

## THE METHODIST CHURCH IN YUGOSLAVIA SINCE WORLD WAR II

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The information in this paper is a slightly reworked version of chapter XII of the author's Ph.D. dissertation "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia" (Boston University, 1965). The dissertation has recently been scanned and published by the Evangelical Methodist Church in Austria in 2008. There were two geographical areas in Yugoslavia where Methodists were located: in the northeast of the country, in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which was part of the Republic of Serbia, and in the southeast, in the Republic of Macedonia. Due to poor infrastructure, travel and communication between Vojvodina and Macedonia used to be difficult even in peacetime. During World War II the Methodists of these two regions actually lived under five occupational authorities/state structures! Communication between them was nearly impossible. Even in the 1950s and early 1960s, there was insufficient knowledge available to this author as to what transpired in Macedonia as he lived in Vojvodina and therefore this study provides far more detailed information on Methodists in Vojvodina than Macedonia. Since the author was living in the United States of America when he wrote his dissertation, he was unable to collect first hand all the data and had to be careful how he wrote it lest it become a source of danger to the churches. Some of the sources were protected in the dissertation but are accurately presented in this paper.

### **The Position of the Church Immediately after the War**

The liberation of Yugoslavia found the Methodist Church in total disarray and paralysis. With the exception of Georg Sebele all the ministers in Vojvodina had left the country with the majority of the German membership of the church.<sup>1</sup> With the breakdown of postal and other communications between towns, Superintendent Sebele was ignorant of the fate of the various churches. The German and Hungarian membership was seized with anxiety and terror as to their future. They were under suspicion because Germany and Hungary were the enemies of the victorious Allies, and the Slavic population had built up enormous hatred toward them. The number

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n.p. The available written sources for this chapter are rather scant. Most of the material for this chapter comes from the author's own experiences and observations in the period from 1945 to 1957. In order to make it as objective as possible, references will be made to written primary sources as often as possible. The reader should take into consideration that the author is personally acquainted with nearly all protagonists in this chapter and is related to three of them.

of Hungarians in Vojvodina was large so that no radical mass measures could be taken against them. But the Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) were hated even more because their sizeable pro-Nazi faction had on the whole sinned grievously against Yugoslavia.

The new Communist government of Yugoslavia took extreme retaliatory measures upon all Germans still in the country at the time of the liberation, regardless of whether they were war prisoners or civilians, whether they had been active in the German National Socialist movement and committed crimes against humanity or whether, on the contrary, they had suffered under the Nazis. Virtually all Germans were taken to concentration camps intended to serve for purposes of extermination or forced labor. An undetermined but large number died in these camps and a large number of able-bodied persons were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labor. Those who survived were not released for three or four years (early and middle 1950s) when they were permitted to migrate to West Germany, an opportunity of which nearly all of them took advantage. While in these camps, the German-speaking Methodists and other practicing Christians often met clandestinely for worship and mutual encouragement which helped their struggle to survive rather than to commit suicide or give in to their numerous difficulties.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout 1945, Superintendent Sebele gradually received the news from Senta, Stari Becej, Novi Vrbas, Vrsac, and later in 1946, from Srbobran that the Hungarian members were still in these towns, and as soon as the railroad connections were re-established he visited these people trying to re-organize the work.<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand Drumm continued his ministrations in Vrsac and Banatski Karlovac after his temporary release from concentration camp.<sup>4</sup> He re-established contact with Sebele, who appointed him to minister to those who were left behind in Zrenjanin (formerly Petrovgrad or Veliki Beckerek), Senta, and Becej. In less than a year Drumm was again apprehended with his family and placed in concentration camps where he was able to be the pastor to the scattered groups of Christians, especially the Methodists, Nazarenes, Free Brethren, Baptists, and Lutherans.<sup>5</sup> Finally he was placed in a camp in which the entire Methodist congregation from Mramorak was interned. Drumm was able to serve them and other Protestants until his successful escape to Austria in 1947.

As the majority of the remaining members of German origin were now in concentration camps, the congregation consisted of very few older members. Virtually, this meant a new beginning. Sebele stood alone in this task until he was joined by Mrs. Paula Mojzes, the widow of Anton Mojzes, an independent non-denominational minister from Osijek who was very close

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<sup>2</sup> Mojzes, n.p.

<sup>3</sup> Mojzes, n.p.

<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand Drumm, "Erinnerungen aus dem Werk des Methodismus in Ungarn und Jugoslawien, 1900-1947, wie es sich in meinem Leben and Wirken als Prediger widerspiegelt," Pasadena, Calif.; typescript sent to the author February 29, 1964, for the purpose of his dissertation, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Drumm, 19.

to the Methodists. Despite her husband's murder by the Nazis and her own persecutions she was placed in a concentration camp as a German but was released in January 1945 on account of her clearly non-political sentiments. Superintendent Sebele and Paula Mojzes divided the responsibilities, alternately traveling each Sunday to at least one of the small congregations to revive them as well as serving Novi Sad, the central station.<sup>6</sup> Connections with the Board of Missions in New York were not yet fully established, and the necessary money was obtained by superintendent Sebele's selling his furniture, clothing, and other valuables.

In his first report to the Board of Missions in 1945 Sebele expressed the hope that the new government would now permit the Methodists to work in Macedonia using the native language, since the country was now established on the federal principle and equality to all nationalities and religions had been granted. He expressed the hope that the Board of Missions would consent to the requisition of the "Bethania" sanitarium by the Yugoslav army as a military tuberculosis sanitarium.<sup>7</sup> Sebele also pleaded for relief from the Methodist Church in America, telling them that the Second World War had left greater damage even than the first and that the lack was felt especially for medicine and clothing. The response from America and Switzerland was generous. This aid helped the members to survive the most difficult part of the post-war years, but there was very little money for preachers' salaries, travel, and maintenance of property. Actually there was very little property left. Nearly all the chapels had been nationalized as property belonging to Germans. An exception was the house in Novi Sad which was left in the ownership of the Methodist Church, although rented to various tenants, with the exception of the preacher's apartment and the worship hall. The parsonage in Novi Vrbas was also saved because, under bombardment, the aged women from the home in Novi Sad had been moved, under the leadership of deaconess Bertha Kettenbah, to Novi Vrbas.<sup>8</sup> Repeated attempts were made to nationalize this house also.

All except two deaconesses left Yugoslavia with their families toward the end of the war. Margarete Merz was named by Superintendent Sebele as the main deaconess and she remained to work at the former "Bethania" Sanitarium.<sup>9</sup> Since her services as the most experienced nurse were needed by the sanitarium she was not taken to a concentration camp but was interned at the sanitarium until 1948, and from then to October, 1963, she served voluntarily and was even named the head nurse.<sup>10</sup>

When Bishop Paul N. Garber, the new Bishop of the Zurich area, vis-

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<sup>6</sup> Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n.p.

<sup>7</sup> Georg Sebele, "Report of the Executive Secretary," Board of Missions (hereafter RES), 1945, 76. The consent of the Board would at the best bring a little good will on part of the government but would not affect in any way the accomplished nationalization without compensation to the present.

<sup>8</sup> Oswald Bickel, "Wie Steht es um die Arbeit der Methodistenkirche in Jugoslawien?," manuscript of the article which appeared in *Schweizer Evangelist* (January, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Bickel.

