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CONFIGURATION OF THE SMALL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

By **David Steele**

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Another foreign commentator on religion in the Balkans, Trevor Beeson, has written that, "Yugoslavia is the despair of tidy minds. . . Yugoslavia's historical, political, cultural and religious backgrounds combine to create a minefield which even the most sensitive and well informed commentator can only cross in fear and trembling."[1] Today, a decade after Beeson wrote, the risks have certainly increased manyfold. One should perhaps proceed with even greater fear and trembling, even when assessing the current and future role of the small religious communities in the successor states to the former Yugoslavia. Before addressing this question, however, I will spend considerable time on the history of these communities, both

[1]Trevor Beeson, Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) p. 288.

Jewish and Protestant.[2] I will begin with the Jewish community since their presence pre-dates that of Protestantism.

History of Judaism

The history of Judaism in the lands comprising the former Yugoslavia varies greatly depending on which region one examines. Jewish communities have existed in Dalmatia, Serbia and Macedonia since Roman times, pre dating by several centuries the presence of Slavic peoples. In Dalmatia the Jewish community thrived during the Middle Ages under the rule of Venice and the Republic of Dubrovnik. Expansion of these communities into northern Croatia and Slovenia, though at first successful, eventually led to persecution and expulsion, beginning in 1496. In Serbia, and especially in Macedonia (e.g. Struga, Ohrid, Skopje, and Bitola) Romaniot (or Greek speaking) Jewish communities existed during the Byzantine Empire in which they were granted a certain degree of autonomy, such as their own court system. After the advent of the Ottoman Empire, however, the Turks reduced the size of this community by moving great numbers of these Romaniot Jews to Istanbul in 1453.[3]

Following the demise of these early Jewish communities, the first major wave of Jewish immigration to the South Slavic lands came in 1492 with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The Turks welcomed these Sephardic Jewish refugees to the Ottoman Empire, where

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[2]It must be noted that limiting this study to Jewish and Protestant religious communities excludes a couple of communities worth noting. First the Jehovah's Witnesses have formally existed as a church in the former Yugoslavia since 1953 and presently number about ten-thousand adherents. Prior to World War II they had existed as a "secular society," but even such a designation did not prevent them from being totally eliminated during the war. Second, the old Catholic Church was established in 1923 by priests who were distressed over the lack of reform in the Catholic Church. This Croatian Old Catholic Church entered into the Union of Utrecht, the council of all Old Catholic Churches. Just prior to World War II their membership had risen to 68,000, despite a split in 1933 which produced the Croatian National Old Catholic Church. During World War I all Old Catholics suffered greatly resulting in much diminished numbers. However, in postwar Yugoslavia, this movement spread to other regions, including Slovenia, Vojvodina, Serbia, and Bosnia & Herzegovina. In 1974 the two factions united, producing a church of 5,000-6,000 adherents today (Rudolf Grulich, "The Small Religious Communities of Yugoslavia" Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe, III, No.6 [1983], 1-3, 7; and Aleksandar Birviš, [Pastor of Baptist Church in Belgrade], private interview, Beograd, 24 June, 1994). This paper will also not include treatment of now extinct religious groups like the Bogomils. Nor will it include the examples of single congregation splinter groups or new western missionary efforts currently beginning.

[3]Grulich, "The Small Religious Communities of Yugoslavia," pp. 8-10; Aryeh Shmuelevitz, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries: Administrative, Economic, Legal and Social Relations as Reflected in the Responsa (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 11-12, 17, 21; and Harriet Pass Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), p.5.

they settled in large numbers. By the mid-sixteenth century there were strong communities established in Beograd, Sarajevo, Skopje, Bitola, Dubrovnik, and Split. At first there was considerable tension between the Sephardim and the remaining Romaniot Jews, the immigrants considering themselves more culturally advanced. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, the Sephardic community had successfully assimilated the Romaniot Jews.

The Sephardic Jews brought their own language and customs, speaking a Judeo-Spanish dialect evolved from Castilian Spanish. These communities were very close knit and had little contact with the outside world. Their lifestyle was a combination of Spanish and Oriental influences, but the center of the community life was their religious piety and traditional Jewish customs.[4] Wherever they located, they formed separate communal organizations alongside of those already in existence with the Turks granting them the status of an autonomous community or state. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these Sephardic communities flourished, and continued to do so until the decay of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century.

