

# **“GLORY AND PRAISE TO YOU, LORD JESUS CHRIST”: LINGUO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF PRAYERS AMONG BAPTIST SERBS IN ROMANIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, our case study is the Serbian Baptist community in the Danube Gorge in Romania, from the settlements Radimna, Pojejena, Moldova Veche, Divici and Liubcova. The objective of the ethnographic field research was to collect data on non-Orthodox Serbs living outside the borders of their home country and having experienced conversion to one of the Evangelical communities during the second half of the twentieth century. One of the most significant elements of the narrative of the Serbian Baptists is the place of prayer in their daily life. This paper is analysing prayer in the wider context and more specifically using linguo-cultural analyses it provides several examples of Baptist prayer narrative, its main characteristics and patterns. The analyses focus on the question how the religious identity of Baptists can be defined or strengthened through prayer. From the aspect of linguistics and communicology, prayer is a speech act having a specific internal and external structure: it contains the beginning, duration and finalization, including the abundance of accompanying nonverbal acts. Based on the collected ethnographic data, we analyse several fragments of prayers among the Baptist Serbs which illustrate the modalities of communication through prayer.

*Keywords:* Baptists, Serbian minority in Romania, prayers, Evangelicals, language and religion.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Studying language as a semantic code used for the exchange of ideas, meanings and thoughts is rather specific and multidisciplinary whereby it is necessary, *inter alia*, to describe in a complex way all the components of this unique cultural phenomenon. Communicative culture as a linguo-cultural discipline whose actuality has not subsided for decades, presents an inevitable segment of linguistics, and it is therefore present in almost all segments of society, its collective and individual actions, whereby specific patterns within a specific ethnic community, social, age, gender, professional group are created. General presence of this scientific discipline and its transparency, enabling its implementation in almost all spheres of life and modern society has also led to its

connection with the religious sphere.<sup>1</sup> Communication patterns in the sacral sphere have been created based on specific social requirements and relations, and consequently several approaches to describing the phenomenon of religious communication, with very specific terminological apparatus have been developed in modern linguistics.<sup>2</sup>

Serbian linguist Ksenija Končarević studied communication in the sphere of religion in a publication entitled *Sacral Communications. Norms. Traditions. Means*. In the introduction to the monograph, Končarević describes complexity and multidimensionality of methodological approaches to the studying of sacral communication, but also dominant paradigms related to the research of the interaction between the language and spirituality and religion functional stylistic, communicological, discourse and sociolinguistic. This paper will focus on the communicative paradigm, specific genres of sacral and communication within the church, *i.e.* the prayer as one of its key components. Language plays a crucial role in prayer, especially in the structure and the form of prayer. Many prayers follow a specific format or structure, with specific words and phrases that are repeated or recited in a particular order. While studying the interaction between the language and religion, the analysis of sacral communication presents one of the most perspective approaches, which provides the possibility to use different types of sources to excerpt relevant data.<sup>3</sup>

Prayer, being a specific form of verbal communication, presents the part of church language, found in liturgical texts and performed orally; it is characterized by an expressed aesthetic motivation and significantly decreased stereotypes in relation to the theological language, *i.e.* the language of theology.<sup>4</sup> It is important to stress that the sacral word differs from the secular one in a number of characteristics and in the specificity of the language function. The function of liturgical language while creating the sense of unity and socialization in the liturgical community is achieved through the frequent usage of pronoun, *we*, as well as through the usage of verb forms in the first-person plural in the church (liturgical) language. This is confirmed in numerous other prayers, whereas it is expressed in the most comprehensive manner in the prayers uttered by a priest during the liturgy.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of how the prayer is defined, it is considered “a conversation or dialogue with God”.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the prayer itself is much more than only addressing God, than using words – it is an occasion of “union with God and unity of love with him”.<sup>7</sup> The prayer is a religious direction of an individual towards God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Končarević 2013: 9.

<sup>2</sup> Terms religious language, cultic language, language of the sacral, language of prayer, liturgical language, religious discourse, religious style, religious-narrative style, religious use of language, religious communication, etc. have been widely scientifically used.

<sup>3</sup> Končarević 2013: 32.

<sup>4</sup> Končarević et al. 2004: 146.

<sup>5</sup> Bajić 2007: 37.

<sup>6</sup> Ivanda 2005: 3.

<sup>7</sup> Bajić 2007: 63.

<sup>8</sup> Brajnčaninov2005.