<sup>10</sup> Margarete Merz, letter to author, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, (January, 1964).

ited Yugoslavia in 1946, he witnessed the extent of the disintegration of the Methodist work in northern Yugoslavia. The work in Macedonia seemed more encouraging since five pastors, Pane Temkov, Vladimir Daskalov, Krum Kalajlijev, Kosta Krmazov and Ceko Cekov, were still at their preaching places and continued their work.<sup>11</sup> Georg Sebele thought that the Methodist Church should commence social and medical work in order to help the ravaged land and to strengthen the church, but this plan could not be executed because the government would not permit any medical or social work to be done by private or religious agencies. The orphanage of the church in Srbobran ceased to function and the only kind of social work which was permitted, after considerable hesitation, was the Home for the Aged (elderly women) in Novi Vrbas which was jointly supported with money and food by the members of the various congregations. This was the only social work permitted until the fall of communism, and its existence was probably due to the very limited scope on which this work was carried on, usually involving not more than five elderly women.

### **The New Relations with the State**

After the Communist take-over, the Methodist Church entered into a new phase of church-state relations. Laws and decrees were issued by the state which were of special concern to the Protestants, although they were aimed equally at the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish groups. According to the letter of the law, which often remained very vague, more religious freedom was granted to the smaller Protestant churches than they had enjoyed before the war. Prior to the war the Methodists were frequently subjected to discriminatory policies, and occasionally to outright persecution by the state and by the recognized churches. Now the government at least theoretically treated all churches equally. In fact its attitude toward the churches was generally negative and depended on the political expediency of the moment. From the legal point of view this was an improvement for the Methodists now existed as a recognized ecclesiastical body. But practice often departed from the letter of the law and the liberties granted remained for the most part illusory. However the Methodists experienced less hostility from the larger churches than before. It is important to stress this because many Western observers of that period blamed the Communist governments for all the religious persecutions in Southeastern Europe.<sup>12</sup> In reality, the minority churches enjoyed some liberties previously denied to them. True, these liberties granted to the church were very ambiguous.

A group of Protestant ministers traveling in Yugoslavia in 1947 said, "We saw no evidence and we heard no complaints at any time, that the govern-

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<sup>11</sup> RES, 1946, 56.

<sup>12</sup> E. G. Gary MacEoin, *The Communist War on Religion* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1951); George N. Shuster, *Religion Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York, MacMillan, 1954); Martin D'arcy, *Communism and Christianity* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957).

ment was conducting any antireligious or educational propaganda.”<sup>13</sup> This statement is misleading. In Yugoslavia many clergymen lived for years in terror of what might happen in the near future, many churches have been torn down in Communist-inspired riots, many clergymen and church members, the innocent along with those guilty of collaboration with the enemies during the war, met violence and death. Freedom of religion was limited to the freedom of worship. Worshippers were frequently intimidated in various ways and spies were placed in the congregations to report on the activities and sermons of the preachers and priests.<sup>14</sup> Such a country could not possibly have been a showcase of religious liberty, as the seven eminent Protestant ministers were led to believe. They should have been aware of the charges of religious persecution and tried to get the full picture of the situation in Yugoslavia. They may not have realized that they did not have all the data. But if they did, they could have made a statement to the effect that their report was limited to the observable and not actual situation. If the Communist government of Yugoslavia did not epitomize all evil in regard to its relation with the churches, and it was more lenient and liberal than most Communist governments, it is equally evident that there was much that was wanting regarding religious liberty.

There was no lack of promises of religious liberty. The Tito-Subasic agreement of 1945 contained guarantees of freedom of worship. Guarantees of religious liberty also found their place in the Constitution of January 31, 1946. Articles 22, 25, and 37 of this Constitution carry provisions declaring the equality of all citizens irrespective of creed, the abuse of which is punishable by law. Citizens were also guaranteed freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, the churches being free to conduct their religious affairs and to administer religious rituals. The churches were separated from the state and the schools.<sup>15</sup>

A law of July 11, 1946, prohibited incitement to hatred and discord on national, racial, and religious bases. The law stressed again the equality of all religions and forbade any propaganda and activity which would damage the equal rights of all citizens and the unity of the Yugoslav people. It then defined incitement to religious hatred in the following way: “The offence of incitement to religious hatred consists in the attacking of one religious denomination by the adherents of another or in the provoking, on the basis of religion, of hostility on the parts of members of one religious denomination

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<sup>13</sup>*Religion in Yugoslavia: A Report on the Conferences with Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Moslem, Jewish and Protestant Leaders, and Investigations through the Medium of Religious Institutions and Documents* by Seven American Protestant Clergymen and Editors of Religious Journals who visited Yugoslavia the summer of 1947 (Washington: Embassy of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, 1947), 9.

<sup>14</sup>Alex N. Dragnich, *Tito's Promised Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1954), 146-157. Dragnich's evident anti-Titoist bias should not rule out the use of his evidential support even though one may not concur in the conclusions drawn from the evidence.

<sup>15</sup>J. B. Barron and H. M. Waddams, *Communism and the Churches: a Documentation* (London: SCM Press, 1950), 90.

towards the members of another. Scientific criticism of religion in general and criticism of improper actions of religious representatives or ecclesiastical officers cannot be regarded as incitement to religious hatred."<sup>16</sup>

This law, basically good and necessary for the wellbeing of the nation, contained a number of dangerous provisions which the administration could interpret as it wished. It guards only against "unscientific" incitements to religious hatred, but does not guard against "scientific" dialectical materialist incitement of antireligious hatred, which led not infrequently to bloodshed. This law, like other laws in Communist countries, could be helpful provided the administration ceased to use its interpretive powers in an arbitrary way.

On December 5, 1946, a law was issued concerning the nationalization of private economic enterprises. This law was subsequently modified and enlarged under the Law of April 28, 1948, which included within its scope the nationalization of foreign properties including hospitals, clinics, orphanages, etc., maintained by foreign missions.<sup>17</sup> As a result the Methodists irretrievably lost the "Bethania" Sanitarium and the orphanage, without compensation. Several houses used as chapels and parsonages were expropriated by the government, to be regained only after years of painful and costly legal procedures.

The provision of March, 1947, granting all churches the freedom to evangelize in all parishes of other denominations was probably not conceived in the conviction that such freedom should be fully employed, but rather to irritate the larger denominations.<sup>18</sup> It is hazardous to pry into the motivations of governments, but it is clear that the government had no intention of guaranteeing freedom of religious propaganda. The law supported complete freedom from anti-religious propaganda but guaranteed freedom of worship only in the most limited sense, i.e. in holding religious ceremonies inside the church. Even such innocent activities as taking Sunday School children on a picnic out of doors has usually been forbidden.

In 1948, the government set up a Commission on Religious Affairs to facilitate communication between the government and the churches.<sup>19</sup> The secretary of that commission declared that the churches were allowed to cooperate in government welfare planning and that they might have ordinary contacts with churches abroad, provided that this did not result in their opposition to the government.<sup>20</sup> This change of policy toward the churches manifested itself increasingly as the government developed its anti-Cominform policies from 1948 on, and foreign contact with the churches have never since been severed.

Due to the episcopal system the Methodists in Yugoslavia could not and

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<sup>16</sup> Barron, 96.

<sup>17</sup> Barron, 97f.

<sup>18</sup> James Hutchison Cockburn, *religious Freedom in Eastern Europe* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1953), 98.

<sup>19</sup> It was called the *Komisija za verska pitanja* which literally means the Commission on Religious Questions.