A second major wave of Jewish immigrants into these territories in the former Yugoslavia came at the end of the eighteenth century from the Hapsburg Empire. Prior to this, these Ashkenazic Jewish communities had been banned from settling in Slovenia and Croatia, though small numbers of them had immigrated to Serbia and Macedonia as early as the fifteenth century. Their numbers in the Ottoman-controlled areas were always relatively small. But with the withdrawal of the Turks from the areas north of the Danube during the late 1700s, Ashkenazic Jewish communities developed in many places in Croatia and Vojvodina. The largest of these were in Zagreb, Osijek, Novi Sad and Subotica. By the mid-nineteenth century a majority of these Ashkenazim had joined reformed Judaism, a movement which advocated greater leniency in religious practices than did the Orthodox Jews. Their language also changed from Yiddish to German or Hungarian.[5]

After the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878 some Ashkenazic Jews moved to Sarajevo and to other communities as well as to Beograd. A few Sephardic Jews made their way to Zagreb around the same time. But, by and large, the division between the two Jewish communities remained along the contours of the old border between the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires. This division mirrored the division between Croats and Serbs. Just as the Serbs accepted the influence of Byzantium and the Catholics turned to Rome, so the Sephardim adapted the Babylonian model within Judaism and the Ashkenazim the Palestinian

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[4]Shmuelevitz, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, pp. 13-14; and Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp. 5-6.

[5]Shmuelevitz, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, p. 12; and Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp. 6-7.

model. Also, the Sephardic communities maintained much greater separation from the general culture than did the Reformed Ashkenazic communities who adopted many western concepts under the influence of the Hapsburgs. The latter, no longer operating within a predominantly Jewish context, underwent a significant degree of assimilation and considered themselves more advanced and enlightened than their Sephardic counterparts who remained tied to their history and traditions.[6]

The European struggle for emancipation in the nineteenth century produced the liberation of all serfs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1848. During these climactic events, Jews were primarily interested in gaining equal status as citizens rather than simply preserving special states as Jews. Liberal Jews identified themselves as members of the same nationality as their neighbors, distinguishing themselves only in their religion. By the late nineteenth century they had achieved legal emancipation, and by 1918 they enjoyed full civil equality.[7]

During the period between the wars as citizens of the newly formed kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Jews continued to be regarded as a religious instead of a national minority. Yet still they constituted a relatively small portion of the population, much smaller than in other former Hapsburg lands. In 1921 there were about 65,000 Jews, representing about half a percent of the total population. As such, they were neither the largest, nor the most significant minority in interwar Yugoslavia. Yet there were some significant traits which distinguished them from their fellow Yugoslav citizens. They were overwhelmingly an urban population in a very rural country, with the largest concentrations existing in Zagreb, Beograd, and Sarajevo. As was the case with many urban people, they achieved greater educational and socio-economic success than much of the rest of the population. However, few of them had prominent positions in public life. Gradually they acquired a knowledge of the Serbo-Croatian language, an indication of a desire on the part of most Jews to be assimilated. Yet this process of integration was not universally successful. The Ashkenazim had a harder time being accepted as Croats than did the Sephardim as Serbs or Bosnians. Therefore, Zionism became an increasing attraction to the Jews in Croatia.[8]

With the outset of World War II, the Yugoslav Jews suffered the fate of all the Jews of Europe. After the surrender of Yugoslavia in 1941, discriminatory regulations were put into effect, arrests were made, and concentration camps were started. The worst massacres occurred in Serbia where all Jews were eliminated by mid 1942. In the puppet state of

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[6]Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp. 7-8.

[7]Ibid. p. 55; and Franc Sebjanič, The Protestant Movement of Slovenes in Pannonia, trans. by Suzanne Kiraly-Moss (Murska Sobota: Pomurska Zalozba, 1978) p. 52.

[8]Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp. 55-56, 68, 170.

Croatia, the ruling Ustashi fascists murdered and tortured both Jews and Serbs in some of the most notorious concentration camps in Europe. The only part of Yugoslavia where the Jewish population were at all protected was the Italian controlled Adriatic coast. Overall, the Holocaust destroyed eighty percent of the pre-war Jewish population, about 60,000 people. Of the 15,000 survivors, about half emigrated to Israel after the war. The remaining Jews, numbering only 6,000-7,000 following 1952, and representing only .01 percent of the population, began the task of reorganizing. The ratio between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews remained about the same, but the distinction ceased to have any meaning, and the differences gradually disappeared. Likewise, the Orthodox minority was no longer organized into separate structures. Also, Zionists and integrationists no longer campaigned against one another. Such differences were not even discussed following the war. The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities which had been formed in 1919, but had dissolved during the war, was reinstituted in 1952 as the Federation of Jewish Communities. Noteworthy is the fact that the word "Religious" was dropped from the name. This reflected a radical shift away from the religious sphere in the purpose and activities of the federation. Some religious facilities were maintained, but these were used primarily by the older generation. The majority of younger Jews have, for a number of decades now, held a strongly secularist perspective. Their interest has been in the cultural state of communal life. Initially following the war this included the establishment of the network of social service institutions for the poor, the orphaned, the sick and the elderly. After 1952 these institutions, with the exception of a home for the elderly in Zagreb, were gradually phased out. What has remained is a few kindergartens, student clubs, choirs, and programs on Jewish history and culture. On the other hand, the leadership of the Jewish communities became increasingly involved in influential positions within the secular society. The remaining Jews were mostly professionals, many of whom held high government positions and were members of the League of Communists. It was obviously a high priority to foster close official ties with the governing regime.[9]