Communication in liturgical prayer is established on several levels: 1. through the dialogue of the priest – presider of liturgical gathering with God 2. through the dialogue of the priest with devotees 3. through the dialogue of an officiant with a purpose of performing divine service. 4. through the dialogue of every participant in the prayer meeting with God.<sup>9</sup> However, if the prayer is identified with supplication, it all reduces to “mere plea and humble entreaty”.<sup>10</sup>

Even though prayer is defined as a verbal act with a clearly defined structure, individual prayer may also be un verbalized, expressed through the internal monologue (without any words pronounced). Prayers that are not verbalized denote the feeling of “God's presence in our souls, when there are no requirements for words, as this feeling is entirely sufficient”.<sup>11</sup> Prayers are nowadays wordy solely by their form, whilst they are spiritual by their strength.<sup>12</sup> A wide spectrum of patterns related to emotional conduct of the participants in the service of worship including love, joy, pleasure and pleasantness, experiencing aesthetically appealing, wondering, admiration and alike is typical for the language of prayer and divine service in addition to communicative-social and intellectually-cognitive functions.<sup>13</sup>

The ability to apply the methods of linguistics and communicative culture while describing the aspects and phenomena from the sacral sphere is evident in the above-stated text. In this paper, we aim to contribute to better understanding of the role prayer has in the various branches of Christianity.

#### PRAYER IN CHRISTIANITY – ORTHODOXY

The Bible and other religious texts place great importance on prayer; there are numerous testimonies about overcoming life hardships and sufferings, about miracles that happened owing to a prayer. Prayer is one of the basic needs of corporeal-mental-spiritual side of a human; it is cultivated using different names and in different ways in all religions of the world, and it was raised to the highest spiritual heights in Christianity (especially the Orthodox one).<sup>14</sup> Prayer is a journey towards God, where the stages of the journey to be made are different devotional states entered by those who pray properly and steadily. An Angel has once revealed to a holy monk the following order of thoughts when praying that is pleasing to God: “The beginning of the prayer ought to be composed of glorification of God, thanksgiving for his numerous beneficences; then we are obliged to offer to God an honest confession of our sins; in the end we may bring before the Lord, but with great humbleness, prayers for our spiritual and corporeal needs, devoutly leaving the fulfilment or nonfulfillment of those prayers to his will”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Končarević et al. 2004: 156.

<sup>10</sup> Florovski 1996: 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bajić 2007: 79.

<sup>12</sup> Zatvornik 1998: 492.

<sup>13</sup> See Končarević et al. 2004: 170.

<sup>14</sup> Kalezić 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Brjančaninov 2005.

In the Orthodox faith liturgical prayer or prayer of the Church is “a rule and pattern, measure and criterion, expression of the gathering and the sense of every prayer”. The prayer is, according to Nikolai Berdyaev, provoked by the need not to feel totally dependent on the inescapability that rules the world, on the world forces of destiny. According to the testimony of St. Paul the Apostle and Holy Fathers, there are no words in the human language that could name, define and express everything that humans obtain from God through prayer. The word of the prayer has no time or space limitations. It iconizes people, by giving them back their original dignity, allowing them to “overcome human dimension and their own abilities”.<sup>16</sup> Engaging in a prayer is the most sublime activity of a human mind, leading it to the state of purity, which is its most sublime state.<sup>17</sup>

Being a central divine service of the church, liturgy is the most important and central prayer: the Eucharist, which ends during the liturgy, has historically always been the prayer center and the essence of church life.<sup>18</sup> Liturgy, when translated from Greek, means «communal act»; churchgoers gather in the temple to say communal, congregational prayer. It is this unity of heart and soul in God that makes the prayer universal.<sup>19</sup> Personal prayer should be universal, that is, it should encompass everything, the entire universe, and a praying heart ought to embrace all the hardships and all the pain of the humanity. Even though it is difficult to differentiate between congregational and personal prayer, there are still functional and genre criteria owing to which they may be differentiated.

Congregational prayer is performed during the divine service, with the mandatory participation of a clergyman. There are several forms of congregational prayer—liturgy, evening prayer, moleben, panikhida (parastos – prayer for the dead), litany, etc. As a form of sacral communication, congregational prayer is characterized by a number of textual genres with different intentions and a certain order, canonically defined and prescribed in liturgical instructions for every individual year: in addition to prayer, tropak, kondak,<sup>20</sup> psalms and alike belong to this group.<sup>21</sup> Every prayer uttered by a priest, is confirmed and completed by churchgoers by saying *Amen*.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, individual, personal prayers, are said without intermediary and do not use genre groups in their full form, but genres recommended to this aim: canon, akathist, tropar, kondak, magnificence. It is also recommended to use texts written by Saints and approved by the Church in a personal prayer. Liturgical hymns and texts of prayerbooks in the Orthodox tradition have not been considered to be copyright works, but to be the product of beneficial God's help – “co-authorship of the Spirit”.<sup>23</sup> In the individual prayer believers pray to God, Holy

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<sup>16</sup> Kamadakis 1986: 270.