<sup>20</sup> Barron, 97.

did not want to be independent of the international connectional system which ties it to the Geneva Episcopal area. The government would much rather have had an independent Methodist Church in Yugoslavia with its own bishop and own separate organization, and frequently blocked the admission of the bishop.<sup>21</sup> However no radical steps were ever made to force the severance of connections. The Methodists in Yugoslavia held most of their Annual Mission Conferences without the presence of a bishop, but the government had on many occasions recognized the Methodist foreign connections by receiving representatives of the Board of Missions, bishops, and other ecclesiastical functionaries at the headquarters of the Commission on Religious Affairs in Belgrade. The government also permitted missionary financial aid from the Board of Missions and other Methodist agencies to flow regularly into Yugoslavia, making possible the continuous existence of the Methodist Church there.

### **The Gradual Renewal in Church Work**

#### ***Before 1953***

Renovation of church activities in Vojvodina and the recovery of the work in Macedonia took place gradually. Five ministers in Macedonia served congregations in Skopje, Strumica, Prilep, Murtino, Monospitovo, Kolesino, Radoviste, Raklis and less frequently in Bitola, Pristina, and Kosovska Mitrovitsa. They were often limited by the arbitrary decisions of Communist officials, resulting in restrictions not unlike those experienced before the war.

Restrictions were made on travel. On one occasion superintendent G. Sebele, and church sister<sup>22</sup> Paula Mojzes, just as they started a tour of the churches in Macedonia, were given a few hours notice to return to Vojvodina. The reason for the greater pressure in Macedonia was that the officials there were less educated and experienced men, with little prudence in dealing with their people, but rather, an eagerness to outdo the orders of the central government. So they frequently threatened and imprisoned the Methodists. In the summer of 1950, two Macedonian pastors were arrested, and one of them, Ceko Cekov, was sentenced to four years of hard labor for allegedly aiding a relative to escape over the border into Greece.<sup>23</sup> According to the opinion of Cekov's associates the charges were trumped up for the state did not want to flagrantly break the promises of religious freedom. They preferred to accuse a minister who was in their way with non-religious charges and then sentence him after a mock trial. Cekov was a natural target as he exercised great influence in Kolesino, where about half of the village belonged to the Methodist Church, not at all to the liking of the Communists.

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<sup>21</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Basel, Switzerland, (September 3, 1963).

<sup>22</sup> Church sister (*tsrkvena sestra*) was the term used by Yugoslav Methodists for lay women engaged in preaching, teaching, and serving actively in the church because of the lack of pastors. They received some theological and administrative training.

<sup>23</sup> RES, 1950, 57.

Despite the appeal of Mrs. Cekov, even to the President of Yugoslavia, he was not pardoned. At the time of his release he was deeply traumatized from abuse in prison but happily he recuperated after a year of rest.

Before 1948, the revival of the congregations in Vojvodina was fairly slow. Small groups of five to ten people gathered for prayer and worship in Zrenjanin, Vrsac, Novi Vrbas, and Novi Sad. Superintendent Sebele realizing that he could not carry on the work alone decided to follow a radical course. Since men were not available for leading worship services he appointed women to carry the burden of the work.<sup>24</sup> It is believed that no other Mission Conference had relied so heavily upon women as the Yugoslavia Mission Conference.<sup>25</sup> In 1948 he appointed Mrs. Anna Fiala to take care of the small church in Vrsac with twenty-one members and few more sympathizers. She also helped revive interest among the Germans in Mramorak and Banatski Karlovac, who by this time had been released from concentration camps.<sup>26</sup> The freeing of the local Germans, and the relaxation of internment measures of German war prisoners, caused a large increase in membership and attendance. There was still danger in working among Germans, and in small places, like Mramorak, visitations by Sebele and Paula Mojzes were obstructed. But as a rule the conditions in Vojvodina were much more conducive to freer work. In most congregations there were members speaking Serbian, Hungarian, and German. It was felt necessary to use these languages not through interpreters but by the successive preaching in each language by the same person. This required much skill and language training on the part of the preacher and patience on the part of the congregation, yet it was done and with great success.

The exodus of Germans in 1950 and 1951 caused great losses to the Methodist Church.<sup>27</sup> By 1958, almost all the German nationals had left Yugoslavia and the Methodists lost an estimated 300 to 500 members, who in many cases composed the core of the congregations. In some places, such as Vrsac and Novi Vrbas, this meant a considerable reduction in membership, while in some others, like Mramorak, it spelled the end.<sup>28</sup>

The Macedonian churches had experienced a small revival in 1952.<sup>29</sup> At the same time the relations with the government improved. The Methodists in Yugoslavia gained more freedom than those in other Eastern European countries.<sup>30</sup> Thus, for example, a youth meeting was permitted in Vrsac in 1948 in which some thirty young Methodists from all over Vojvodina gathered for a week-end of witnessing, singing, and recreation. This strengthened

<sup>24</sup> Paula Mojzes, *Metodizam: Kratka Istorija Metodisticke Tsrkve* (Novi Sad, Youg.: Sekretariyat Metodisticke Tsrkve u F.N.R. J., 1962 or 1963—mimeographed), p. 67.

<sup>25</sup> *Annual Report of the Division of World Mission of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church* (New York: Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1955), 40 (Hereafter abbreviated to *Ann. Rep. DWM*).

<sup>26</sup> Anna Fiala letter to Paul Mojzes, Vrsac, Yugoslavia, (December 11, 1963).

<sup>27</sup> RES, 1951, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Fiala, and Mihajlo Olejar, "Autobiografija," *Novi Vrbas* (January, 1964), 3.

<sup>29</sup> RES, 1952, 29.

<sup>30</sup> RES, 1951, 42.

the local congregations and established a pattern to be followed as often as possible. This was forbidden by the government on only a few occasions.<sup>31</sup>

### ***From 1953 to 1963***

#### **1. Relaxation of State Control**

After Yugoslavia's break with the countries of the Eastern bloc, there was a gradual liberalization. The year 1953 marks the beginning of the new order of relaxation and decentralization, when the National Assembly issued the Constitutional laws modifying the Constitution of 1945. Certain provisions on civil and religious liberties in the constitution were, interestingly enough, duplicated in the laws, although this was superfluous as the new law was designed only to amend the constitution. It was said that this was done in order to reinforce the already liberal provisions regarding these liberties.

In May of the same year, the National Assembly passed the Religious Communities Law,<sup>32</sup> as a supplement and elaboration of the constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion.<sup>33</sup> The leadership of the Methodist Church awaited this law with both anxiety and anticipation. The reaction was a sense of relief since it brought no startling changes. It merely formalized existing practices, though its text allegedly reflects a document based on free and amicable discussions between the government and the churches. The Methodist Church had not been asked to contribute anything to this discussion, if, indeed, it ever took place.

According to the new provisions the citizens of Yugoslavia were free to belong to any religious group or to none. Exerting pressure to make people become church members or to prevent them from becoming such and participating in religious rites was altogether prohibited. Complete legal equality and recognition were granted to all churches; neither the membership nor the clergy of the churches were to be granted any special privileges. Religious services and rites could be performed in the churches and on church property without specific notification, but for outside services special permission would have to be secured. Ministers might visit individual patients in hospitals and rest homes if their ministrations were requested.

It was required that civil marriages and registration of births precede religious weddings and baptism, which were not to be compulsory. For baptism the consent of one parent was sufficient, but for religious instruction, in church buildings after school hours, the consent of both parents or guardians was necessary.