The Present State of Judaism

The size of the Jewish community has remained about the same since the end of World War II, numbering 5,600 as of 1980. However, the current conflicts have brought similar

[9]Ibid., pp. 98-99, and 191-210; Nora Levin, The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), pp. 510-17; Grulich, "The Small Religious Communities of Yugoslavia," pp. 13-14; Nikola Volf (former head of the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Belgrade Jewish Community), private interview, Beograd, 25 June, 1994; and M. George Zaninovich, The Development of Socialist Yugoslavia (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968) p. 171.

trials to Jews, as to other inhabitants. The Jewish community of Sarajevo, the largest of the communities prior to 1992,[10] has now been greatly diminished with the largest number, about 600-800 going to Beograd. Splits have occurred between the Croatian and Serbian communities, with recriminations thrown back and forth between the two. Some leaders in the Beograd community claim that the leadership in Zagreb is closely tied to Tudjman and that the head of that community has falsely claimed that Jews in Serbia have been banished and mistreated.[11] Similarly, some of the Zagreb leadership has charged the Beograd community with serving Serbian propaganda and falsely portraying democratic Croatia as anti-semitic.[12] Charges of anti-semitism have once again re-appeared, with the most flagrant examples being the explosion of a bomb in the synagogue in Zagreb in 1992[13] and the reprinting in Serbian in 1994 in Beograd of a Nazi war propaganda pamphlet titled "Protocols of the Sages of Zion."[14] Both of these events tend to be played down by the indigenous community and played up by some in the opposite community. In each case there has been a very strong tendency to support one's own regime. For example, a Jewish senior counselor at the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs speaks of current Serbian aggression as the new holocaust and calls the world to respond accordingly.[15] On the other hand, the rabbi in Beograd says such Jews should be ashamed of themselves since the true victims of this war have been Serbs.[16] There is some sign that these extreme attitudes are moderating. The lay leadership of both the Beograd and Zagreb communities has recently undergone significant change, bringing in a younger generation who hold more dissident views than the World War II veterans who were more pro-regime.[17]

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[10]Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp. 193 and 205; and Grulich, "The Small Religious Communities of Yugoslavia," p. 14.

[11]Rabbi Cadik Danon, private interview, Beograd, 12 August, 1993; and Volf, private interview, 25 June, 1994.

[12]Mihail Montiljo (Senior Counselor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Croatia), "The Jewish Aspects of The Crisis in Ex-Yugoslavia -- The Facts on the Position of Jews in the Republic of Croatia" (Zagreb: printed by the World Conference on Religion and Peace, Croatian Chapter, 1993), pp. 1-10.

[13]"Jewish Community and the War in Croatia," (Zagreb: Kršćanska Informativna Služba, 26 March, 1992).

[14]EKP "Velvet," ed., "Protocols of the Sages of Zion (English translation of Serbian title), Beograd, printed by "Jovan," 1994.

[15]Montiljo, "The Jewish Aspects of the Crisis in Ex-Yugoslavia," pp. 2,3 and 7.

[16]Danon, private interview, 12 August, 1993.

[17]In Zagreb, the lay leadership is the only leadership (Volf, private interview, 25 June, 1994).

There are still major hurdles to be overcome before the Jewish communities are likely to function in a reconciling role. In addition to the recent divisions between Zagreb and Beograd, one must remember that these communities historically have identified themselves as Croats and Serbs. Secularization may have reduced the religious distinctions, but the secular ones remain. The Croat and Serb identities have been reinforced by high degrees of Jew and non-Jew inter-marriage within the respective communities and the recurrent Jewish fear of offending the respective state authorities. In addition to these reasons, the very small size of the communities, together with the aging population, make it difficult for energetic, new initiatives to come from this source.[18]

