of friendship in conversion. Prior to the 1970s, family was the most important means of conversion, more important even than the Bible. However, following 1970 the importance of family in conversion has steadily dropped. The lowest period is during the 1990s, and following a rise in the first decade of the 2000s, the number has receded again among the most recent converts. The data for these two periods, the 1990s and 2010s, supports the data for religious background, in which in both of these periods, there are more individuals from a Roman Catholic background than from a Protestant background.

The third trend is the ongoing importance of formal evangelism over evangelism through deed. Throughout all the periods covered, humanitarian aid never rose to double-digit significance. Further, the period of the Homeland War, in the 1990s, scored the lowest percentage, within the margin of error for having no impact. Education fared slightly better in some periods, but was generally at or below 10% throughout. Formal evangelism, however, has tended to be more significant. In general throughout these periods, evangelism events have scored around 3%, and summer camps have generally scored between 25% and 30%.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on reporting the results of the field survey. In the first section the total survey was examined, in terms of demographics, conversion experience, and means to conversion for Croatian Baptists. In the second section, the impact of conflict on conversion was examined, by a study of the responses from churches in the Homeland War conflict zone. Finally, in the last section, the impact of change has been examined, by reviewing the survey responses across the past four decades. In the following chapter a synthesis of the data from this chapter, along with the two preceding chapters, will to seek provide insights into the teleological question, “How do Croatians convert?”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the introductory chapter, three primary questions were raised as the basis for conducting this study. These three questions were referred to as the initial problem, the epistemological problem, and the teleological problem. The initial problem consists of the question, “How have Croatians experienced conversion during four decades of conflict and change?” The epistemological problem consists of the questions, “Who are the Croatians?” and “What is conversion?” The teleological problem consists of the question, “How could more Croatians convert?” The epistemological questions were addressed in chapters 2 and 3, and the initial question was addressed in chapter 4. In this final chapter, I will focus on the teleological question.

I will address the teleological question in three stages. I will begin by briefly summarizing how Croatian Baptists have experienced conversion, based upon the answers to the initial problem. I will also review the impact of conflict and change on conversion, as seen in the forty years of the study. Second, based upon answers to the epistemological problem, I will examine the reasons why so few Croatians have experienced conversion. Third, I will recommend steps that national and international gospel workers should take in seeking to reach the 99.99% of Croatians who have not experienced conversion. Finally, in the conclusion of this chapter, I will recommend areas for further research that could yield greater insight into the teleological question.

The Normative Conversion Experience

What is the normative conversion experience for Croatians? This was the initial problem that led to this study. In the opening of chapter 1, two individuals, Željka

and Tomislav, were introduced and their conversion experiences compared. Željka's experience lasted twenty years, while Tomislav's experience lasted less than an hour. Željka came into contact with the gospel for the first time at age twenty-five, when a stranger gave her a New Testament, and she converted at age fifty-one. At that time her husband had been a believer for five years and she had been visiting a church of approximately thirty believers for two years. Željka converted and was baptized the same year, along with her daughter. In contrast, Tomislav converted the first time that he heard the gospel, at a summer camp, in the form of a sermon about the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Prior to his conversion he had had no personal contacts with any born again believers. Tomislav was twenty-two when he converted and was baptized the same year. Which of these two conversion experiences is closer to the norm for Croatians?

“Ana”

Based upon surveys with more than eight hundred Croatian Baptists, I can say with confidence that both of these experiences are extremes. The “average” Croatian Baptist looks something like the following composite personality, which I will refer to as “Ana.”¹ Ana is nearly fifty years of age and lives in north-central Croatia. She grew up in a family in which both parents were Baptist. Ana converted in the 1990s, at the age of twenty-five, after having heard the gospel multiple times over the course of seven years. She does not remember a specific date when she converted. She was baptized within a year of her conversion, in her local church, the only church that she has ever attended. Ana considers personal Bible reading, the preaching in her local church, and the influence of her family to be the primary means through which she was converted.

“Ana” is of course a gross oversimplification of Croatian Baptists, and glosses

¹“Ana” is the most common female name among Croatians since 1950. “Kretanje popularnosti 100 najčešćih imena od 1950. do 2010,” Imehrvatsko.net, accessed April 21, 2015, available at <http://imehrvatsko.net/cmspage/1/top-100-baby-names-in-croatia>.

over the major feature of their makeup, namely that half of all Croatian Baptists did not grow up in Protestant religious backgrounds. Half of all Croatian Baptists are first generation evangelical believers. Both Željka and Tomislav differ from Ana in this respect; they are both first generation believers. While Željka is female and nearly the same age as Ana, she is from the south of Croatia and grew up in a Roman Catholic family. Tomislav also grew up in a Roman Catholic family, and while he is from north-central Croatia, he is male and significantly younger than Ana.

Both Željka and Tomislav experienced outsider conversion, while Ana experienced insider conversion. Therefore, rather than seeking one composite conversion experience for all Croatian Baptists, religious background must be taken into consideration when looking for a normative conversion experience. The context in which conversion occurs is dramatically different for those who experience insider conversion as opposed to outsider conversion, so that two normative conversion experiences must be sought for Croatians.

Insider Conversion

In this section I will use the term “insider conversion” for all those who stated that they grew up in a Protestant religious background. I will not examine demographic information, but only the conversion timeline and the means of conversion.

Conversion timeline. Nearly three out of four individuals in this category converted before the age of 20. Ten percent of those who experienced insider conversion converted in their twenties, with the remaining 15% converting after the age of 29. This is the obvious result of having grown up in an environment sympathetic to the gospel and where the gospel was promoted. Therefore, those experiencing insider conversion convert relatively early in life.

The conversion timeline for insider conversion generally begins with conception; the children of Croatian Baptists are in church from the womb onwards.

Insider converts are “on the radar” of believers since before birth and their early lives are saturated in prayer and exposure to the gospel message in both the home and church. However, I chose to begin the timeline at age five, as that age is recognized by psychologists as the point by which a child has become fully self-aware.² Therefore, with this initial point set, the average conversion timeline for insider converts in Croatia is ten and a half years. Eighty-seven percent of insider converts heard the gospel message more than ten times. Eighty-two percent of insider converts knew more than ten believers before conversion.

Means of conversion. Insider converts cite the Bible as the most important influence in their conversion. The second most important influence on insider conversion is family, and the third most important is preaching in the local church. The order of the second and third means for insider converts are at odds with the experience of “Ana,” yet it is the family which makes an insider convert an insider. The family environment serves as a critical means through which the gospel message is expressed, in both word and deed.