The churches might not operate parochial schools, except for ministerial training. The churches were to choose their own faculties and curricula for the theological schools, but the state reserved the right to supervise these

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<sup>31</sup> Fiala.

<sup>32</sup> Rastko Vidic, *The Position of the Church in Yugoslavia*, trans. Veselin Kostic (Belgrade, Yugoslavia: Jugoslavija, 1962), 128-133. Contains the complete English translation of the legal text.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Lee Wolf, *The Balkans in Our Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1956), 511.

schools. Periodicals and newspapers might be issued by the churches within given provisions. The churches could be supported by voluntary collections taken inside but not outside the churches. The government had the right to grant subsidies to churches, such aid to be used without restrictions, unless specifically designated. In reality the Methodists have not received any subsidies from the state.

The provisions of this law were reasonable, when viewed against the past history of religious intolerance and the still dormant religious hatred. But there were unnecessary and unjustified restrictions, such as that of having church services only within buildings exclusively dedicated to this purpose and the prohibition of religious propaganda.

For the Methodists the most crippling clause was the one prohibiting the use of private homes for religious services. In many towns the Methodists had gathered in homes as the congregations were too poor to be able to afford a chapel. When the new regulation was issued it seemed that activity in a number of towns and villages would have to be abandoned particularly the smaller ones. Had it not been for prompt aid from a number of individual churches<sup>34</sup> and the Board of Missions this would have happened, but in few years it was possible to purchase houses for each of the congregations.

## **2. The Slovak Blue Cross Societies and the Church**

Methodism in Yugoslavia had its origin in German and Hungarian members of the Blue Cross Society, with some Serbs joining the churches. Fifty years later the Methodist Church in Vojvodina was strengthened by a new infusion of members of the Blue Cross who were Slovak nationals. Numerous Slovak colonies, often making up entire villages, were formed in Vojvodina between the eighteenth and twentieth century when both Slovakia and Vojvodina belonged to Hungary, when many Slovaks moved to Vojvodina in search of better land. Large and prosperous villages were formed in Backi Petrovac, Kovacica, Pivnicee, Kisac, Padina, as well as large parts of Backa Palanka, Sid, Ilok, and many other places, the inhabitants of which were primarily-Evangelical Lutherans or Roman Catholics.

The Blue Cross Society had considerable success among these Slovaks. This laymen's Christian movement, not connected with any church, found support among many Slovak Lutherans who experienced conversion and regeneration trying to bring individuals to a total dedication to Christ, in the belief that only thus can the power of addiction to alcohol and other sins be broken.<sup>35</sup>

The Blue Cross missionaries from Slovakia brought inspiration to the Slovaks in Vojvodina. Stara Tura (Slovakia) was the center from which

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<sup>34</sup> For example the College Heights Methodist Church from Lakeland, Florida, purchased a house for the congregation in Ilok, Vojvodina, for \$550 and thus enabled the continuation of services there.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Paul Bartak, "Quo Vadis Yugoslavia?", an unpublished article written but not accepted for publication after Dr. Bartak's return from a visit to the Yugoslav Methodists in spring of 1957.

radiated the blessed influence of Christine and Marie Roy, daughters of a Lutheran minister, who had dedicated their lives fully to the Lord. Christine wrote Christian pamphlets and books which were translated into many tongues and were propagated by tract societies all over the world. Marie composed music. Together they published a song book in which both, [sic] words and music, were mostly of their own composition.<sup>36</sup>

Jan Rohachek, a layman, from Stara Tura, Slovakia, felt called to organize Blue Cross Societies in Vojvodina, and he settled in Kisac in 1910. "He opened his home for religious worship and was instrumental in leading many a soul to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. When he died . . . in 1939, there were at least eight such centers among the Slovaks in Yugoslavia.<sup>37</sup> Around 1920, a Slovak colporteur, Djuro Lukac, established temporary residence in Sid, and there with the aid of Jan Rohachek, and two missionaries from Slovakia, Jan Horvat and Samuel Chinchurak, started a Blue Cross Society which was later lead by Mihal Hovan, Adarn.Djurik, Jano Olejar, and others.<sup>38</sup> A similar society was organized around 1925 in Erdevik by Ribar, Rohachek, Hovan, and others, including some deaconesses from Slovakia, but this group never became large.<sup>39</sup> In some places the society did very well; for example, in Pivnice the society had over 180 members.<sup>40</sup>

Already in 1940, the members of the Blue Cross Society in Kisac had turned for assistance to the Methodist Church. Paula Mojzes visited here and held services in place of the late Jan Rohachek.<sup>41</sup> Jan Rohachek had been in close touch with the Methodists and preached in some Methodist churches in Banat. He suggested that all members of the Blue Cross societies in Kisac, Kovachica, and Padina become Methodists, but this was not accomplished because of disagreement among the leaders.<sup>42</sup>

About 1948, the government ordered that the Blue Cross Society must register as a church within six months or cease activities. Through the indecisiveness of the leadership, the Blue Cross failed to register and the government banned it. Thereafter some of the leaders refused to obey the ban, and continued to meet. This resulted in the imprisonment of Tomas Slamai, Jano Podlavitski, and Mrs. Biresh from Stara Pazova.<sup>43</sup>

Various factions of the Blue Cross later associated themselves with Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Free Brethren, and Methodists. The majority eventually joined the Methodist Church because these people held much the same theological views, and used much the same methods as the Methodists. The chief difference was their lack of ecclesiastical structure. However in a number of places, such as Padina, very unchristian scandals

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<sup>36</sup> Bartak, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Bartak, 4f.

<sup>38</sup> Mihailo Olejar letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Vrbas, Yugoslavia, (December, 1963).

<sup>39</sup> Maria Dudok letter to Paul Mojzes, Erdevik, Yugoslavia, (January 6, 1964).

<sup>40</sup> Lajos Papp letter to Paul Mojzes, Pivnice, Yugoslavia, (December, 1963).

<sup>41</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n.p.

<sup>42</sup> Ondris Sjanta letter to Paul Mojzes, Padina (December, 1963).

<sup>43</sup> Yano Oleyar to Paul Mojzes, Shid, Yugoslavia, (January 7, 1964).

broke out in regard to the property of the society and confusion and quarrelling was the order of the day.<sup>44</sup>

The members of the former society in Kisac were the first to join the Methodist Church in 1949 under the leadership of the daughter of Jan Rohachek, Marta Rohachek.<sup>45</sup> When the others saw what a tremendous improvement the Kisac congregation made under Methodist auspices, they sought incorporation into the Methodist Church. The second congregation to seek membership was from Backa Palanka.<sup>46</sup> This trend continued until 1954. A number of people who joined the Methodist Church in this way later drifted into Baptist or Free Brethren Churches, when they were convinced of the need of adult baptism, weekly communion, or other theological points insisted upon by these two denominations. But in general the situation remained stable.

Superintendent Sebele and Mrs. Mojzes tried to minister to these new churches, traveling ceaselessly to strengthen Methodist influence. In addition to the former Methodist preaching places there were now congregations in Kisac, Backa Palanka, Ilok, Pivnice, Sid, Stara Pazova, Kovacica, Erdevik, and Padina, all in Vojvodina but at considerable distance one from another. Being unable to handle the work alone, they sought help among laymen, as well as lay women, whom they called "church sisters," Mrs. Mojzes' niece, by name Ljubica Vojvodic, was stationed in Zrenjanin in 1952 to take over the burden of the few Banat churches. Marta Rohachek, Beta Fiala, Katka Simon, Katarina Papp, and Katica Dukai entered the work of the church. Franja Zunk, a student at the University of Belgrade also traveled extensively and served as a lay preacher. The church sisters had the duty of preaching occasionally, and taking care of the daily program of the church, calling upon members, especially the ill, inviting people to services, holding Sunday Schools and women's meetings, prayer services, and other work.