<sup>17</sup> Brjančaninov 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Bajić 2007: 51.

<sup>19</sup> Končarević 2017: 174.

<sup>20</sup> Type of the hymn performed in the Orthodox and Eastern-Catholic liturgical tradition.

<sup>21</sup> Icković, 2019: 235.

<sup>22</sup> Bajić, 2007: 51.

<sup>23</sup> Končarević et al. 2004: 150.

Trinity, Mother of God, bodiless powers, *i.e.* angels, archangels, saints.<sup>24</sup> It is really important to emphasize that congregational prayer does not abolish an individual prayer; actually, it stimulates, inspires and mimics it.<sup>25</sup> Even if a man prays alone at home, he joins the congregational prayer of all the living and the dead, since liturgically, universality and synergy of the prayer appear to be universal and comprehensive in the Orthodox faith.<sup>26</sup>

First of all, prayer is co-existence and man's unity with God, which can be liturgically confirmed by saying: "The Christ is with us – it is and it will be".<sup>27</sup> In the Orthodox tradition, prayers were formulated for different occasions and needs by the Holy Fathers of the Church; therefore they are uttered with a pronounced canonicity, not "using our own words".

Prayer occupies a significant and special place in the written works of numerous teachers of the Church, with Saint Theophan the Recluse being one of the most prominent. In his numerous works, the Saint devoted special attention to prayer and to prayerful asceticism, thereby pointing to the essence of the prayer, its significance and role in the spiritual life.<sup>28</sup> Speaking about the essence of prayer and the laws of spiritual life, Saint Theophan states: "Prayer is a great and sacred opus; it is a fragrant flower of spiritual life. He who knows how to pray, he is already being saved"; "It is a key to heavenly treasures, a mediator between God and mankind, a ladder that unifies Heaven with Earth, creation with the Creator". "Prayer is the science of all sciences; it is everything: faith, love and salvation".

The *Orthodox Prayer Book*<sup>29</sup>, which was blessed by the most supreme Spiritual Fathers, including the restful Serbian Patriarch Pavle, states that the teachers of the church and Holy Fathers advise everyone to be humble and contrite in their heart during the prayer owing to their sins. If a man does not feel sinful in his heart, God will not answer his prayers. A prayer beaded with tears of appeasement and repentance will be answered immediately. Our relationship with God reflects our prayer, and the opposite, our prayer reflects our relationship with God.

Končarević made a significant contribution to studying theology in the Serbian speaking area through her monograph *Language and Religion. Theolinguistics Glossary* by describing the notions in the field of theolinguistics. Among the most versatile terms in the area of religion, prayer occupies an important place when stated in different contexts. In that respect, Končarević states numerous examples of how prayer is defined in the Christian tradition. It is defined as follows: "Elevation of the mind to God", as defined by Jovan Damaskin; "the soul of faith" (H.E. Fosdick); "opening one's heart to God" (K. Rahner);

<sup>24</sup> Icković 2019: 235.

<sup>25</sup> Končarević et al. 2004: 155.

<sup>26</sup> Končarević 2017: 174.

<sup>27</sup> Končarević et al. 2004: 156.

<sup>28</sup> Maslarić, 2015.

*Православни молитвеник*. Штампарија Српске патријаршије, Београд: 1998; с благословом Његове Светости Архиепископа пећког, Митрополита београдско – карловачког и Патријарха српског Павла и чланова Светог архиепископског сабора Српске православне цркве.