Three other means were significant for insider converts: formal evangelistic events, summer camp, and small group Bible study. All three of these must be seen in the light of the alternation conversion experience, where “a relatively limited form of change which actually develops out of one’s own past.”³ Young persons growing up in an environment saturated with the gospel, when experiencing conversion, do not undergo a radical reformulation of their worldview. Rather, in personalizing the gospel message, they are confirming the worldview that they have inherited from their parents and their

²Philippe Rochat, “Five Levels of Self-awareness as they Unfold Early in Life,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 12 (2003): 717–31.

³Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 12. See chap. 3 for a fuller discussion of this.

parents' faith community. In most cases, the unconverted children of Baptists will have developed lifestyles in line with the faith community, and externally will not seem radically different than members of the faith community who have converted. Young persons experiencing insider conversion do, however, need a venue in which they may formally announce the internal change once it occurs. Croatian Baptist churches do not have a weekly "altar call," in which a young person may "walk the aisle" and "pray to receive Christ" before the faith community. Therefore, evangelistic events and summer camps serve as venues where it is appropriate to express conversion. Finally, small group Bible studies, or *vjeronauk* (faith teaching) for children, provide a deeper knowledge of a faith already taken for granted due to one's family spiritual heritage, providing an age-specific exposition of the gospel message.⁴

Outsider Conversion

In this section I will use the term outsider conversion for all those who stated that they did not grow up in a Protestant religious background. Once again, I will not focus on demographic information, but only on the conversion timeline and the means of conversion.

Conversion timeline. Those experiencing outsider conversion convert later in life than insider converts. This is an obvious consequence of not being exposed to the gospel at an early age, as well as the result of not growing up in an environment sympathetic to the gospel worldview. The gospel confronts and contradicts their previous worldview, and therefore their conversion experience is not alteration, but rather

⁴*Vjeronauk* is roughly the Croatian equivalent of Sunday School in the United States. It generally occurs during the Sunday sermon; children attend the worship service, and then exit to their classrooms for *vjeronauk*, which is, depending on the size of the church, taught in age specific groups.

conversion or transformation, in the Gaventa typology.⁵ Whereas the vast majority of those experiencing insider conversion convert before the age of 20, only 20% of outsider converts do so. The greatest number of those experiencing outsider conversion convert during their twenties, and nearly as many convert during their thirties as do before the age of twenty. Further, nearly one in four convert after the age of forty. The outsider conversion experience is much broader and more varied than the experience of the insider convert.

The average conversion timeline for outsider converts is seven years, with six years between first hearing the gospel and conversion, and another year following conversion before baptism. Yet this time line is significantly shorter for atheists, four years total, and significantly longer for Orthodox, twelve years total. I believe that this striking difference between atheists and Orthodox reveals that social pressure is a greater stumbling block to the gospel rather than the actual claims that the gospel makes. An atheist experiences conversion in the terms of Gaventa's conversion, while an Orthodox experiences conversion as transformation; the worldview change is much more radical for the atheist.

However, the one who faces a greater worldview change experiences conversion in a shorter period of time than the one with a less radical worldview change. Therefore, the impact of social pressure is not merely in terms of keeping one from participating, by denying access, but also has an impact in that an individual must "de-program" the false religion before truly comprehending the gospel message. It would seem then that there is a greater advantage to a worldview with a greater divergence from the gospel worldview, than in a worldview that is closer to the gospel worldview. This

⁵Gaventa, 12. Conversion is defined as "a pendulum-like change in which there is a rupture between past and present, with the past portrayed in strongly negative terms." Transformation is, "a radical change of perspective which does not require a rejection or negation of the past or of previously held values, but nevertheless involves a new perception, a re-cognition of the past." See chap. 3.

will be discussed at greater length below in the following section dealing with conversion resistance.

The outsider conversion experience is generally marked with a repetition of gospel message and messengers, though to a lesser extent than for insider conversion. Sixty percent of outsider converts report hearing the gospel more than ten times while Twenty-four percent report hearing the gospel three or less times. Forty percent of outsider converts report knowing more than ten believers prior to conversion, while 33% report knowing three or less believers. Once again, a much broader and more varied experience is represented in outsider conversion than in insider conversion. I believe that this is due to the variety of contexts in which individuals lived prior to conversion.

Means of conversion. Outsider converts cite the Bible as the primary influence on their conversion. This response was the same both for insider converts and outsider converts, and must be seen as reflecting not only their conversion experience, but also the theology of the movement into which they converted, as Croatian Baptists hold a very high view of Scripture. The second highest influence on conversion was preaching in the local church. The third influence was that of friends.

For outsider converts, friends take on the role that the family serves for insider converts. The outsider has no other living witness available than any friends they know who may be believers. With no believing friends, the outsider's access to the gospel is limited to the Bible, written materials they may encounter, and radio or television broadcasts. As Croatian Baptist churches are generally small, in larger population areas, an individual may not know of one's existence, and in smaller population areas may not have the courage or inclination to attend. Certainly the Holy Spirit can utilize these means; they are fully sufficient to lead an individual to conversion under the power of the Holy Spirit. However, a living witness, in the form of a family member for an insider or friend for an outsider, can not only point to other means, but can actually be a means

through which the gospel is proclaimed, and interactive means which can not only proclaim the gospel, but also serve, comfort, encourage, and pray for salvation.

Other significant means for outsider converts include family, books, small group Bible studies, and evangelistic events. That family should be significant for outsiders is surprising. Thirty-two percent of respondents from a Roman Catholic religious background cited family, while this number was 20% for non-Roman Catholics. Clearly, while these individuals did not grow up in an environment saturated with the gospel, the Holy Spirit was able to use something in that environment, whether a respect for Scripture or an ethical lifestyle, to lead them towards the gospel. The importance of books and small group Bible studies reveal a need for obtaining a greater knowledge in conversion experience, a knowledge that had been lacking in their early years. Finally, evangelistic events provide both a concentrated presentation of the gospel by trained or gifted gospel workers, with a clear call to respond, as well as a venue to respond which is not available elsewhere.

The Impact of Conflict and Change

In the transition from Yugoslavia to Croatia, the Croatian people experienced significant change and the Homeland War added a destructive conflict to this experience. Based upon examinations of survey results from conflict zones, there were no significant differences between the responses of individuals in conflict zone churches and the general survey. Significant change was evident when conversion was examined by decade, however. The second half of the period covered in this project, 1990-2010, the period of the Republic of Croatia, saw a greater number of conversions than the first half of this project, the period of the Yugoslavia. The end of the communist regime and the establishment of a democratic government with an open society in which Baptists could freely evangelize saw an increase in the number of conversions and a decreased conversion timeline.