Their inestimable contribution is much beyond any merely factual account. The services in the local churches were held by former lay leaders of the Slovak congregations, or new leaders that came to the fore. They became local preachers, of whom some were ordained and others only licensed. All of them continued their old employment in farming or other crafts, and gave to the church their spare time, for which some were paid by the central church treasury. The local church collections covered the cost of electricity, heat, and traveling expenses of the preachers, so that the meager salaries had to be paid by the treasury maintained through Board of Mission appropriations and special gifts.<sup>47</sup> These preachers were Jano Podlavicki, Tomash Slamai, Pavle Zajac, Ljudevit Pelah, Paljo Djuris, Jano Olejar, Ondrish Sjanta, Martin Lenhart, Lajos Papp, Djuro Lukac, and others. None of these men

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<sup>44</sup> OndrishSjanta to Paul Mojzes, Padina, Yugoslavia, (December, 1963).

<sup>45</sup> Paula Mojzes, n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Pavle Zajac letter to Paul Mojzes, Backa Palanka, Yugoslavia, (January 3, 1964).

<sup>47</sup> *The Journals of the Annual Meetings of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church* for the period of 1954 to 1960 specify the amounts of appropriation from \$1,711 in 1954 to a high \$4,139 in 1957, with a basic \$3,000 appropriation in 1959 and 1960.

had any theological training, but they did their work with great enthusiasm. Sermon preparation was by and large unknown among them. The procedure as to preaching was to seek “the inspiration by the Holy Spirit.” It was not unusual for the preachers to continue for an hour or more whether or not he held the attention of the congregation

The influence of these former Blue Cross Society members was very wholesome, and they showed great enthusiasm and faithfulness to the Methodist Church. Their accession in such large numbers<sup>48</sup> just after the rest of the Germans left, played a crucial role in the continuation of the work in Vojvodina. New property problems arose in connection with this incorporation, because the government expropriated almost all the property of the Blue Cross Society. While the government permitted meetings in private houses this was not a great problem, but when this was forbidden properties had to be purchased in almost all Slovak localities. This was a great burden for the church, but also a great victory after it was achieved.<sup>49</sup>

### **3. Ecclesiastical Organization and Work**

In Yugoslavia, the Methodist Church was organized according to the common Methodist Discipline. But some adaptations were necessary. Indeed the church was never a slave of rules, and flexibility was always maintained. The Quarterly Conferences were not regularly held, especially in the smaller churches. At least one Quarterly Conference of each church was held annually and these were usually well visited by members and workers of the local church and from the vicinity.<sup>50</sup>

The churches in Yugoslavia were divided into the Northern or Vojvodina district and the Southern or Macedonia district. The Annual Mission Conference consists of the two districts but the Bishops of the Geneva area could seldom preside, because of the government’s refusal to issue a visa. In 1946, Bishop Paul N. Garber presided over the Conference, in 1953, Bishop Arthur J. Moore, who had just taken over the jurisdiction of the Geneva area, led the conference in Novi Sad, and finally in 1957, Bishop Ferdinand Sigg, elected Bishop of the Geneva Area in 1956, came to Novi Sad. The communication with the first two of the bishops just named was a little difficult because of the language barrier, but when the Swiss Dr. Sigg assumed the episcopacy it was much easier to communicate with him in German.<sup>51</sup>

From 1945 to 1953, there were six active preachers, one in the North and five in the South. The superintendent was Georg Sebele. In 1953, Vladimir Daskalov and Pane Temkov were retired and the former died shortly thereafter. The brunt of the work fell on the remaining four pastors. The outstanding figure of Yugoslav Methodism was Georg Sebele. In a small church, much more than a large one, the key personalities tend to mold the character

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<sup>48</sup> There has been no official estimate of the number of Slovaks who joined the Methodist Church. An estimate of 250 does not seem unrealistic. Additional members joined afterwards.

<sup>49</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, (September 8, 1959).

<sup>50</sup> Bickel.

<sup>51</sup> Paula Mojzes, “Autobiografija,” n.p.

of the whole church.

Georg Sebele was the soul of Yugoslav Methodism. Small in stature, a model of patience and kindness, he seemingly could not make enemies even among declared enemies of the church. He had a very strong sense of duty, and a great store of energy for traveling at the most dangerous and inconvenient times, on foot, by bicycle or by trains, even after he was well over fifty. His unassuming leadership was unquestioned because of his seniority and experience. When advancing in years he was still studying Serbian and English and he started with Slovak, in order to be more useful to the church. He was a very humble person, who did all that he could to advance the interests not only of his church but of the Kingdom of God. "George Sebele is one of the epic heroes of Methodism in our day, but he would be amazed to have anybody say so."<sup>52</sup> When he died suddenly in the fall of 1955 the church experienced its heaviest loss. Besides the loss of personal friendship, "the death of a capable, and almost irreplaceable leader in Yugoslavia, Rev. George .Sebele, has also created a problem in administration."<sup>53</sup> The Bishop then appointed Mrs. Paula Mojzes to serve as the acting superintendent besides her duties as the secretary of the church administration. This she did until Bishop Sigg could come to the Annual Conference in 1957 to appoint pastor Krum Kalajlijev as the new superintendent of Yugoslav Methodism. Paula Mojzes was on that occasion ordained a deacon of the Methodist Church with three men, Lajos Papp, Paljo Djurish, and Ljudevit Pelah. She was then appointed the supervising pastor of the Northern District.<sup>54</sup> Beside teaching and translating from German for the Bible course in Novi Sad and doing extensive traveling to preach and administer the sacraments in the church she was the editor of *Put Zivota* (The Path of Life) and *Crkvene Vesti* (Church News) as well as its contributor. She also wrote a short history of Methodism called *Metodizam* and helped with the creation of a Macedonian hymnbook. The burden of the work in Vojvodina fell on her and the church sisters.<sup>55</sup> She was characterized by the General Secretary of the Board of Mission, Dr. Eugene L. Smith as "one of God's best achievements."<sup>56</sup> She held one of the most responsible places of any woman in any of the Annual Missionary Conferences of the Methodist Church.

Krum Kalajlijev was the worthy successor of Georg Sebele. A powerful evangelist, on whose face there was a constant expression of his goodness, he traveled from station to station two or three times a year besides serving his own church in Prilep. He was the first Macedonian to become the

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<sup>52</sup> Eugene L. Smith, "Yugoslavia," an unpublished travel report, 1954, Boston University, Methodist Library.

<sup>53</sup> *Ann. Rep. DWM*, 1956, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n. p. She is considered the first ordained Methodist woman in Europe and the first woman District Superintendent according to the United Methodist Historical Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Helmut Nausner, "Die Arbeit der Methodistenkirche in Jugoslawien," *Der Methodist* (February, 1960): 3.

<sup>56</sup> Smith.