History of Protestantism

Protestantism came to the lands which constituted the former Yugoslavia during three distinct historical periods. The first was at the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century when Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) traditions were moderately successful in Slovenia, Croatia, Dalmatia, Istria, Slavonia, and Hungary. Lutheranism came from Austria and Calvinism from Hungary where the feudal lords used the new religion as a means to resist centralized authority. Soon thereafter conflict broke out between Lutheran and Reformed traditions, however, and by the mid-seventeenth century the Calvinists had lost out to the Lutherans on the territory that is presently Slovenia and Croatia. Yet the biggest challenge came when the Catholic counter-Reformation began at the end of the sixteenth century and accelerated in the seventeenth century. This movement gained strength by mid-to-late 1600s, especially with the victory over the Turks at Monoster in 1664, leading to a "decade of sorrows (1671-81)," remembered as such for the persecution of Protestants. This counter-Reformation movement obliterated most of the early Protestant congregations, although in Hungary a large number of Lutheran and Reformed Churches have remained until this day. There is also a tiny remnant of Lutheran Churches in Slovenia and Croatia, along the border with Hungary, although their numbers are now decreasing due to intermarriage.[19] The Pannonian Slovenes, for example, who have lived between the Mura and Raba Rivers, have retained this Protestant tradition since the time of the Reformation,

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[18]Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp. 201-210.

[19]Paul Benjamin Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," Ph.D. dissertation (Boston: Boston University Graduate School, 1965), p. 46; Franc Sebjanič, The Protestant Movement of Slovenes in Pannonia, pp. 9-19; Paul Mojzes and Gerald Shenk, "Protestantism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," unpublished manuscript later published in Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Post-communist Eras, ed. by Pedro Ramet (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 17; and Birvis, private interviews, Beograd, 11 March, 1993 and 24 June, 1994.

surviving the counter-Reformation only with the help of Slovakian Lutherans from Bratislava. Yet, even apart from the influence of this small remnant, the early Protestants had a lasting impact. They gave the Slovenes their first books in the vernacular (school primers, catechisms, and a translation of the Bible) and are credited with establishing the actual written language of this now Catholic land. The emphasis on the printed word and on education for young people resulted in opening the doors of learning through the establishment of church schools to many young people from peasant backgrounds (the primary class attracted to Lutheranism in this region) and ultimately led to economically development of a previously impoverished area and class of people.[20]

The second wave of Protestants arrived as a result of ethnic migrations in the eighteenth century into land evacuated by the Turks in northern regions of the former Yugoslavia. These were Hungarian, German, and Slovak Protestants. The Hungarians were mostly Reformed, but some were Lutheran. The Germans and Slovaks were mostly Lutheran. The establishment of these churches was greatly enhanced by the Tolerance Dictum of 1781 issued by Josef II of Austro-Hungary. This dictum assured freedom of religion and the ability to construct buildings and hold services for both Protestant and Orthodox church people. Thus, Lutheran and Reformed traditions were permanently established most strongly in Vojvodina.[21] The largest Protestant churches in Yugoslavia today are still the Lutheran and Reformed traditions in this area and in Slovenia and Croatia. The largest is the Slovak Lutheran Church with 51,000 members. This church together with the Evangelical (Lutheran) Christian Church (with Hungarian membership) and the Hungarian Reformed Church, are all situated primarily in Vojvodina. After World War II the membership of the German Evangelical (Lutheran) Church was devastated, as about 200,000 Germans were killed and most of the rest left the region.[22]What remains, then, in the former Yugoslavia from this history, is a handful of old Protestant churches that are equally as much tied to ethnicity as are the predominant Catholic and Orthodox traditions in Croatia and Serbia respectively.

The third wave of Protestantism came at the end of the nineteenth century and through the twentieth when the "Free Churches" arrived, mostly in the northern parts of the former

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[20]Sebjanič, The Protestant Movement of Slovenes in Pannonia, pp. 5-7, 15-17, 20-22, 26-39, 45-49, 58-59.

[21]Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994; Mojzes and Shenk, "Protestantism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," p. 17; Sebjanic, The Protestant Movement of Slovenes in Pannonia, p. 40; and Kurt Hutten, Iron Curtain Christians: The Church in Communist Countries Today, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967) p. 382.

[22]Beeson, Discretion and Valour, p. 292; Hutten, Iron Curtain Christians, pp. 382-83; and Birvis, private interview, 24 June, 1994.

Yugoslavia. These churches were "free" in the sense of having a lower church polity (i.e. less hierarchy) and not being tied to any particular ethnic group. They were the result of Western missionary efforts primarily from America, Germany, Switzerland, Britain, and Sweden.[23] These church plantings were most effective in small rural communities and encompassed a wide variety of church denominations founded between the middle of the nineteenth century and World War I. These included Congregational, Methodist, Nazarene, Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist, and Church of the Brethren.[24]

The most established of these churches are the Congregationalists, which started in 1873 in Macedonia, and the Methodists, which started in 1898 in Vojvodina, and whose churches united in forming the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1922.[25] The Congregational Church was the result of American missionary efforts in Macedonia which grew out of the church's efforts in Bulgaria. The beginning of this mission was typical of the perspectives of other missionary movements. It was launched by the more conservative membership of its mother church in the United States. In this case, Bulgaria and Macedonia were seen to be ripe for mission endeavors because of what was perceived to be only a nominal connection with Orthodoxy. This was a misperception of the general societies, but was largely true with respect to those who converted. To the missionaries, however, the mission was viewed as a

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[23]Birviš, personal interview, 24 June, 1994; Mojzes and Shenk, "Protestantism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 17-18; and Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 46-47.