Summary

Croatian Baptists experience conversion differently based upon their pre-conversion contexts. Yet all Croatian Baptists expressed similarities regardless of their backgrounds. First, the vast majority of Croatian Baptists experienced repeated and varied exposures to the gospel prior to their conversion. Second, in all contexts there is a preeminence of Scripture; the Bible is the primary means by which conversion occurs. Third, the ministry of preaching, the public propounding of the Word, is also critical among all contexts. Fourth, the importance of a relational witness, whether family or friend, is evident among the majority of respondents, the means through which the message of the Word is made incarnational. Yet, beyond each of these primary means, there are also evident a great variety of means which are effective to individuals from varied backgrounds. Finally, the conflict of the 1990s was seen to have less of an impact on conversion than the overall change experienced in the transition from Yugoslavia to Croatia, and the openness that this change brought about.

Conversion Resistance

Standing in stark contrast to the 849 conversion experiences presented in this study are the more than 4.2 million non-conversion experiences of those living in Croatia today. In light of the answers to the epistemological questions regarding conversion and the Croatian people, the question must be asked, “Why have so few converted?” What are the barriers to conversion past and present that have kept a Christianized people from experiencing spiritual conversion? Why are the Croatian people resistant to the gospel? In this section I will identify four factors from Croatia’s past which have led to this conversion resistance, two factors that face the Croatian people today, and finally, one theological factor which must be considered as superseding all of these preceding factors.

Four Past Factors

I believe that there are four primary historical factors which have created a

conversion resistance among the Croatian people: limited access to the biblical gospel, a culture saturated with a false gospel, a society with an intense allegiance to tradition, and a potent nationalism that has reinforced the ascendancy of this false gospel.

Limited access. Except for a brief period in the sixteenth century, in one small section of northwestern Croatia, access by Croatians to the biblical gospel has historically been limited until the 20th century. The majority of Croatia never experienced the results of the Protestant Reformation, and the states which ruled over the Croatian people either directly limited or discouraged outside evangelical influences. The birth of the Croatian Baptist movement was the result of indirect missional efforts, such as emigration and re-immigration. The limits on gospel access were removed with the establishment of the Republic of Croatia in 1991, and since that time the Baptist church in Croatia has more than doubled.

False gospel. The Croatian culture is saturated with the false gospel of the Roman Catholic Church. From birth to death, every major life event is impacted by the sacramental system. This system is identified with the first century Church, and therefore claims historical ascendancy. Through this system of the Roman Catholic Church a gospel of faith and works, of grace and merit, of God and mankind, both the individual as well as a pantheon of saints, is presented as working together to achieve forgiveness and salvation. This system utilizes the same Scripture, the same theological terms, and claims the same God and savior as the Croatian Baptists, yet with radically different interpretations of each.

The result of the presence of this false gospel is that the Croatian people have become “inoculated” to the gospel of the Bible. When presented with this biblical gospel, one or two things will occur for a Croatian. First, they will reject the gospel as

novel, an innovation straying from the historical gospel, as they have received it. This is a message of sectarians, not of the historic Catholic Church.⁶ Second, if not outright rejecting the message and messengers, they will focus the similarities and dismiss the differences as inessential. The biblical gospel is heard and understood in the framework of their existing worldview, and is not recognized as the radical message that it is. Therefore, the presence of the false gospel weakens the impact of the biblical gospel among the Croatian people.

Tradition. The third factor in conversion resistance is the strong sense of tradition among the Croatian people. Croatian evangelical historian and author Stanko Jambrek states, “In some cultures, such as in America, there is a focus on the future. In Croatia there is a focus on the past. There is constantly the question, “What would my grandfather think about this?””⁷ Among a people group that is saturated with a false gospel, for an individual to embrace an alternative gospel, or even to explore its teachings, is tantamount to betraying one’s family. Further, from the perspective of the family, for an individual to turn to another gospel will be perceived as not only personally changing religions, but also turning one’s back on one’s current and past family. Outsider conversion among Croatians will be perceived both individually and in society as becoming “other.” Therefore, tradition serves to discourage both seeking and accepting the gospel.

Nationalism. The fourth factor leading to conversion resistance among Croatians is nationalism, the passionate self-identification with one’s people group in political terms. Where tradition is the informal, natural conformity to one’s family and

⁶A common reference, and pejorative, for non-Traditional Christian communities in Croatia, including for Baptists, is *sektaši*, or “sectarians,” who are considered divergent from the accepted mainstream traditions.

⁷Stanko Jambrek, interview by author, Zagreb, April 28, 2015.

immediate societal peers, nationalism is the formal focus on conformity to the larger entity of the people group. In a culture that is defined primarily by its identification with Roman Catholicism, to abandon the Roman Catholic Church is to abandon one's people. Nationalism has been particularly potent during the past century among Croatians as they moved towards nationhood, reaching its highpoint in the late 1990s and early 2000s following the war for independence. Right at the time that full access to the gospel arrived, the rise of nationalism served to reinforce the gospel inoculation among the Croatian people.

Two Current Factors

The four historical factors listed above continue to be an issue in contemporary Croatia. While nationalism and the influence of the false gospel maybe seen to be weakening in the wake of new political realities, they are still important.⁸ Further, access remains an issue as there are many areas of Croatia that continue to have no living witness.⁹ However, two new factors are present that have not been historically present among the Croatian people group: secularism and pluralism. While both of these factors tend to limit the effects of nationalism and its allegiance to the false gospel, both factors simultaneously serve to reinforce conversion resistance among the Croatian people.

Secularism. Secularism is the separation of sacred from the secular, and ultimately is the removal of the spiritual from daily life. Secularism occurs in the political sphere, but also within the worldviews of the Croatian people. In the political sphere secularism undermines the power of the established institutions of religion. From a Croatian Baptist perspective, this is not necessarily bad, as Croatian Baptists exist at

⁸These new realities include Croatia's integration into the European Union, but also major political scandals involving nationalistic leaders. At the time of this writing, both Ivo Sanader, the former Prime Minister of Croatia, and Milan Bandić, the current mayor of Zagreb, are in jail for corruption.

⁹The regions of Dalmatia and Istria in particular have large areas and major towns with no evangelical church.

such a disadvantage with the traditional churches in Croatia. However, secularism in the worldview of the Croatian people serves to reinforce conversion resistance by banishing spiritual talk from common discourse. In a secular environment, there is no place for public evangelism, personal or formal; spiritual talk is unfamiliar, unexpected, and unwelcome.