“response to God's former love” (D. Steere); “expressing a religious sensation” (F. Heiler); a way to meet God “in person” (G. Buttrick).<sup>30</sup>

Orthodox prayer is composed of four basic elements: a) doxology or praise, b) thanksgiving, c) repentance, contrition owing to sins, d) entreaty. Their mutual relation within prayer service is flexible, so that, for instance, the prayer may commence (after the simplest call «*Oh, Lord!*») with confession and repentance, and then with thanksgiving and doxology elevating at the end. In the mentioned *Orthodox Prayer Book* the importance of the way the believers cross themselves has been emphasized: “We cannot neglect the fact that one should cross oneself when praying. Nevertheless, it is necessary to cross oneself properly, unlike those who act as if they are ashamed of the cross of God, entangling fingers before their face and chest, without even folding them properly and placing them where appropriate. Careless placing of the cross on oneself aggrieves the Lord and is considered sinful for the worshipper. Such placing of the cross is not only powerless, but it also rejoices devils, as then it is not the most dreadful weapon against them”.<sup>31</sup>

Pouring out of the soothed soul, according to Solomon the Wise, the prayer gets through the clouds without dwelling on before reaching the Lord. Therefore, it is a wonderful habit to address God heartily using brief prayers on all occasions and events.<sup>32</sup> The motives to pray are numerous and individualized, the prayer is characterized by an array of forms and the ways of pronunciation, so that *the Lord's Prayer* is undoubtedly mostly used both individually and collectively. In the Orthodox faith, the mystical tradition of hesychasm has developed the so called *Jesus Prayer* (“*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*”), which was nourished for centuries of its existence primarily on Mount Athos.<sup>33</sup> Whereas the Roman Catholic prayer Ave Maria, associated with the meditative usage of rosary, has long been a popular form of godliness.<sup>34</sup> When the Jesus prayer pervades our entire body and grows into the unity of mind, heart and will, it introduces a man into a mystical condition of contemplation – the harmony of all psychophysical forces and elements inside a man has been achieved.<sup>35</sup>

Končarević also speaks about “the prayer of all prayers”, which occupies a special place in the Christianity. It is the Lord's Prayer – *Our Father*, which became the model prayer for all subsequent Orthodox prayer services owing to its divine origin and priority.<sup>36</sup> Tertullian, the Christian apologist coming from Carthage and one of the most prolific writers of the Latin Christian literature of his era wrote that Our Father prayer “encompasses the lifelong learning of the

<sup>30</sup> Končarević, 2017: 159.

<sup>31</sup> Orthodox prayer book 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Brčjančaninov, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Kalezić, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Končarević 2017: 160.

<sup>35</sup> Kalezić, 2002.

Končarević analyses thoroughly and in detail the structure of *The Lord's Prayer* in the mentioned monograph, focusing attention to each of its parts, which testifies once again to the importance of this prayer in the Christian world (for further information, see page 165-170).

Lord...this prayer is truly an abbreviated form of the entire Gospel.” Apart from numerous differences in the liturgy of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church, there are also common components including congregational prayers, prayers of invocation, priestly prayers, prayers for the sanctification of bread and wine in the Eucharist and traditional prayers such as *Kirie Eleison* and *Agnus Dei*. When we speak about the differences and following the standardization of liturgical prayer, the Roman mass became obligatory in the West, whereas the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom prevailed in the East.<sup>37</sup>

Although the narratives of prayer services were not considered to be copyright works, the Orthodox Church is faced with the challenges of liturgical renewal, being motivated by the necessity for general renaissance. When it comes to the content of liturgical renewal, contemporary Orthodox theologians agree with the former attitudes of Slovenian luminaries and are therefore unified in the stance that laities should be more present in all aspects and forms of divine service. In the broader sense, liturgical renewal also implies the reaffirmation of the pluralities when it comes to forms and expressions of liturgical art and spirituality, including their enlargement and enrichment with contemporary arts, new prayers where the special requirements of time and the surroundings in which we live would find their place.

#### RESEARCH OF THE SERBIAN BAPTIST COMMUNITIES IN ROMANIA

The case study in this paper for analysing prayer is the Serbian Baptist communities in Romania. This paper is based on the data collected during qualitative ethnographic research in five Baptist communities in the region of the Danube Gorge (Western Romania). The Danube Gorge stretches along 142 km from Baziaş to Drobeta Turnu Severin. Serbs have lived in thirteen of its settlements since medieval times. According to the 2011 census, there were approximately 18,000 ethnic Serbs living in Romania, most of whom reside in the western part of the country, particularly in the Banat region. Serbs live throughout Romania, in all counties, however they are most numerous in the counties of Timiș, Caraș-Severin, Arad and Mehedinți. Dominant confession of the Serbian community in Romania is the same as the confession of the majority population, being Orthodox Romanians. The Serbs in Romania are largely Orthodox, with Serbian Orthodox Churches in almost all settlements where Serbs reside, whereas the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese is situated in Timisoara and has three churches in the city itself. The Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Timisoara encompasses 57 parishes within 56 church communities in what is today modern Romania, including 67 parish and monastery churches and chapels.<sup>38</sup>

Ethnographic data was collected in the research conducted in 2010 in the five settlements of the Danube Gorge in the Romanian part of Banat: Radimna, Pojejena, Moldova Veche, Divici and Liubcova. One of the objectives of field research was to collect ethnographic documents in the mentioned settlements

<sup>37</sup> Končarević 2017: 160.