Superintendent of an Annual Mission Conference. Fortunately, the government occasionally permitted him and Paula Mojzes to travel abroad and participate in the various international Methodist Conferences. These visitations have significantly strengthened the ties of Yugoslav to world Methodism as have the visits of American, German, Swiss, and Austrian Methodist leaders. Kosta Karmzov was the preacher of the Skopje Congregation with the aid of the retired Pane Temkov. His congregation suffered extensively during the earthquake in Skopje in August, 1963, and the chapel was greatly damaged. A team of pastors and church members immediately started to work on the chapel and the parsonage.<sup>57</sup> Methodists all over the world, including the Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief, the American, Scandinavian, and Swiss Methodists and the World Council of Churches helped the church members and the general populace.<sup>58</sup>

Ceko Cekov, the youngest of the Macedonian ministers had a fairly good basic education and was viewed before imprisonment as a future leader. Upon return from prison it seemed as if his spirit had been injured by great suffering, but he recovered and was giving a most useful service to the church in Strumica and the vicinity where the strongest Methodist Churches in Macedonia are located and eventually replaced Kalajlijev as the District Superintendent.

Relaxation of state control did not mean its complete disappearance. The preachers in Macedonia, especially superintendent Kalajlijev were frequently called to give account of their work to the Commission for Religious Affairs.<sup>59</sup> Similar investigations were being carried on by the secret police. It must be said in the case of the activities of Georg Sebele and Paula Mojzes the approach was usually civil though intimidating.<sup>60</sup> Investigations consisted of not necessarily unpleasant conversations as to what was going on in the churches, who the foreign visitors were, what they had to say, and other internal business of the church. Such investigations are dreaded by the people who undergo this sort of questioning.

Two flagrant cases of state intervention occurred. Around 1955, the Murtino Church in Macedonia received the permission to build a new church. When the old structure was torn down and new material was brought to the site by voluntary labor of the membership, local state officials, on a pretext relating to a building permit, took it away, in a most brazen fashion, and repeatedly imprisoned six church leaders for periods up to a month, expropriating all the money and the building material. By 1963, the church had not yet been built.<sup>61</sup> Similar interference with building was experienced in Strumica.

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<sup>57</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Gaither P. Warfield, Novi Sad, (October 7, 1963), and also Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, (October 21, 1963).

<sup>58</sup> Gaither P. Warfield letter to Paula Mojzes, New York, (January 2, 1964).

<sup>59</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Basel, Switzerland, (September 3, 1963).

<sup>60</sup> The author was a personal witness of such investigations by plain clothes policemen of his mother.

<sup>61</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, 1963, No.2.

Most tragic of all was the mysterious death of a preacher from Murtino by the name of Asen Palankov. While attending the Bible course in the winter of 1958, he was reported drowned in the icy Danube in Novi Sad, presumably by suicide, probably the result of unbearable pressure by government officials. More likely, however, was that he was drowned by secret agents. No permission was given to view his corpse after it was pulled out of the river, but some believed that his hands had been tied by wire. One of the Macedonia church sisters had been threatened by the police that her intestines will also hang from the rafters as did Palankov's. The real cause and manner of his death may never be known. To my knowledge Palankov is the only Methodist preacher from Yugoslavia who was killed by the Communist authorities.

Another case of state pressure, not so tragic but nonetheless very real, came about as follows: Without warning the church was taxed in the amount of seventy percent of all monetary gifts from abroad, including the appropriations from the Board of Missions. This was a staggering blow.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the publication of periodicals was not to be supported, nor were the church workers to receive their salaries from abroad. These measures were brought out in full knowledge of their impact upon the smaller churches. In Novi Sad, the large apartment house was nationalized and placed under collective management, the church receiving only the use of the church hall.

Through such economic pressure as well as intimidation and mockery of people attending services, especially students or workers, and through continuous anti-religious propaganda the Methodist Church was continuously menaced. The leadership felt that the field for their labor is shrinking. The pressure upon the church varies with the political aims of the state; when rapprochement with USSR is the order of the day the churches are under greater pressure; and when the West is to be pacified the churches feel a little more freedom. The deeper meaning of terror in a totalitarian state is not so much overt persecution as the fear of unknown hostile measures that may be arbitrarily invoked.

The lack of adequate statistics prevents the exact estimate of the numerical strength of Methodists in Yugoslavia. The membership was variously estimated from 755<sup>63</sup> to 2,300.<sup>64</sup> These reports, especially the lower figure, are inaccurate. According to the 1959 figures of the secretariat of the Methodist Church in Novi Sad there are 3,000 Methodists in some forty congregations, with three ordained elders, ten church sisters, sixteen local preachers, and 400 children in Sunday Schools.<sup>65</sup> One should keep in mind the possibility of "pious exaggeration," arising by not striking names of those who have

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<sup>62</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, (September 7, 1960).

<sup>63</sup> "A Progress Report on World Mission," *World Outlook* (April, 1959): 15.

<sup>64</sup> Stewart Winfried Herman, *Report from Christian Europe* (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), 129.

<sup>65</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, (May 22, 1959).

ceased to attend, in the hope that they will return. It might at best be optimistically assumed that the Methodist Church in Yugoslavia had approximately three thousand members. This figure was perhaps somewhat lower in 1961 and 1962.<sup>66</sup>

In Macedonia there were several congregations of two or three hundred Christians who are deeply dedicated but poorly organized. The potential of these churches is not used to the full because of lack of attention such as is possible in smaller groups.<sup>67</sup> The most active church was at Kolesino, which had a fine youth fellowship and large Sunday School. A number of church sisters were added to the list of workers in these congregations. The poverty in Macedonia was a disabling factor, the contributions of the congregations being very small. The Novi Sad congregation in Vojvodina, if not large, was considered one of the most active and the most sacrificing.<sup>68</sup>

The administrative headquarters remain in Novi Sad. Virtually all initiative and planning came from the secretariat of the Church. Novi Sad was the center of the Backa circuit, including Kisac, Novi Vrbas, Pivnice, Backa Palanka, and Ilok. The Novi Vrbas congregation lost nearly all its members through emigration. The Slovak churches in Pivnice, Kisac and Backa Palanka have recorded a small growth, while the Ilok congregation has declined to a handful of people.<sup>69</sup>

The Srem circuit consisted of congregations in Belgrade, Stara Pazova, Sid, Sremska Mitrovica, and Erdevik. The last two met only occasionally when visited by some preacher. The Sid and Stara Pazova congregations increased only slightly, but they were the source of several younger workers. In Belgrade the congregation consisted mainly of Methodists who moved to the capital. They met in the hall of the Reformed church.<sup>70</sup> Services were conducted by Boris and Nikola Andonov, by a Baptist minister, Aleksandar Birvis, and by visiting preachers.<sup>71</sup>

The Banat circuit included congregations in Zrenjanin, Vrsac, Kovachica and Padina. The first two suffered by the emigration of the German population, and the separation of the Baptists who worshiped with the Methodists until they acquired their own quarters. The Padina and Kovacica churches improved their chapels and expanded in membership so that they were considered among the best congregations.<sup>72</sup>

A Hungarian circuit in northern Backa consisted of congregations in Senta, Stari Becej and Srbobran. Of these, the Senta congregation was by far the most vital. Here the ecumenical spirit progressed greatly as the Evangelical

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<sup>66</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Izvesta.i Sekretara Godisnjem Bratskom Sastanku .Jugoslovenske Misijske Konferencije," Kisac, 1961. Typed report to the Annual Mission Conference, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Hovan letter to Paul Moizes, Zrenjanin, (January 3, 1964).

<sup>68</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Izvestaj," 3.

<sup>69</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Izvestaj," 3, 4, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Izvestaj," 5.

<sup>71</sup> Nikola Andonov letter to Paul Mojzes, Claremont, California, (December 15, 1963).