[24]The Congregational Church has now merged with the Methodist and the Nazarene Church is nearly extinct. As of the mid-1980s, Methodists had 3,700 members in Macedonia and Serbia (especially Vojvodina) and included Hungarian and Slovak speaking congregations. Baptists had 3,500 members in all parts of the former Yugoslavia except Montenegro. Seventh Day Adventists had 10,600 members in all the former republics. Pentecostals had 5,000 members in all parts except Montenegro, including Hungarian and Romanian speaking congregations. The Church of the Brethren, composed of ex-Baptists, existed only in Croatia and Vojvodina. Baptists and Methodists belong to international ecumenical organizations, and they, plus most of the others, are now part of indigenous councils of churches. Seventh Day Adventists, the primary exception, are even moving in more ecumenical directions (Grulich, "Small Religious Communities of Yugoslavia," pp. 3-8; Beeson, Discretion and Valour, pp. 293, 304; Birvis, private interview, 24 June, 1994; and "Toward A 'Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches'," [Zagreb: Krscanska Informativna Sluzba, 16 April, 1992]).

[25]The origin of the Methodist Church in Vojvodina can be traced to German and Swiss origins. German Methodists spread to Austro-Hungary, including Vojvodina, at the end of the nineteenth century. At about the same time, a temperance society named the "Blue Cross," came to the region from Switzerland. The Blue Cross Society began attracting members from German speaking Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic traditions who desired a more pietistic faith. Eventually, the German and Swiss movements were combined through the efforts of an Austrian Methodist minister. In the early twentieth century, this Methodist movement expanded to include Hungarian speaking communities (Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 265-77, 283-89).

resumption of the original apostolic movement begun by St. Paul to Macedonia as recorded in the book of Acts.[26]

Although their initial purpose was not to begin a new church, but to reform Orthodoxy, both spiritually and democratically, this mission inevitably resulted in conflict with Orthodoxy and in the establishment of an independent church. The tensions between the Congregational Mission and the Orthodox church were not only theological, but also political. An American conception of church-state relations, with its emphasis on religious liberty, came into direct conflict with the indigenous Constantinian pattern of church-state relations. The orthodox accused the Congregationalists of stealing church members and dividing the nations, weakening it in its struggle against Ottoman imperialism. The charge of anti-nationalism was not entirely accurate since the Congregationalists often supported the goals of Macedonian Revolutionaries while resisting the violent methods used. In fact the Protestants were, at times, successful in converting revolutionaries while they were imprisoned.[27]

The eventual result of this mission, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, was the development of ethnically mixed congregations and schools in Macedonia along with a few churches in Serbia. The Balkan wars of the next decade left the congregational churches divided. Those in what was now Bulgarian controlled territory joined the Bulgarian Mission, while others in Serbian controlled territory were given to the Methodist church. This was done because the Methodist church was more willing to adapt to the use of Serbian language than was the Mission Board of the Congregational Churches and because the Methodists had other churches within the newly established boundaries of Yugoslavia.[28]

Following World War I the German Methodists from Vojvodina moved throughout the whole of the new country. Though they failed to be successful in converting Muslims or in planting permanent churches in Croatia, they did contribute to the Methodist/Congregational ties which brought about the union of these denominations in 1922. However, the two districts of the newly created Yugoslavian Methodist church were very different. For example the Macedonian churches all had Slavic pastors while the Vojvodina churches had German and Hungarian pastors. Partly because of this union the Methodist churches grew

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[26] Ibid., pp. 50-68, 425; and William Webster Hall, Puritans in the Balkans: The American Board Mission in Bulgaria, 1878-1918: A Study in Purpose and Procedure (Sofia: Studia Historico Philologia Serdicensia, 1938), pp. 16-18.

[27] Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 67-68, 109, 118-20, 130-145.

[28] Ibid., pp. 141-54, 421-26.

exponentially during the 1920s despite the difficulties in post-war times. This continued until the market crash of 1929 ended their financial base.