<sup>38</sup> Đurić Milovanović 2012: 118.

having as majority Serbian Baptist communities. The aim of the research was to collect documents about non-Orthodox Serbs living outside the borders of their home country and having converted to Protestantism, more accurately, to Baptism in the second half of the twentieth century. Conversion to Baptism is a religious phenomenon not typical only for Serbs, but also for the members of other ethnic communities inhabiting this area.<sup>39</sup>

Baptism, being an evangelical movement, developed within the scope of European Protestantism in England and Holland in the early seventeenth century. Evangelical movement is a product of reformation, encompassing different Protestant and non-Protestant communities all over the world. Etymology of the word evangelical derives from the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον*-*evangelion*, meaning good news, that is good news on the salvation through Jesus Christ and spreading good news to others. In the early nineteenth century evangelical theology began emphasizing the renewal of church and believers, as well as evangelization, *i.e.* the dissemination of the Gospel, which is interpreted as returning to the sources and to the essence of Christianity. Thus, evangelical Christianity developed as “a natural development of Protestantism going through several religious excitations, whereas its theology was focusing on the observation and the development of Christian life”.<sup>40</sup> Evangelical Christians belong to an array of different neo-Protestant communities, having their origins primarily in the Anabaptist wing of European reformation, but also in the British reformation nonconformist wing. It represents original, Apostolic, New-Testament Christianity, with the emphasis on the importance of the Bible, experiencing Christ as a personal Saviour, insisting on the real experience of the Holy Spirit when experiencing spiritual revival and in the holy life afterwards. Evangelical theology developed in the twentieth century primarily within the scope of apologetics and ethics, whereas its basic sense was to study thoroughly the Bible, with the prayer, putting emphasis on the Gospels, awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ, living in the community of believers and celebrating Christ.<sup>41</sup> In addition, theology of evangelical Christianity is trinitarian, with the emphasis on the deep attachment to the Bible, its daily reading and studying, experiencing Christ as a personal saviour and insisting on the real experience of the Holy Spirit. Certain interpretations of Bible doctrine had an impact on the creation of various evangelical, primarily charismatic Pentecostal communities in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Evangelical movement, in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, led to the “awakening” amongst Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and other protestant denominations, not only in Europe and the USA, but also owing to missionaries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Baptists were born out of the English Puritanism and as a result of the contact with the Dutch Mennonites; former Anglican priests John Smyth and Thomas Helwys established the first Baptist Church in Holland in 1609. Under

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<sup>39</sup> See the study on Czech Baptists in the Danube Gorge: Preda 2011: 56-79.

<sup>40</sup> Bjelajac 2003: 8.

<sup>41</sup> Bjelajac 2003: 8.



the influence of Anabaptists, John Smyth defined Baptist doctrine that was based on the baptism of adult believers. As an essence of their learning, Baptists attach great importance to the personal experience of God and to spiritual revival, while the salvation occurs only through rebirth and subsequently baptizing. Baptist historian Walter Shurden defined “four freedoms” in the Baptist theology: soul, church, bible and religious.<sup>42</sup> Baptist movement went through a powerful expansion in the USA especially in the period of the Great Awakening, after 1790. Even though Baptists emerged in Holland, the movement spread quickly throughout Europe owing to the network of missionaries, firstly in Germany, then in Denmark, Austria, Poland, certain regions of Russia and in the Balkans. Baptist history is rather dynamic and rich, I would like to mention the founding of the Baptist missionary society in 1792 by William Carey. The first Baptist World Alliance was established in London in 1905 during the First Baptist Congress.