<sup>72</sup> Martin Hovan letter to Paul Mojzes, Zrenjanin, Yugoslavia, (January 3, 1964).

Lutherans and Reformed Christians worshiped with the Methodists.<sup>73</sup> The Stari Becej church, at one time very active, became one of the weakest, as many members moved or died, and the rest degenerated into practicing black magic, spiritism, and superstition.<sup>74</sup> In Srbobran the church was disorganized because the house in which the orphanage formerly was located, where services were held, was nationalized.<sup>75</sup>

Methodism in Yugoslavia largely rested on the work of women. There were congregations, such as in Erdevik which were entirely made up of women.<sup>76</sup> Women's Societies contributed not only to the spiritual well-being of the church, but also took care of the needs of the Home for the Aged in Vrbas (which was later moved to Kisac).<sup>77</sup>

There was an absence of young people in the congregations in the north, but this was not the case in Macedonia. The Sunday Schools, despite two training courses for teachers, were weak, with some notable exceptions, such as Backa Palanka. The burning problem for churches in Communist countries was how to enlist more young people. Occasionally there was an increase in young people's attendance, but the church had planned no solution except the hope that constant prayer and evangelism would produce miraculous results. There was very little in the church that was truly attractive to youth. The church was not concerned with the specific problems of youth, and was very rigid in its attitude toward dancing, smoking, make-up, dressing, movies, and all types of "worldly entertainment." The church's message of an impending doom<sup>78</sup> was not exactly cheering and a number of young people were undoubtedly repelled by its inflexible demands for a visible rebirth and radical change of life, as well as the refusal to accept any scientific theories which seem to contradict the Bible. The government took advantage of this in alienating the youth from all churches, as a part of the secularization of society.

The membership of the church was made up mostly of old and sickly people, mostly women, and was led by elderly preachers. Many of them tended to look wistfully back to the past, rather than to cope with the new situation. However, they did not lack in zeal and energy, and no one would dispute their dedication to God. There was not a favorable element for religion between 1940 and 1965 on the Yugoslav scene. The accomplishments in the face of all these unfavorable circumstances was nearly miraculous. It would not have been possible but for limitless trust that God is leading and that it is imperative to listen to God's commandments no matter how discouraging and desperate the situation might be. In this lies the strength and survival of Yugoslav Methodism.

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<sup>73</sup> Paula Mojzes, "Izvesta.i Sekretara Godisnjem Bratskom Sastanku .Jugoslovenske Misijske Konferencije," 1962. Typed report to the Annual Mission Conference, 6.

<sup>74</sup> Mojzes, "Izvestaj," 1962, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Mojzes, "Izvestaj," 1961, 5.

<sup>76</sup> Maria Dudok letter to Paul Mojzes, Erdevik, Yugoslavia, (January 6, 1964).

<sup>77</sup> Mojzes "Izvestaj," 1962, 7.

<sup>78</sup> Mojzes "Izvestaj," 1962, 1.

#### **4. Ecumenical Relations**

The ecumenical movement influenced the Yugoslav churches. With few exceptions they did not respond enthusiastically. As a rule a “bad neighbor” policy prevailed among the churches, as it did among the Balkan States, and only under Communism were they forced by external threats to cooperate, though the old suspicions still lingered. The ecumenical encounter with other Protestants had been accepted as early as the 1920s, although it was not practiced extensively. Very limited cooperation was developed with the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The extent of cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church was that one priest, Ugresic, the secretary to the Orthodox bishop of Novi Sad, taught at a small seminary for Methodist lay preachers and attended a number of ecumenical prayer services. Methodist representatives were received in audience by the late Patriarchs Vikentije and German and the chairman of the Association of Orthodox Priests, archpriest Milan Smiljanic. The Serbian Orthodox Church had not joined the World Council of Churches during the time period under discussion, and no other ecumenical contacts had been made with the Orthodox. The Orthodox in general regarded the Methodists as unwelcome foreigners. Especially in Macedonia, the Methodists had a very bad relationship with the local Orthodox churches, which subsequently improved.

With the Roman Catholics there were no relations whatsoever. The Methodists were anti-Catholic and frequently regarded that church and the pope with great distrust and enmity. The ecumenical tendencies of the Roman Catholic Church displayed at the Second Vatican Council and the broader Christian efforts for unity were regarded as significant but not essential as it had nothing to do with the unity of “real Christians” who have been reborn, who have always enjoyed real unity in Christ.

The unity of all Christians will not be the unity of which Christ speaks. The real unity refers to the body of Jesus Christ and not to a great general Christian church. It is true that Christianity made many mistakes, but this has nothing in common with Christ. He who loves Christ, that is, who is born again, loves his neighbor as himself and consequently cannot do any injustice to his brother or sister. In Christ end all differences between races, classes, and sex as well as all struggles except against sin. Such Christians will always be in the minority; they will always remain the “little flock” to whom Jesus said “be not afraid.” The person who belongs to this fold has the promise that even the gates of hell cannot harm him. Real Christianity will never be a mass movement but always consist of individuals who washed their clothes in the blood of Jesus Christ. They will always be a thorn in the side of both Christians and non-Christians.<sup>79</sup>

Clergymen of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches were suspected of insincerity in their Christianity if they smoked or drank alcoholic beverages. Close relationships with these men developed in only a few cases, such as

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<sup>79</sup> Paula Mojzes letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, (July 16, 1963).

with Reformed Bishop Sandor Agoston from Feketic and Lutheran senior Sostarec from Subotica. Such men were frequently invited to evangelize in Methodist Churches and very cordial relations followed. Despite the feeling that these churches were too formal, and that they did not insist on rebirth as a measure of membership, the Methodists invited some of their ministers to teach at the seminary for lay preachers. They cooperated each year in the organization of a prayer week in Novi Sad in which the Baptists and Free Brethren also took part.

With the smaller denominations, such as the Baptists, Free Brethren, Pentecostals, and Adventists, there was a great deal of rivalry, and they were all accused of trying to draw away members and in some places distrust and bitterness were common. In Pivnice, for example, an evangelist Hlavach from America disrupted and nearly destroyed a new congregation consisting of former Blue Cross members after presenting himself as a friend. He criticized severely the Methodist Church in America and insisted on the necessity of adult baptism for salvation.<sup>80</sup> Similar incidents occurred in Backa Palanka, Padina, Erdevik, Sid, and other places.<sup>81</sup>

The relation between the Baptists and the Methodists was not wholly one of rivalry. In Vrsac, in the absence of a minister, a few Baptists joined the Methodists for regular worship services.<sup>82</sup> Frequently the two churches shared visiting evangelists of both denominations. James Lowden from Chicago, a fundamentalist evangelist, visited Yugoslavia some five or six times for considerable periods, preaching in almost every Baptist and Methodist Church with great success and impartiality. He also spoke to President Tito on behalf of these two churches hoping to evoke good will.<sup>83</sup> Another encouraging development was that five young Methodist ministerial candidates studied for four years at the Baptist Theological School in Novi Sad.

## 5. Theological Education

A very burning problem was the education of preachers. Yugoslav candidates could not go for studies to foreign countries and foreigners could not go to Yugoslavia to work.<sup>84</sup> The church sisters and lay preachers had no formal theological education and as most of them had only elementary schooling and did not read German or English, they were unable to profit from the existing religious literature in these languages. They were restricted essentially to the Bible and the hymn book, or perhaps a devotional book or two, for the preparation of their sermons. There was a great need to improve not only their general education and culture, but even more to give them basic religious training. There being no Protestant theological faculty or school in the country at that time, the leaders of the Methodist Church, particularly

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<sup>80</sup> Lajos Papp letter to Paul Mojzes, Pivnice, (December, 1963).