Secularism, however, is ultimately unfulfilling to creatures who are by nature spiritual, who were created “with eternity in their hearts” (Eccl 3:11). As seen in the section on the Materialist worldview in chapter three, secularism must either construct an alternate non-spiritual religion, as Tito sought to do in Yugoslavia, or it must blend secularism with spiritualism, as Tito is reported to have done in his own life. This second option of blending worldviews, the option of pluralism, poses an even greater threat to the gospel than does secularism.

Pluralism. Pluralism can be defined as a state of fact or as an ideal. In the former, pluralism is defined as “a situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests.”¹⁰ In this case, Croatia has always experienced pluralism, as it has always existed as a part of a larger community, whether as a part of the Venetian Empire, the Hapsburg Empire, or Yugoslavia. Pluralism may also be defined as an ideal, to be cultivated and pursued within a society, “the belief that people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., should live together in a society.”¹¹ The watchword of pluralism is coexist; to not only accept the differences of those around oneself, but also to appreciate and honor these differences. From a purely secular point of view, this is a noble ideal, and quite necessary for a society that is not homogeneous, to succeed and

¹⁰“Pluralism,” in *The Merriam Webster Dictionary*, accessed April 25, 2015, available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluralism>.

¹¹Ibid.

prosper.

However, the ideal of pluralism is at odds with the exclusivity of the gospel message. Pluralism increases conversion resistance in two ways. First, the exclusivity of the gospel message is not welcome in a pluralistic society that seeks for individual worldviews to find a place for all other worldviews. Differences in worldviews are seen as differences of perspective rather than differences in reality. In this environment, evangelism, promoting the exclusivity of truth in Jesus Christ, is both uncultured and insensitive. Second, as the members of a pluralistic society internalize the pluralistic ideal, the uniqueness of the gospel message is subordinated to the position of one option of many, which may be cannibalized for the preferred components, while the less desirable components may be ignored or rejected.

As discussed previously in chapter three, in the section on Folk Catholicism, pluralism has also always been present in Croatia. However, it was always in the background and subordinate to the Traditional belief. The new pluralism, brought on by post-modernism and the liberalism of the European Union government, is squarely in the forefront. In a pluralistic society, individuals will say yes to the gospel, but also yes to views contrary to the gospel as well, which will ultimately result in a rejection of the gospel.

The Theological Factor

Ultimately, the answer to the question as to why so few Croatians have converted rests in the mystery of the sovereignty of God. Based upon my understanding of conversion, as a spiritual phenomenon by which a spiritually dead individual is made spiritually alive by grace through the work of the Holy Spirit, God is the Lord of conversion as well as all of the factors that inhibit conversion. In terms of access, God has “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” for each and every Croatian who has ever lived (Acts 17:26). His desire was for each one to seek

Him, and while they may not have had access to the gospel, the world around them was full of testimony to His existence (Rom 1:20). And yet, for the entirety of their recorded history, the Croatians have had the letter and form of the gospel, but not its spirit. They have “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2).

In a spiritual sense the Croatian people can be compared with the Israel of the first century. They see themselves as the people of God, and “yet the LORD has not given [to them] a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (Deut 29:2). As a result of this spiritual blindness and deafness, they are unable to “understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (Isa 6:9-10). The guilt of this spiritual insensitivity was the primary charge against the Israel of Jesus’ day, and this same spiritual insensitivity is prevalent among the Croatians today.¹²

And yet, in the light of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the 849 participants in this research, I am led to ask, “Is this the generation?” Having seen the centuries of religion that did not lead to salvation, a nationalistic dream that did not lead to fulfillment, and spiritual guides that did not lead the people to Christ, could it be that “He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede; then His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him” (Isa 59:16)? Could all the conflict and change experienced at the end of the 20th century have served only to create an environment in which the gospel could finally take root and grow?

These, however, are speculations for the ivory tower, not for the field hand, the gospel workers serving among the Croatian people. If all of the labor expended to create these research findings result only in such conclusions, the labor will have been in vain. The reality of the staggering spiritual lostness in Croatia, in light of the command to

¹²All four Gospel authors (Matt 13:15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:9-10, John 12:40) quote Isa 6:9-10 in reference to Israel, as does Paul in Acts 28:27.

make disciples of all nations, leads us to look beyond that which cannot be fully understood in order to take up the task of reaching the lost, as “my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved” (Rom 10:1). Therefore, let us turn from the question of why more Croatians have not converted and towards the teleological question of how more Croatians could convert.

Reaching The Resistant

Having reviewed the answers to the initial problem and the epistemological questions, I will now turn to the teleological question: How could more Croatians convert? Having examined the six factors of conversion resistance among Croatians, and not ignoring the theological fact that God alone is the Lord of conversion, to which efforts should gospel workers apply their limited resources of time and personnel? The short answer is nothing startling or new: “preach the gospel” (2 Tim 4:2). While it may appear to many gospel workers in Croatia today that they are preaching out of season, it is only by preaching the gospel of Christ that men and women are converted. Based upon conversion trends over the past forty years, five general approaches will be suggested for how to preach the gospel among Croatians: prayer, an appreciation of the distinctiveness of both insider and outsider conversion, and understanding of collaborative evangelism, a focus on church planting, and an embracing of theological and denominational distinctiveness. These five approaches address various aspects of conversion resistance as well as drawing upon the conversion experiences of Croatian Baptists.

Prayer

Recognizing that no man comes to the Father but through the Son, and that no man comes to Son except that the Father draw him, the first step in seeing increased conversions among Croats must begin with prayer (John 6:44 and 6:65). A ministry of prayer recognizes that while God is the Lord of conversion, the church has been chosen as an instrument of both bearing the gospel, but also interceding for those who need the

gospel. While founded primarily on the theological factor of conversion resistance, Scripture speaks of prayer as addressing the other six factors. Prayer is sought to bridge limited access (Matt. 9:38). Further, prayer may be directed towards the softening of hearts, hardened by false religion, tradition, and nationalism, and the opening of ears and eyes, shut by secularism and pluralism (2 Chr 6:19-40, Neh 1:5-11, Col 4:3-4, 2 Thess 3:1). Prayer should be focused nationally as well as specifically to cities and individuals.

Addressing Insiders and Outsiders

Following prayer there needs to be an awareness of the diversity of contexts within Croatia. The gospel answers every question, yet it is important to know the questions that are being asked by an individual prior to seeking to provide the appropriate answer. There are three primary types of people needing conversion in Croatia: insiders, spiritual outsiders, and material outsiders. Insiders are the children growing up in Baptist families in Croatia. Access, false religion, and tradition are not factors of conversion resistance for insiders, though in the national education system they will encounter nationalism, secularism, and pluralism. In order to be drawn toward conversion they need a firm biblical foundation and may sit under significant biblical teaching before they experience conversion. Insiders may experience conversion subconsciously and will need a venue in which to announce their conversion in order to move their conversion from being merely a personal experience to being a public decision.