Following Nazarenes, Baptists commenced spreading their learning with the arrival of German colporteurs from the Hungarian Bible Society in 1878 in the Banat, where they started their missionary activities. The influence of European Baptism in Germany contributed to the occurrence and development of Baptist communities firstly among the Germans and later on amongst other ethnic groups of Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, Serbs and Romanians. Before long, Baptism was accepted by Orthodox Romanians, while the first Serbian Baptist communities were founded in the Danube Gorge in certain Serbian settlements in the early twentieth century. The most numerous and largest Baptist churches are in the Banat, in the towns of Oradea, Arad and Timisoara. Among the Serbs in the Northern Banat, that is in Banatska Crna Gora there are not many Baptist churches, which was not the case with churches in the Gorge. Nazarenes were the first neo-Protestants to appear among the Banat Serbs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the area of Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The first baptisms in the Danube Gorge were performed in the Romanian settlements of Moldova and Coronini in 1919, which soon became strong missionary centres with preachers spreading the Baptist faith in other nearby settlements as well. As Sînziana Preda stresses, “In everyday language, in the collective mentality, Romanians refer to the members of these churches as “repenters” (in Romanian, *pocăiți*); they are distinguished from other Christian groups by the practice of adult baptism”.<sup>43</sup> Romanian missionaries were spreading Baptism also among Serbs, while the first Serbian settlement in which the presence of Baptist Serbs was recorded was Pojejena Sârbă where two Serbian families turned Baptists in 1936. The first baptisms of Baptist Serbs were performed in 1948 by the river of Radimna. The emergence of Baptism in the region where the research was done is also characterized by multiethnic population structure in the settlements of the Danube Gorge, where the Serbs under the influence of other ethnic groups that is missionaries got familiar with the Baptist doctrine.

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<sup>42</sup> Shurden 1993.

<sup>43</sup> Preda 2018: 278.

## RESEARCHING BAPTIST SERBS IN THE DANUBE GORGE

It is stated in the local historical sources on Baptist community in the Danube Gorge area that Nazarenes were the first community to adopt adult baptism and who were later on spreading new faith in their settlement: “In Moldova Veche, it was the Nazarene Iva Stefanović who brought baptism into his village”.<sup>44</sup> In 1936 two Serbian families in Pojejena Sârbă converted to Baptist Christianity, but the first baptisms, in the river Radimna, were not performed until 1948. In one of the oldest Danube Gorge settlements, Radimna, the first Baptist baptizing was performed in 1954, and the newly converted Baptists gathered in a private house of one of the believers. The prayer house did not exist, and, in the following years, Baptist Serbs went to church at a neighbouring place three kilometres away. It was not until 1975 that the church in Pojejena Sârbă obtained permission and started to offer worship services in the Serbian language. After numerous problems with authorities, the Serbian Baptist Church was founded in Radimna in 1988. The largest baptism was performed in 1993, with up to twenty people present and, on that occasion, as stated by Budimir, “two brothers from Yugoslavia were also preaching in the Serbian language”.<sup>45</sup> In numerous Serbian villages in the Gorge, Baptist communities emerged only after the 1989 Revolution – Divici, Baziaș, Belobreșca, Zlatița (even though there were only few of them). Baptism expanded faster in Romania due to missionary work, an increasing number of educated preachers, and the legalized position of Baptist communities. Further south in the Banat, in the Danube Gorge, there are several settlements where Serbian members compose more than a half of the Baptist community, and in some of them worship services are performed in Serbian language.

Based on the research conducted in the Baptist communities, one can conclude that there are certain verbal situations common to all communities and dealing with divine service and sermon, prayers, singing hymns, performing music and evangelization. Divine service is performed in accordance with defined scheme in the Baptist communities, even though small deviations may occur if a community is visited by a foreign guest or a guest coming from another community. The prayer plays a significant role for neo-Protestants not only during the divine service, but also in the everyday life. Based on the testimonies of our informants, believers pray in their homes daily, as well as in the houses of worship during the divine service. Believers are advised to read the Bible once a day, while the “quiet hours” refer to the period of prayer, which is practised several times a day. There are prayers of supplication, thanksgiving and praise to God. An expression “heartfelt prayer”, as stated by our informants from the Baptist Church, relates to the spontaneous prayers uttered individually by believers during the divine service. In the very beginning, following the first hymns and a brief introduction into a sermon, believers pray aloud intermittently, while in ethnically mixed communities everyone utters a prayer in their mother tongue. For Baptists, the prayer represents a daily religious practice as the most important segment of

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<sup>44</sup> Budimir, S. 1994: 86.