During World War II, the Yugoslavian Mission Conference of the Methodist Church dissolved due to foreign occupation. However, the Vojvodina and Macedonian churches did not suffer very greatly under German and Bulgarian occupation, respectively. In 1944 though, just about all the work came to a stop as the Axis armies began to suffer defeat.[29]

Following World War II, Methodism in Vojvodina, but not Macedonia, suffered the loss of its German membership base, which either fled the region or were put in concentration camps irrespective of their guilt. Though the Hungarian Methodists stayed, this still left the few existing churches largely leaderless. Were it not for the injection of more "Blue Cross Societies" (this time a movement originating in 1910 among the Slovak Lutheran population), Methodism in Vojvodina might have come to an end. When the new government banned this society in 1948, most of its members became Methodist rather than returning to the Lutheran church. The former lay leaders of these societies became the new pastors. Slovaks now constituted the largest ethnic group in Vojvodina Methodism, though a number of churches spoke Hungarian and the pastors began using both languages, as well as Serbian, in many churches. The leadership of the post-war Methodist Church in Vojvodina was taken up largely by women, a characteristic that made it unique among sister churches in Yugoslavia and within Methodism of that era.[30]

This brief history of Congregationalism and Methodism are illustrations of the ministry emphases and the trials endured by all the free churches of the former Yugoslavia. The religion of these churches has been pietistic, focused on the necessity of belief in the infallibility of the Bible and the necessity of a conversion, often experienced during a revival service, followed by a life of personal prayer and strict discipline so as to avoid sin.[31] The main impetus has been personal rather than social, although inadvertently affecting a variety of social issues, often as a result of their need to service their own people with education and

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[29]Ibid., pp. 401-402, 412-20, 427-31, 449-51 456-57, 479-89; and Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994.

[30]Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994; and Mojzes, "A History of Congregationalist and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 565-70, 579-80, 585-91, 595, 602-04.

[31]Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994; and Mojzes, "A History of Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 128, 295.

"care providing" institutions,[32] and their striving for recognition and religious freedom with the advent of a new constitution in 1963.[33]

Despite the granting of religious freedom to older Protestant churches in Vojvodina, a principle which in theory was recognized by the Yugoslav government in 1920,[34] this was not applied universally to the free churches. Baptists, for example, were the only ones of these churches that could own church property prior to World War II. Pentecostals frequently called themselves Baptist in order to get around the ruling. The Methodists in Vojvodina lost their churches when German members left following World War II because German members, as individuals, held the property deeds, again to get around the ruling.[35] But if it was difficult in Vojvodina, Macedonia was even worse. During the first half of this century there was conflict with Orthodoxy to the extent of Protestant church burnings and pastors imprisoned, tortured, and even killed.[36]

Some of the newer denominations still struggle with acceptance by the Orthodox Church although since World War II this has been limited to the milder form of unpleasant remarks. Largely, this change resulted from the government's forced legal equalization, even giving Protestants a more favorable position on some issues in order to diminish the power of the larger religious communities. Following its break with the Soviet block in 1953, the government granted even more religious liberty. This freedom, however, included only the right to worship in a church building, not in a home. It also did not permit them to provide social and educational functions and discouraged the giving of foreign financial assistance through excessive taxation regulations. Furthermore, implementation depended on the local authorities. Especially in Macedonia, the reality was often the infiltration of churches by government spies and communist inspired anti-church riots. where churches were burned and

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[32]These institutions have included schools, Sunday Schools, youth work, orphanages, facilities for medical treatment, homes for the aged, as well as the current rise of humanitarian aid organizations. The effectiveness of the church agencies has varied depending on finances and on government opposition, the latter being especially strong immediately following World War II (Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 407-11, 443-47, 468, 570-75).

[33]Mojzes and Shenk, "Protestantism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 18-19; and Manojlo Broćić, "The Position and Activities of the Religious Communities in Yugoslavia," in Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe, edited by Bohdan R. Bociurkiw and John W. Strong, assisted by Jean K. Laux (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1975), p. 357.

[34]Ibid., p. 404.

[35]Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994.

[36]Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 120, 130-34, 144, 434-39, 454, 463, 479, 578-79.

church people were beaten and killed.[37] Relations between Protestants and the former Yugoslav state improved again with the adoption of the new constitution in the 1960s. However, even today, some groups, like the Seventh Day Adventists in Serbia, have to be registered as a secular society[38] and its members are more subject to harassment.[39] Moreover, in the present chaos, such problems are being encountered even by groups which have been previously recognized if they do not show sufficient support for the new governments.[40]

I have tended to categorize all the free churches together, although in reality they have frequently been in competition with each other. They have taken members from one another as well as from the Orthodox, Catholic, and older Protestant churches. Small differences between them have often been seen as big ones.[41] At the same time, cooperation has increased during the twentieth century. Much of the pastoral leadership between 1935-55 for the Methodist, Baptist, Brethren, and Lutheran Churches in Serbia were graduates of the same school in Austria.[42] This led to cooperative ventures such as ecumenical teaching staffs for theological seminaries and lay training institutes plus the institution of an annual interdenominational prayer service in Novi Sad for members of the four previously listed denominations and the Reformed Church.[43] It is undoubtedly no accident that Novi Sad, today, hosts the only weekly inter-faith peace prayers that can be found in the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, many of the present generation of free church leaders (especially Baptist and Pentecostal) have also graduated from the same theological school in Osijek, Croatia, a faculty on whose board there is a bishop of the Reformed Church. There are even some signs of cooperation between the free churches and the Catholic and Orthodox

[37]Ibid., pp. 571-74, 582-85, 596-98.