Spiritual outsiders are individuals who hold to the false religion in Croatia, and accept a spiritual reality. These individuals may be aware of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church or merely be traditional Catholics, with a limited knowledge of the Church's actual teachings. The primary factors of conversion resistance among spiritual outsiders are false gospel, tradition, and nationalism. Allowing the Bible to speak for itself and providing an alternative community is key for spiritual outsiders to be drawn to conversion.

Material outsiders are individuals who hold to a materialist worldview. They reject the spiritual worldview of both the gospel and the false gospel. The primary factors of conversion resistance for material outsiders are tradition, nationalism, secularism, and pluralism. While material outsiders reject the spiritual underpinnings of Croatian tradition and nationalism, as Croatians they will accept the forms that accompany them. Personal relationships with believers are key for material outsiders, and these relationships can then lead to additional encounters with the gospel through sermons and formal evangelistic events.

Access is a key problem for both spiritual and material outsiders. Insiders are born into a network by which they are engaged with the gospel. However, due to the high proportion of Croatians who do not have a natural social network that includes believers, Croatian churches must be intentional about reaching out beyond these natural networks. Regular evangelistic events inside and outside of church buildings must be a part of every local church's annual calendar. Further, while broad seed sowing methods such as street evangelism and radio or television reported very low response rates, efforts must be made utilizing these methods to engage new networks with the gospel. Without these efforts, the majority of Croatians will live their entire life without encountering a living witness.

Collaborative Evangelism

In the Croatian context, evangelism needs to be pursued with a collaborative mindset. As stated above, the conversion experience of Tomislav is not the norm, and gospel workers among Croatians should not expect those who hear their message to be converted by a single gospel message in a single encounter. While this always remains a possibility, and gospel workers can live in hope of such a result, the vast majority of conversions will occur as the result of multiple messages conveyed through multiple encounters through multiple means over the course of multiple years. Croatians tend to

convert as a result of collaborative evangelism. I will provide two examples from the surveys collected as examples of collaborative evangelism.

Vinko. Vinko is the husband of Željka. He was born into an atheist family in Split; his father worked for the SDS, the Yugoslav secret police.¹³ Vinko described his conversion experience in the following manner on his survey form: “The feeling of emptiness and fulfillment which I had in adolescence, and thinking about the truth and struggling, so that I was seeking for God and the gospel spoke to me the first time I read the Sermon on the Mount.”¹⁴ Vinko had studied various New Age religions and had had contact with Jehovah’s Witnesses before hearing the gospel at a concert hosted in Split by an evangelical American blues band in the summer of 2000. Immediately following the concert, Vinko met members of the Split Baptist church, who were hosting the band members, and he began attending the church. Vinko had been searching for spiritual fulfillment for years, and when he encountered it, he quickly embraced it and was baptized the following year. Five years later his wife and daughter were baptized, followed by his son and son-in law two years later, and his sister four years after this.

Vedrana. Vedrana was born into a Roman Catholic family near the town of Drniš, in the Dalmatian hinterlands. She later married a man from Split and moved there. Vedrana described her conversion experience in the following manner on her survey form:

The key before my conversion was the difficult illness of my late mother-in-law and her death before I started to come to the Baptist church. A difficult period with my teenage daughter and the desire that through the Bible I meet Jesus Christ our savior. For a time I was in the Roman Catholic Church, but it didn't bring me closer to God's Word, because it was not based upon Scripture, as we study God's Word.

¹³Interview with Vinko, Split, June 8, 2014. SDS stands for *Služba državne sigurnosti*, or State Security Service.

¹⁴My translation of the narrative portion of the survey.

And so I recognized the love in this church.¹⁵

Vedrana's mother-in-law was the sister of a Baptist in the central Croatian town of Sisak, Stana. For many years Stana had witnessed to her nephew and Vedrana when they would visit Sisak, with little apparent impact. In Split, every day Vedrana would pass the Baptist church on her way to the market, and recalls hearing singing coming from the church and thinking that these were Stana's people, but never entered the church.¹⁶ However, as family crises seemed to overwhelm her, Vedrana decided to visit the church, and one Sunday morning simply walked in. She began attending worship services and the weekly Bible study, which was led by an American missionary who had worked with Stana's husband in Sisak. Within a year she stated that she had converted. Two years later she was baptized. Her son began attending the church with her, participating in *vjeronauk*, and her husband and daughter began to attend on special occasions, such as Easter or Christmas.

Štef. Štef was born into a traditional Roman Catholic family near the town of Koprivnica in northern Croatia. As a young man he moved to Zagreb to find work. Štef had an uncle who was a believer and would ride his bike two hundred kilometers each way to hear Jovo Jekić preach in Severin na Kupu.¹⁷ This uncle introduced Štef to the idea of a personal religion apart from the traditions he had inherited from his parents. In 1967, at the invitation of this uncle, Štef heard Billy Graham speak at Šalata in Zagreb, and began a twelve-year process of wrestling with the benefits and demands of the gospel. In 1979, Štef and his wife attended a baptism service in Mačkovec, once again at the invitation of his uncle.

At this baptism service, Štef said he heard a conversation in his mind. Once

¹⁵My translation of the narrative portion of the survey.

¹⁶Interview with Vedrana, Split, August 18, 2013.

¹⁷Interview with Štef, Dugo Selo, May 9, 2015.

voice he heard saying, “Maybe these people are right, but what will others say?” Štef says that this voice was the voice of Satan, standing behind tradition, to keep him from accepting the gospel. However, he says he heard another voice, and this voice asked, “If you do not follow these people, what will I say?” This voice Štef identified as the voice of God. That day both Štef and his wife chose to follow those who been baptized, and identify that day as the day they converted.

Summary. While Vinko, Vedrana, and Štef come from different regions of Croatia, and from different religious backgrounds, they all encountered the gospel as a result of collaborative evangelism. In all of these cases there was a cooperative effort between family members, the local church, and international gospel workers. All heard the gospel formally and informally, and experienced the gospel lived out in a local faith community. Multiple means were collaborated, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to bring about these three individuals conversions. Finally, as a result of their conversion, the gospel began to flow through them to their family members. This is collaborative evangelism.

Collaborative evangelism embraces all forms of evangelism and does not hold one style above or below another. Collaborative evangelism is truly “all things to all people, so that by all means” some might be saved in a way that one style of evangelism cannot be (1 Cor 9:22). With a collaborative view of evangelism, both confrontational evangelism and relational evangelism are equally valid; neither is to be disparaged. Due to the various giftings of evangelists and the various contexts of the unconverted, all styles, forms, and methods of evangelism should be pursued nationally, and as many as possible in the local church. At the least, a local church should have regular formal outreach events while simultaneously encouraging and training members in personal evangelism.