<sup>45</sup> Idem: 73.

religious life. The prayer is one of the forms of communication with the divine realm, probably the phenomenon that is the most frequent and most available to common believers, directed at obtaining help and the well-being of believers. How can the religious identity of Baptists be defined through prayer? Based on the collected ethnographic documents, we are going to present and analyse several fragments of prayers among the Baptist Serbs which illustrate the modalities of communication through prayer:

[1] Oh, dear heavenly father, Lord Jesus Christ, we want, Jesus Christ, to glorify and honour you, and pay you respect, Lord, at this marvellous moment, for bestowing upon me one day of life alone, thank you (*thank you*). Thank you, God, I have no words, Lord Jesus Christ, we have lived on Earth for thousands and for hundreds of years, and we have to be thankful. So, please, Lord, help us follow you using your steps (*Amen; Lord, help us*). So, I pray to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for our health (*Amen*), look after our brothers, sisters, our churches. So, we pray to you, God, for all heavenly shepherds (*Amen*), we pray to you for missionaries, wherever they are, Lord Jesus Christ, help the sick, Lord Jesus Christ, hold out your right hand, God and send us your spirit, Lord, Dear God, heavenly Lord, we live, Lord, in troubled times (*yes*), the final days have come, Lord, so we pray to you, Lord, give us strength, Lord Jesus Christ to endure difficult moments, troubled times and I praise you, Jesus Christ. Thank you, God, glory to you and pray in your name and in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

[2] It is our soul that glorifies and praises you, our Great God, thank you our God and our Lord for being here in your home, I praise you (*I praise*). Through your grace and your great goodness, we are here now (*yes*). It is our soul that praises and glorifies you for you are great (*yes*). Please, Lord, bless this day (*Amen*), may it pass in the glory, praise and honour of your holy name. Lord, bless your holy words, your servants and in all things done, Lord, may your name be blessed, glorified, and now also eternal, Amen.

[3] Our father, who are in heaven, I may thank you, Lord, for all the good you have done (*thank you*) to these people, for the rain on time (*Amen*). So, I pray to you, Lord, to give me more reason, more power, more patience, Lord Jesus Christ, so that I can praise and glorify you, Lord. So, I pray to you, Lord, for all of my brothers, for all of the sisters in this world. So, I pray to you, God, for my family, for all brothers and sisters, for the entire world, and the entire nation to glorify and praise you, in the name of the father, of the son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

[4] Thank you, heavenly Lord Jesus Christ, for this day, thank you for our intelligence and reason, thank you for telling us quietly what we should be like, what we should do and how we should act. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for our guests, for having people showing interest in us, Lord Jesus Christ, may someone see how we live and what we do, Lord. Thank you for all, Lord, I pray to you, stay with us, I pray to you on behalf of the sisters from Divić, give them strength to stay on the lord's path, I pray to you for our guests, stay with them, rescue them on their path from every evil action, may your will be done, Amen.

[5] I also thank you, Jesus Christ our Lord, first of all, I thank you for your love and grace, for being in your home this morning. Thank you, Jesus Christ our Lord for creating this day, to praise and glorify your holy name, which belongs only to you and to nobody else, Jesus Christ. I pray to you to bless this gathering, bless every soul and help every soul to be

saved, Jesus Christ our Lord, help to save my family, Lord Jesus Christ. My grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, my children, so that we can all jointly praise and glorify your name. You are the greatest, Jesus Christ our Lord and you bear the greatest name, for that reason you are worthy to accept all the praises, honour and glory from your children and there is no God beside you, Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to be faithful to you and be afraid of your holy name, thank you for all the gifts, for all the blessings you have so far bestowed upon me, Jesus Christ our Lord and for everything I have received from your holy hands, for everything I praise you and glorify you. May your holy name be blessed and glorified, heavenly father, from this moment on, Amen.

#### PRAYER AS A FORM OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

Liturgical discourse is a complex socio-communicative phenomenon, encompassing a whole different set of spheres, and is therefore represented in all types of liturgical narratives.<sup>46</sup> In each sphere, including the sacral one, language is much more than merely the combination of letters and sounds. It contains a message, capturing reality, whereas words, when placed in an adequate environment, get life and strength. When one speaks about the religious sphere, the sense of words is revealed by knowing the structure of the language in which God's word has been written down. From the aspect of linguistics and communicology, prayer is a speech act having a specific internal and external structure: it contains the beginning, duration and finalization, including the abundance of accompanying nonverbal acts. Even though the prayer is part of non-linguistic reality, *i.e.* it exists beyond language, exceeding the plane of speech event and communicative dimensions within the empirical reality, it can be implemented in all the spheres of communication in a socio-cultural collective without excluding the option of making linguistic analysis. Formal realization of congregational prayer is by its virtue the unity of musical, verbal and spiritual elements, with the numerous effects on the participants in the liturgy: emotional – experiential, ascetic, moral effect, the sense of belonging to the community, inner purification, spiritual growth, confrontation to detrimental and undesirable thoughts and sentiments – passions and reaching good, sublime and desirable thoughts and sentiments.