[38]Birviš, private interview, 11 March, 1993.

[39]For example, a young man was released from the Yugoslav army in the 1980s due to "mental instability," after revealing that he was a Seventh Day Adventist (Paul Mojzes, "Editorial: Impressions About Religion in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia," Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe, IV, No. 5 [1984], viii).

[40]Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994; and Aleksandar Mitrović, private interview, Novi Sad, 14 March 1993.

[41]Beeson, Discretion and Valour, p. 305; Mojzes and Shenk, "Protestantism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," p. 18; and Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 443-44.

[42]Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994.

[43]Mojzes, "A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," pp. 474, 605-08.

Churches. All three traditions, for example, are represented on the board of Kršćanska Informativna Služba (Christian Information Service) in Zagreb.

I will mention a few of the distinctions of some of the free churches, especially as they pertain to the social influence of the church. The Seventh Day Adventist Church is known today for its relief work through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).[44] In fact, in Bosnia, it has been said that at the end of this war only Muslims and Adventists will be left in Sarajevo. This is a testimony to their reputation, gained because they have gotten aid through when no one else could. Other churches, especially the Baptists and Pentecostals, have also established relief agencies ("Agape" in Croatia and "Bread of Life" in Serbia) which function well out of proportion to their size. The Nazarene Church,[45] which flourished between 1848-1914 and is almost non-existent today, is the only church, other than Jehovah"s Witnesses, which has stood for conscientious objection. Even the Church of the Brethren, which in most places in the world is counted as one of the "historic peace churches" stemming from the Anabaptist movement of the Reformation, has in the former Yugoslavia never taken that historic stance. In fact, their male members have repeatedly served in the armed services and seem to be proud to have done so. On the other hand, some highly influential members of the Baptist and Pentecostal Churches in both Croatia and Serbia have recently either resisted military service themselves or have actively helped young people to avoid, or be released from, military service.[46] Anyone who knows these denominations in the West can appreciate how unusual this stance would sound to most of their adherents in other parts of the world.

Future Potential Impact of the "Free Church" Protestants

Having come now to the present, I would like to address the future potential impact of these small free church communities which make up less than one half of a percent of the

[44]"Adventists Help Refugees in Croatia" (Zagreb: Kršćanska Informativna Služba, 12 May, 1992).

[45]This church is not the same as the Nazarene Church in the United States, which has Methodist roots. The Yugoslav Nazarene Church was a result of missionary efforts by a Swiss Calvinist with Baptist convictions. The church was especially successful in the mid-nineteenth century because, unlike many other churches, it sided with the peasants in the revolution of 1848. Many of their adherents have left for Austria due to persecution; others have now either become Seventh Day Adventists or returned to the Orthodox Church (Birviš, private interview, 24 June, 1994).

[46]Bill Yoder, "Protestants in (Former) Yugoslavia," Religion in Eastern Europe, XII, No. 1 (1993), 40; and Aleksandar Mitrović (Pentecostal Pastor) private interview, Novi Sad, 14 March, 1993.

population of the former Yugoslavia, but which are growing faster than the older Protestant churches. The relief work is an area of social involvement which I believe has just begun. For the first time in their history many of them are now permitted to provide this kind of social function.[47] In addition, some of them have a new generation of emerging leadership which is much broader in vision and much less other-worldly in its focus. For these younger leaders faith is no longer glorified in opposition to reason. But most importantly, there are strong articulate voices that are clearly stating the necessity for the church to avoid the marriage of religion and nationalism. One of these voices is that of theologian Peter Kuzmič, President of the Evangelical Theological Faculty (ETF), who writes:

> The messianic pretensions of new (or old) political programs offering salvation at the expense of the neighboring group are patently false, an idolatry of self that poses a threat to authentic personhood under another form of collectivism. A return to "marriages" between local religious and political elites would only distance us further from authentic original Christianity.[48]

The concept of separation of religion and nationalism is not new for these churches. Most of them have, within their membership, bridged the ethnic divides in the former Yugoslavia during the better part of their existence. Now, some of them, like the Baptists of Serbia and Croatia, have made a special effort to overcome the ethnic divide by meeting together in southern Hungary since the beginning of the Serb-Croat war. This behavior shows a willingness to take concrete action in opposition to prevailing trends to link religion and nationalism.