Finally, results should not be evaluated in the short term. From a perspective

based purely on the knowledge available in 2000, the concert held in Split that summer was a failure. One individual, Vinko, expressed interest in the spiritual content of the event. However, from a perspective based on the knowledge available in 2015, an entire family was converted, and new families were engaged with the gospel because of this family's faithful witness. With a collaborative evangelism perspective, laborers will trust in the Lord of the harvest to bring about conversion in the proper season (Matt. 9:38).

Church Planting

In the Croatian context, evangelism alone will not be enough to overcome conversion resistance; communities must be formed that those who convert may join. Due to the conversion resistance factors of tradition and nationalism, converts need a new community that can support them, as some converts will find themselves excluded from their pre-conversion communities as a result of their conversion. Further, it is only through the community of faith that is the church that true collaborative evangelism can occur. Through the multiple giftings of the local church, the gospel can be both heard and seen, reinforced by the repetitive living witness of its members. In a context where there is only one Baptist church for every 105,000 Croatians, access to the living gospel remains a challenge that only church planting can overcome.¹⁸

¹⁸With a generous estimate of all evangelical churches in Croatia of 160, this number remains extraordinarily high at one evangelical church for every 26,250 Croatians.

Finally, there is a distinct trend in the survey data that calls for a focus on church planting in Croatia. While established churches are proving effective in reaching those raised within these faith communities, a study of recent church plants show that these communities are more effective in reaching those from a non-Protestant religious background. The following chart displays the difference between seven churches which were planted since 1991 and the results of the total survey in terms of religious background.¹⁹

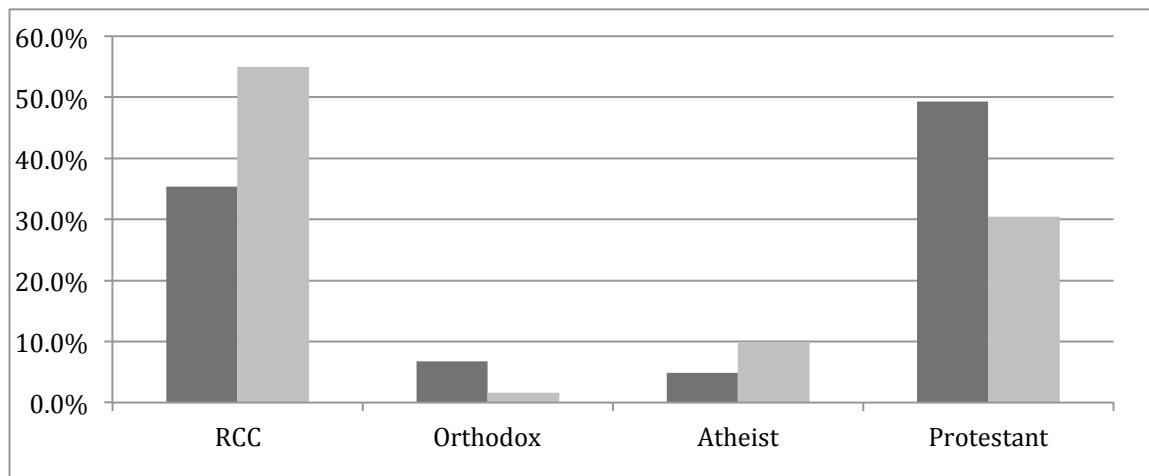


Figure 16 – Religious background, total survey vs. post-1991 church plants

In these seven churches, the percentage of those with Protestant religious background is significantly lower, while the percentages of those with Roman Catholic and atheist religious backgrounds are significantly higher. Churches planted since 1991

¹⁹These seven churches were selected from a list of twenty-one churches planted in cooperation with the Croatian Baptist Union since 1991. This unpublished report was prepared by Nenad Kovačević, pastor of the Baptist church in Mačkovec and the church-planting director for the Croatian Baptist Union. A number of these church plants did not succeed, and a few have left the Baptist Union. The seven churches on this list which were surveyed include the following churches: Dubrava (planted in cooperation with European Christian Mission and Greater Europe Mission), Dubrovnik (planted in cooperation with British Missionary Society), Krapina (planted in cooperation with Grace Community Church), Koprivnica (indigenous), Slavonski Brod (planted in cooperation with Pioneers), Šibenik (indigenous), and Split (planted in cooperation with the International Mission Board). These churches represent 22% of the survey and 12% of my estimate of Croatian Baptists.

have a better rate of reaching those outside the church than the churches already in existence before this date. The reasons for this difference are beyond the scope of the data obtained in this research project. However, I would speculate that the reasons for this difference are as follows. First, to effectively plant a church, evangelism must be very intentional. Second, to plant a church in an area where there was previously no evangelical church increases access to the gospel. And finally, church plants are by their nature open to outsiders, where as some more established churches may be less aware, or even less welcoming, of outsiders. Church plants depend on outsiders to be established, and as a result, will be more accommodating.

Maintaining Theological and Denominational Distinctiveness

In the Croatian context evangelism and church planting need to occur in a spirit that embraces the theological and denominational uniqueness of both the evangelist and church planter. In the secular and pluralistic climate currently present, a balance needs to be established between bridge building and drawing clear distinctions with other worldviews. Certainly there are times when leaders within the evangelical community will need to engage with leaders from other faith communities in issues of religious toleration, and pursue interfaith dialogue. Certainly there are times when leaders within the evangelical community will need to speak with one voice on the issue of religious freedom, and at that time pursue ecumenicalism. However, when engaging in evangelism and church planting a clear distinctive must be drawn.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is exclusive to all other religions and worldviews and it calls all men and women to an exclusive relationship to one God through one mediator based on the one principle of grace. In a context where each of these singular entities is defined in radically different terms, an overly strong focus on bridge building will only serve to muddle the gospel message. In the short term a hearing will be gained, but in the long term the content of the message will be weakened. Ultimately, it is in the

distinctiveness of the gospel message that the Spirit will move to bring about conversion, and the desire to gain a hearing should not be used as an excuse to water down this unique gospel message.

Summary

An awareness of the dynamics of prayer, understanding the unique makeup of those seeking to be converted, collaborative evangelism, a focus on church planting, and a dedication to theological uniqueness represent approaches that are in line with both the factors of conversion resistance as well as how Croatians have converted over the past four decades. All three of these strategies can serve to mitigate the five factors of conversion resistance among Croatians. Collaborative efforts in outreach between local churches and international gospel workers and the effort to plant churches that are near to every Croatian population segment can overcome the problem of gospel access.