Prayers presented in the previous section address God using a number of honorific titles, such as “heavenly Father” and “Lord Jesus Christ”, including a number of expressions of gratitude, such as “thank you” and “we have to be thankful”. These expressions serve to reinforce the idea that believers are thankful to God for the gift of life and for other blessings, and they also reinforce the idea that God is a beneficent force in the world. Another notable element of the prayer is the use of repetition. The phrase “Lord Jesus Christ” is repeated several times throughout the prayer, as is the phrase “we pray to you”. This repetition serves to emphasize certain themes and ideas, and it also reinforces the idea that believers should focus their attention on certain aspects of their faith. The prayer also includes a number of requests or petitions, such as

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<sup>46</sup> Končarević 2006a: 81-85.

“help us follow you using your steps” and “look after our brothers, sisters, our churches”. These requests serve to establish a sense of dependence on God and reinforce the idea that believers need God's help and guidance in order to live a virtuous life. Finally, prayers include a sense of urgency and concern about the state of the world, with references to “troubled times” and “the final days”. The prayer includes a sense of reverence and respect for God's power and authority. For example, the prayer refers to “your holy name”, “your children”, and “your holy hands”. These phrases serve to reinforce the idea that God is a powerful and all-knowing force in the world, and they also reinforce the idea that believers should approach God with humility and reverence.

Discourse analysis of prayers indicates existence of the following elements: addressing, thanksgiving and praying. The above-mentioned order may be regarded as a pattern, as there are almost no deviations from it. Several forms of addressing are observed: *Good Lord* (it is regarded as the most frequent form), *Oh, Lord, Lord Jesus Christ, Father, Heavenly Father*. Addressing God is at the same time the most frequent word that is observed in prayers, whose repetition is continuous and quite remarkable: *therefore, I ask you Lord, have mercy on all communities, the young, the old, the sick; thank you for everything, Lord, I beseech you, etc.*

The following, but equally important element of the structure, whose integral part is glorifying the name of God, is thanksgiving, in the first place relating to the possibility to be present in the church and in the prayer (expressing the above-mentioned need to belong to the community). Other forms, less expressed in terms of frequency, encompass thanksgiving for blessings (also extremely frequent), concern, love and mercy, for reason and sense, for bestowments.

In every prayer, it is important to emphasize that the words: *I, me* are observed in almost no prayers. The sense of brotherhood is ubiquitous, portrayed in the following words: *we, us, all, for all*. In the first place, as markedly represented we state prayers for blessings: *to bless this meeting, every soul; our work; our village; our community and everything done in it*. Praying for salvation is equally important and evident: *(Lord) help us to save every soul; to have you visible in our lives; to have mercy on our families*. Believers ask from God in their prayers the mercy for their children, for the sick, for their loved ones, for their village or their state. Other forms of praying are individual and less represented: prayer for firm faith and will, for patience, humility.

Choral utterances in the course of an individual interpretation may be mentioned as a very significant part of the structure and an important component of the analysis; it is realized in the background; it is of lower intensity in the form of individual words, among which the most frequent are: *Amen, please, thank you, have mercy* and alike. Through this act other present believers join an individual prayer.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper our case study was the Serbian ethnic minority community living in the Danube Gorge who, although predominately Serbian Orthodox, joined

the Baptist Church. Their new religious identity presents the consequence of their contact with other ethnic communities which spread with missionary efforts neo-Protestantism to the Banat region, but also with Romanian missionaries who had well-organized and developed Romanian Baptist Churches. The research of this small neo-Protestant community has shown that in the Baptist service the prayer plays the central role in the religious practice, both individual and collective. From theological perspective, the joint prayer during the divine service symbolizes connecting believers through joint practice. Baptist prayers focused on personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the importance of repentance though confession of sins and asking for forgiveness. Prayers in Baptist service also include praying for others, especially those who are not believers yet. Another important aspect is expression of gratitude and speaking with God in direct and authentic way. Religious identity plays a significant role in how people engage in prayer and represents an important expression of their faith and a way to connect with their religious community. Public prayers which are expressed during the service in the Baptist church appear to be spontaneous however certain pattern and repetition exists. Certain patterns are observed, including high frequency phrases, sense of unity, but also individualism, a personal touch deriving from a devotee's inspiration, which proves the coexistence of canonically standardized and personal/individual approach to expressing a prayer in the Baptist communities of Serbs in Romania.<sup>47</sup>

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