Such action exemplifies the implementation of a broader social vision as developed by Miroslav Volf, another professor at ETF. Volf has reflected with great creativity and sensitivity on the challenges of exclusivity facing all churches in the aftermath of the current wars. He speaks of the tendency in all societies of the former Yugoslavia to want to cleanse themselves of the "other." As a Croat, he claims that this is as true of Croatia as the Croats charge that it is true of Serbia. He writes, "The new Croatia, like a jealous goddess, wanted all my love and loyalty. I must be Croat through and through or I was not a good Croat. . . . Identity without otherness -- this is our curse." As a social ethicist, he calls for the

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[47]Depending on which churches are included the actual percentage of free church adherents is about .25% of the total population (Pedro Ramet, "The Dynamics of Yugoslav Religious Policy: Some Insights From Organization Theory," Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe, VI, No. 6 [1986], pp. 13-14; Paul Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia," unpublished paper presented at a conference on "Religion and Crisis in Eastern Europe After Communism" in Houston, Texas, April 23-25, 1993, pp. 27-28; and Yoder, "Protestants in [Former] Yugoslavia," p. 39).

[48]Peter Kuzmic, interview in Croatian news weekly Danas, 15 January, 1991, and quoted in N. Gerald Shenk, "Religion, State and Socialist Society: The Case of Contemporary Yugoslavia," unpublished manuscript, (n.p.: n.d.), pp. 21-22.

assumption of a critical distance from one's own culture in order to avoid the formation of a monochrome identity. As a theologian, he develops this into a theology of embrace, in which one's centeredness in God becomes the antidote for sin (defined as the refusal to embrace) and helps create space for the other culture. At the same time, he is not blind to the evils which have occurred. He speaks of the need to resist evil in all cultures and of the need to acknowledge the legitimate grievances which exist among so many peoples. As a Croat, he can identify with the feelings of helplessness, frustration, and anger. Yet, he speaks of moving beyond liberation theology, popular in many Protestant and Catholic theological circles in the West and in the Third World. He contends that the categories of oppression and liberation only provide combat gear for Serbs and Croats, each of whom perceives themselves as the oppressed who are struggling for liberation. He is convinced that liberation through violence only breeds new conflicts. Therefore, he concludes with a powerful message of reconciliation that grows out of the acknowledgement of sin and evil, the making of apology/confession/repentance, and the willingness to be vulnerable with oneself through openness to, and forgiveness of, the other.[49]

When one adds to this vision traditionally held Protestant values, one has the potential for the creation of a dynamic leaven in the loaf. First, the presence of the Protestant work ethic, with its emphasis on personal diligence, frequently goes well beyond the depths of commitment and sacrifice in Western Protestantism today. Second, the traditional Protestant emphases on emancipation and resistance carry unusual poignancy within these small communities which have stood for decades, or in some cases centuries, against entrenched religious and political establishments. Finally, the affirmation of the nourishing value of a transcendent reality, if divorced from other-worldliness, has the potential to ground an aggrieved people in a much needed spirituality and personal centeredness.

The articulation of such a vision does not guarantee its actualization, however. Most Protestant communities which existed in both Serbia and Croatia have now split into separate organizational structures. Many of these schisms would have happened without external pressure. Croatian government regulation, however, actually requires that all religious institutions become indigenous. In addition, there are grievances among Protestants who, in many cases, have suffered along with their fellow citizens. For example, Serbian Protestants do not support the sanctions against Yugoslavia. Croat Protestants, on the other hand, express no remorse over the break-up of Yugoslavia, while some Serbian Protestants lay the blame for the war on that event.[50] Accusations have been exchanged over issues which have

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[49]Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing'," Religion In Eastern Europe, XIII, No. 6 (1993), 1-20.

[50]Yoder, "Protestants in (Former) Yugoslavia," pp. 38-39.

arisen due to the severed communication links and the resulting rumors. Croats have been outraged at Serbian aggression and Serbs have been outraged at what they perceive to be warmongering on the part of some Croatian Protestants.[51]

I have personally witnessed, however, the repairing of some of these relationships. At the same time, the implementation of a social vision of reconciliation will require that Protestants continue to handle their grievances in a healthy fashion. To articulate the vision will not be enough. It must be lived. Yet, in these small free church communities, one finds one of the few organizational structures within these cultures with the potential for modeling an inclusive society. Small religious communities in other lands have, on occasion, contributed toward reconciliation of their peoples. This radical social potential exists in the former Yugoslavia. The exact expression of it, however, must be left to the people of these churches.

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[51]Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia," p. 27.