The gospel needs to be presented in community and there needs to be a community for converts to join, as pursuing a lifestyle that will result from conversion will cause the individual to come into tension with, or at least to disengage from, the mainstream culture in Croatia. Churches will need to balance being sensitive to the separation between the spiritual and the secular, while also intentionally bridging this gap. Finally, evangelicals in Croatia will need to hold tightly to the exclusive nature of the gospel, bearing the shame of “parochialism,” for the sake of a clear and sharply defined call to embrace the gospel and be converted.

Further Research

In light of the findings of this research project, there are several directions of further research that could serve to strengthen our understanding of conversion among Croatians. First, a similar study among non-Baptist evangelicals in Croatia could provide a broader understanding of how Croatians experience conversion. In particular, research among the Evangelical Pentecostal Union, which is approximately the same size as the

Croatian Baptist Union, would provide a Croatian population segment with a similar understanding of spiritual conversion. This research would provide a larger pool of data on conversion among evangelical Croatians, while also providing the opportunity to search for factors distinctive to the Baptist world view.

Second, Baptists in neighboring countries provide further opportunities for research. The Baptists of Serbia could be studied and the results compared to this study to provide a similar culture but differing primary Traditional worldview. The Baptists of Bosnia, while few in number, could also provide insight from an area of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim backgrounds. Finally, the Baptists of Hungary, who live among a people with the same religious tradition as Croatians, but a markedly different culture, could provide insight as well. Each of these three eastern European countries has shared with Croatia the transition from communism to democracy, and Bosnia experienced a war much more destructive than that experienced in Croatia. Research in these areas could provide a contrast by which better insights into the data collected through this project could be understood.

Conclusion

In the southern Dalmatian region of Croatia, the topography is primarily karst. This has resulted in a landscape that is predominantly rocky and that produces a meager crop. In this context the goods produced, tend to be small in quantity, but of considerable quality. Dalmatian wines have been valued since the time of the Roman Empire, and the *pršut* (smoked ham) from the town of Drniš was served to the kings and queens of Europe in nineteenth century. The same might be said of the Church in Croatia, which has grown out of a spiritually rocky soil, with little production to speak of.

Yet, in God's economy those of little state are afforded special status (Matt 19:30, 20:8). Perhaps in eternity, when the multitude gathers around the throne to praise the Lamb, those of the nation, tribe, and tongue that were of the Croatian people group

will have a special status due to their lack of numbers (Rev 7:9-10). However, this would be a dubious distinction to pursue. It is my hope and prayer that as a result of the research represented in this dissertation that the Church in Croatia will engage the lost in Croatia, and that the ranks of the multitude be swelled because of the presence of many, many Croats who have as of today yet to convert.

APPENDIX

SURVEY DOCUMENTS

Conversion Among Baptists in Croatia

Demographic:

Year of Birth: _____ Member: Yes No

Sex: Female Male

Religious Background:

Roman Catholic Orthodox Muslim Atheist Protestant*

* Which denomination: _____

Do you live in the same community today that:

...you were born in? Yes No

...you were converted in? Yes No

Conversion (calendar year):

Year that you *first* heard the Gospel: _____

Year of conversion: _____ Specific Date: Yes No

Year of baptism: _____

State the level of impact that each of these played in your conversion:
(1 – none, 2 – little importance, 3 – some importance, 4 – very important, 5 – critical)

Family	_____	Street Evangelism	_____
Friend	_____	Evangelism Event	_____
Neighbor	_____	Humanitarian Aid	_____
Co-worker	_____	Education*	_____
Youth Camp	_____	Small Group Bible Study	_____
Bible	_____	Sermon	_____
Book*	_____	TV/Radio*	_____
Magazine/Tract*	_____		

* Please give examples of each that mark for 3 or higher:
(Example: "Book: 4 - *Mir s Bogom*" or "Education: 3 - *English class in Sisak*")

English survey, front

CONVERSION (CONT.)

Please estimate the following:

How many times did you hear the Gospel before conversion?

1 time 2-3 times 4-10 times More than 10 times

How many believers did you know before your conversion?

1 2-3 4-10 More than 10

How many different churches/fellowships did you attend before your conversion?

1 2-3 4-10 More than 10

Did you convert in a Baptist church? Yes No

If "No," then what denomination? _____

Were you baptized in a Baptist church? Yes No

If "No," then what denomination? _____

Did you convert alone (ie. wife/husband/parent) Yes No

If "Yes," please state relation: _____

Prior to your conversion, did you have any contact with New Religious Movements (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or New Age movements)?

Narrative:

Please briefly, in 4-5 sentences, describe the steps that led to your conversion:

English survey, back

Obraćenje među hrvatskim baptistima

Demografija:

Godina rođenja: _____ Jeste li član ove crkve: Da Ne

Spol: Ženski Muški

Vjerska pozadina:

rimokatolička pravoslavna muslimanska ateistička protestantska*

* koja denominacija: _____

Živate li danas u istom mjestu:

... u kojem ste se rodili? Da Ne

... u kojem ste se obratili? Da Ne

Obraćenje (kalendarska godina):

Godina u kojoj ste *prvi put* čuli evanđelje: _____

Godina obraćenja: _____ Određeni datum: Da Ne

Godina krštenja: _____

Navedite razinu utjecaja koju je navedeno imalo u Vašem obraćenju:

(1 – nimalo, 2 – malo važno, 3 – donekle važno, 4 – jako važno, 5 – ključno)

Obitelj	_____	Ulična evangelizacija	_____
Prijatelj	_____	Evangelizacijski događaj*	_____
Susjed	_____	Humanitarna pomoć*	_____
Suradnik	_____	Obrazovanje*	_____
Ljetni kamp	_____	Proučavanje u maloj grupi	_____
Biblija	_____	Propovjed	_____
Knjiga*	_____	TV/Radio*	_____
Časopis/traktat*	_____		

* Molimo da navedete primjere svega čemo ste dali ocjenu 3 ili više:

(Primjeri: "Knjiga: 4 - *Mir s Bogom*" ili "Obrazovanje: 3 - *Tečaj engleskog u Sisku*")

Croatian Survey, front

Obraćenje (nastavak):

Molimo procijenite sljedeće:

Koliko puta ste čuli evanđelje prije obraćenja?

1 put 2-3 puta 4-10 puta Više od 10 puta

Koliko ste vjernika poznavali prije svog obraćenja?

1 2-3 4-10 Više od 10

Koliko ste različitih crkava/zajednica pohađali prije obraćenja?