<sup>81</sup> To this testify almost all the letters received from the leaders of the Methodist congregations in these places.

<sup>82</sup> Anna Fiala to Paul Mojzes, Vrsac, (December 11, 1963).

<sup>83</sup> "Audience of Jim Lowden with Marshall Tito: December 31, 1953" (Mimeographed).

<sup>84</sup> Bickel.

Georg Sebele and Paula Mojzes decided to organize a two-month basic theological training course to be held during the winter months when the people, mainly farmers, could find time to improve their knowledge.

In the first course organized in 1954, help was received from two Reformed pastors, one Orthodox priest, and one Baptist pastor.<sup>85</sup> Twenty-six attended the course of which nine were church sisters. Meetings were held in the small worship hall at the Novi Sad Methodist Church. The students contributed their labor and part of the food, attending classes nearly all day long. Courses such as Survey of the Old and the New Testament, Exegesis, Homiletics, Discipline of the Methodist Church, and similar subjects were offered. This course was again held for two months in 1955, 1956, and 1957. After Georg Sebele died in the fall of 1955, the course was administered by Paula Mojzes, with the help of James Lowden from the USA, and Oswald Bickel and E. Voelmy from Switzerland.<sup>86</sup>

This instruction provided a basic background for most of the older lay preachers and church sisters. In 1958, Paula Mojzes organized a similar course for Sunday School teachers in Kisac, which answered the need of teachers' training. A number of very valuable workers were gained through these courses who could be taken into part-time or full-time employment. Others, besides the above-mentioned lay preachers from Vojvodina most of whom took the course, were Kiro Buhov, Georgi Milchev, Asen Palankov, and church sisters Vera Azmanova and Zora Vuckova.

Two young men, Mihailo Olejar and Martin Hovan, both Slovak nationals, intended to enter the ministry of the church but these courses were not sufficient for the ordination. When the Baptist Theological School opened in Novi Sad in 1957 in the rank of a secondary theological school these two students were sent there. Their theological education lasted three years, with a fourth year in which they studied at home prior to the final examinations.<sup>87</sup>

Besides the basic theological training which was offered by Baptist ministers who had completed theological schools, the seminarians also received a general education in history, government, hygiene, and the like. The quality of the theological part of this education has been judged to be equal to that provided in other European Bible Schools. Three young Macedonians, Krum Ivanov, Boris Doncev, and Bozin Kostadinov entered the school about 1960 and were scheduled to graduate in 1964.

## **6. Theological Beliefs**

The religion of the Methodists in Yugoslavia was experience centered, the basic necessities for salvation being considered to be rebirth, and the continuous fight against sin so as to preserve purity of the life in grace.<sup>88</sup> It was held that it is not very important what one believes, as long as he is motivated

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<sup>85</sup> RES, 1954, p. 41 and Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n. p.

<sup>86</sup> Partial source is *Ann. Rep. DWM*, 1955, 40.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Hovan letter to Paul Mojzes, Zrenjanin, Yugoslavia, (January 3, 1964) and Mihailo Olejar letter to Paul Mojzes, Novi Vrbas, Yugoslavia, (December, 1963).

<sup>88</sup> "Bog ima odgovor za tebe," *Put Zivota* 2.5 (February 2, 1964): 1.

to live a Christian life by repentance of sins and by full acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior. The central message of the Methodists is the love of God expressed through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; unless one has the secure knowledge that this act was done by Christ for the individual personally, he or she cannot be saved, no matter what she or he may believe, or to what church she or he may belong.<sup>89</sup>

The basic Protestant beliefs of the centrality of the Bible, the priesthood of all believers, the right of individual interpretation of the Bible, and justification by faith alone are the basic teachings of the Methodists, although they are not dogmatized. Since the infallibility of the Bible is definitely believed, the major traditional and fundamentalist doctrines are often mutually contradictory. The second coming of Christ, and the end of the world are eagerly expected and felt to be near, but never predicted. The general feeling of the Methodists is that the world is very hostile and that nothing good can be expected here on earth where the human being is just a pilgrim. The real reward will come in the next life in which men will be subjected either to eternal physical and psychic pains or to eternal heavenly bliss. The duty of a Christian is to try to save as many people as possible from eternal damnation. Society cannot be changed by sinful men; when people become real Christians, society would change automatically, but this is impossible here on earth. The Kingdom of God is completely otherworldly.

The basic beliefs of the Methodists were unsystematically presented in the two periodicals, *Put Zivota* and *Crkvene Vesti*, both of which appeared on a more regular basis since 1963. In their pages the emphasis was on the need to be saved through belief in the work of Christ on the cross, the love and faithfulness of Christians, scorn of human wisdom and the glorification of faith as opposed to reason, piety and the need for visible fruits of faith such as bringing new adherents to the churches and the like. The special emphases on the second coming and life after death result from the long existence in a hostile society where very little recompense could be expected for good deeds. Their eschatological beliefs and social concern were not quite reconciled but not mutually contradictory. They lived in the hope of an impending second coming of Christ, yet their time of waiting was filled with good deeds toward others, which are the result of their rebirth.

The distrust in theological speculation can be traced to the lack of such theological training. The strong belief in the infallibility of the Bible caused the nonexistence of any but very conservative theology. Modernism, liberalism, and neo-orthodoxy were perhaps known to exist but none of the pastors understood such theological trends, while the members never heard that there is any other Protestant theology than their own. Such was the conservative theology which all the churches in Yugoslavia preached, with a few technical variations as to the type of baptism, church organization, and the like. Moreover they felt the need to defend themselves from materialistic and atheist philosophy by means of something completely authoritative. If

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<sup>89</sup> "Omotni papir," *Put Zivota* 1.38 (December 15, 1963): 1-2.

the Bible were not considered absolutely and exclusively authoritative and above recourse to reason the whole foundation of faith would be shaken.

It would not do to try to explain every theological doctrine of the Balkan Methodists in terms of the economic, political, and other circumstances in which they lived, because none of this theology was devised by them, but rather inherited or accepted from those who came to spread Methodism in those areas. This is also true for Congregationalism in the Balkans. However, it remains striking that these teachings had such emphasis at a time when they were no longer fostered with such vigor by the mother churches. This might be ascribed to hostile regimes, numerous wars, and being cut off from their major roots. Human nature being complex as it is, this explanation of the grounds of their theological convictions is incomplete, as is the attempt to describe and explain the whole development of the churches under consideration.

The Methodist Church in Yugoslavia continued its proclamation of the Gospel and there were some encouraging signs that some difficulties were being successfully surmounted. A number of congregations, especially in Macedonia, steadily increased, as did the total membership if only by twenty or thirty members annually. A number of younger men dedicated themselves to church work which was considered a welcome addition. As the exercise of religious convictions was not challenged by the government in many of the years, a fairly optimistic atmosphere prevailed among the leadership of the church. To them the improvement of conditions was evidence that God protects and guides his church continually, in good and in evil times. In the middle of the 1960s, there was some evidence of the further liberalization of the regime which would definitely broaden the religious freedoms and no signs that the country was doomed to disintegrate by the beginning of the 1990s so that Methodists of Macedonia and Vojvodina no longer live in the same country.