1 2-3 4-10 Više od 10

Iste li se obratili u baptističkoj crkvi? Da Ne

Ako "Ne", u kojoj denominaciji? _____

Iste li kršteni u baptističkoj crkvi? Da Ne

Ako "Ne", u kojoj denominaciji? _____

Iste li se obratili sami? Da Ne

Ako "Ne", u kojem odnosu (suprug(a), roditelji, braća i/ili sestre) _____

Prije svojeg obraćenja, jeste li imali kontakt s novim religijskim pokretima (Mormonima, Jehovnim svjedocima, ili New Age pokretom)?

Opis:

Molimo da kratko, u 4-5 rečenica, opišete korake koji su vodili do vašega obraćenja:

Croatian survey, back

SP15

Obraćenje među hrvatskim baptistima

Demografija:

Godina rođenja: 1981. Jeste li član ove crkve: ☒ Da ☐ Ne

Spol: ☒ Ženski ☐ Muški

Vjerska pozadina:

☒ rimokatolička ☐ pravoslavna ☐ muslimanska ☐ ateistička ☐ protestantska*

* koja denominacija: _____

Živate li danas u istom mjestu:

... u kojem ste se rodili? ☒ Da ☐ Ne

... u kojem ste se obratili? ☒ Da ☐ Ne

Obraćenje (kalendarska godina):

Godina u kojoj ste prvi put čuli evanđelje: 1990.

Godina obraćenja: 2005. Određeni datum: Da ☒ Ne

Godina krštenja: 2006.

Navedite razinu utjecaja koju je navedeno imalo u Vašem obraćenju:
(1 – nimalo, 2 – malo važno, 3 – donekle važno, 4 – jako važno, 5 – ključno)

Obitelj	<u>4</u>	Ulična evangelizacija	<u>1</u>
Prijatelj	<u>1</u>	Evangelizacijski događaj*	<u>1</u>
Susjed	<u>2</u>	Humanitarna pomoć*	<u>1</u>
Suradnik	<u>1</u>	Obrazovanje*	<u>3</u>
Ljetni kamp	<u>1</u>	Proučavanje u maloj grupi	<u>1</u>
Biblija	<u>5</u>	Propovjed	<u>1</u>
Knjiga*	<u>1</u>	TV/Radio*	<u>1</u>
Časopis/traktat*	<u>1</u>		

* Molimo da navedete primjere svega ćemo ste dali ocjenu 3 ili više:
(Primjeri: "Knjiga: 4 - *Mir s Bogom*" ili "Obrazovanje: 3 - *Tečaj engleskog u Sisku*")

OBRAZOVANJE - OPĆE OBRAZOVANJE, SPECIJALNA POMOĆ, POMOĆ ZA POVIJEST KRŠĆANSTVA (POVIJEST CRKVE, ISUŠEV ŽIVOT); OBITELJ - OBRAĆENJE OCA I MAJKE, A KAD SU MALI I BRATA; BIBLIJA - ČOVJEK IMA NA SEBE, SVAKI JE Ljudsko biće.)

Sample survey, number 15 from Split Baptist church, front.

Obraćanje (nastavak):

Molimo procijenite sljedeće:

Koliko puta ste čuli evanđelje prije obraćenja?

1 put 2-3 puta 4-10 puta Više od 10 puta

Koliko ste vjernika poznavali prije svog obraćenja?

1 2-3 4-10 Više od 10

Koliko ste različitih crkava/zajednica pohađali prije obraćenja?

1 2-3 4-10 Više od 10

Jeste li se obratili u baptističkoj crkvi? Da Ne

Ako "Ne", u kojoj denominaciji? _____

Jeste li kršteni u baptističkoj crkvi? Da Ne

Ako "Ne", u kojoj denominaciji? _____

Jeste li se obratili sami? Da Ne

Ako "Ne", u kojem odnosu (suprug(a), roditelji, braća i/ili sestre) _____

Prije svojeg obraćenja, jeste li imali kontakt s novim religijskim pokretima (Mormonima, Jehovnim svjedocima, ili New Age pokretom)?

NE (HVALA BOGU!)

Opis:

Molimo da kratko, u 4-5 rečenica, opišete korake koji su vodili do vašeg obraćenja:

BIBLIJA U DOBU PRINUDA -> KAKO SU -14 ZA USTUP;
POSTOJANJE PRILIKE DOŠU, NA OBRAĆENJE U PRINUDI
NIJEHOVO IMA I ISUSOVO POSTOJANJE, SVJEDOCINSTVO
GRUPA PITANJIMA, PROMJENE U NJIHOVOM ŽIVOTU (1996)
OBRAĆENJE DOŠU (2000.), POSTOJANJE OŠTA BIBLIJA (2001.),
OBRAĆENJE DOŠU (2001.) I PROMJENA U NJIHOVOM ŽIVOTU (2001.)
DOŠU OBRAĆENJE.

Sample survey, number 15 from Split Baptist church, back.

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ABSTRACT

CONFLICT, CHANGE, AND CONVERSION: FOUR DECADES OF CONVERSION AMONG BAPTISTS IN CROATIA 1970-2010

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Evangelicals represent a tiny minority in Croatia. During the period of conflict and change that accompanied the emergence of the Republic of Croatia during the 1990s, evangelical groups experienced significant growth. This movement has not been formally studied. Understanding this movement has significant benefit to those seeking to further the Kingdom of God in Croatia, but also beyond, as the issues of ethnic identity, nationalism, and civil strife are not unique to Croatia. The focus of research is the from 1970 to 2010, the two decades prior to the emergence of the Republic of Croatia and the two decades that followed, and is limited to Croatian Baptists.

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of the study and makes a case for the research. The Chapter 2 seeks to answer the question of the Croatian religious identity from an historical perspective. The chapter begins with an overview of demographics from the four decades with which this research project is concerned, including ethnicity, language, and religion. Next, the geography of Croatia is reviewed. Subsequently, the religious history of the Croatian people is detailed, providing insight into their conversion resistance. Finally, a brief overview of the Croatian Baptist history is provided. Chapter 3 seeks to provide an understanding of conversion as related to conversion experience. The first part of the chapter details differing perspectives on conversion. The second part of the chapter examines two typologies of conversion experience, before examining two

central aspects of conversion experience: context and means. The chapter concludes with an examination of the three primary conversion contexts included in the research:

Traditionalist, Materialist, and Baptist. Chapter 4 presents the research data beginning with a description of the survey instrument, followed by a description of the methodology of application. Following this introduction to the instrument and method, the results of the research are presented. First, the results of the entire survey for the whole of Croatia are provided. Second, the results are examined for the impact of conflict and change on conversion. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with seven conversion resistance factors and five recommended evangelical responses to this resistance.

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