

4-2018

Methodism in Macedonia Between the Two World Wars

Paul B. Mojzes
Rosemont College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mojzes, Paul B. (2018) "Methodism in Macedonia Between the Two World Wars," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 38 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol38/iss2/4>

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

METHODISM IN MACEDONIA BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS¹

By Paul Mojzes

The Period of Reconstruction: 1919-1922

1. The Incorporation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Macedonia²

After World War I ended, the part of Macedonia commonly called Vardar Macedonia was incorporated into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (subsequently renamed Yugoslavia). It was officially proclaimed to be a part of Serbia as the Serbian government did not recognize a separate Macedonian nationality. Some 10 stations of the American Board, including the Bitola Girls' School, were in this area. The American Board attempted to maintain a semblance of unity in the Balkan Mission, but Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia were on such unfriendly terms that this was not feasible. For a while the American Board was planning to establish a strong mission in southern Yugoslavia, and the missionaries in Bulgaria made various recommendations in this direction, primarily suggesting sending out a competent missionary Serbian-speaking couple speaking, since the new government insisted that Serbian be the official

¹ Excerpts from Paul Mojzes, "A History of the Congregationalist and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia," Ph.D. Dissertation at Boston University, 1965, pp. 565-615. It is a continuation of the article "Congregational Mission to Macedonia, 1873-1918" published in OPREE, Vol. 38, No. 1 (March 2018). In this article there are frequent references to the activities of the Methodists in Vojvodina (in northeastern Yugoslavia) as Macedonian and Vojvodinian Methodists were part of the same church structure.

² Hereafter ABCFM.

language of Macedonia, and tried to obliterate the Macedonian or Bulgarian languages even though they were spoken by the majority.³

Pastors who had formerly served in Macedonia, Kimov, Kjutukčiev, Mirčev, Ivan Popov, and others, left for Bulgaria when the Serbians occupied Macedonia. An exception was Pane Temkov who had started working in the Congregational churches in 1902, becoming a pastor only in 1915. He served churches in Bansko, Jakoruda, Doiran, and in Strumica.⁴ The other congregations had to use lay preachers. “Mr. Temkoff, to my mind, is a hero. He could leave for Bulgaria and be at peace, but in view of the great need he is holding the front; hoping for a missionary to come and reinforce him. He meets many rebuffs, suffers from suspicion and is not sure even whether his life may not answer for his boldness—but he goes on cheerfully awaiting help.”⁵

It became increasingly evident that in order to conduct a mission in Yugoslavia, much more money and manpower were needed than the American Board had at its disposal.⁶ The Methodist Episcopal Church had a mission in northern Yugoslavia at this time and it was desirable that one Board devoted its full attention to Yugoslavia. For these reasons, negotiations with the Methodist Episcopal Board of Missions were commenced.

The stations and out-stations in Serbia, once occupied by the American Board are not being given up; they are being turned over to a Board with larger resources and with eager enthusiasm. At the same time the change harmonizes with the desires of the Governments concerned. It always looks suspicious to one of the Balkan governments to have an organization working on the boundary and in a neighboring state. Since the Methodist Board already was operating in Serbia and since Monastir now lies in Serbia, it made for harmony in relations with the government to transfer the Monastir station to the same Board that was conducting work in the other parts of the country. . . . Perhaps the most potent reason for the change is the disadvantage of having a station isolated from

³ William C. Cooper to James L. Barton of the American Board., Salonica, Greece, May 12, 1921. ABAr. Balkan Mission, 1920-1929, Vol. V, Ro. 47.

⁴ Pane Temkov to Paul Mojzes, Skopje, Yugoslavia, January 3, 1964.

⁵ William C. Cooper to James Barton, Salonica, May 12, 1921.

⁶ James Barton to Frank M. North, May 21, 1921, HBMAr . Correspondence file #83-4.

other stations in language. . . . If the work at Monastir had been continued by the American Board, it would have been required for this one mission station alone the establishment of a training center and a press using the Servian language. But now the efficiency of service in Servia is increased by concentrating the publication and educational work for the whole of the country. The definite responsibilities of the Methodist Board will begin on January 1, 1922.⁷

The primary reason for transferring the Monastir station was financial.⁸ Superintendent Samuel Irwin of the Yugoslavia Methodist Annual Mission Conference, who surveyed the territory with J. Riggs Brewster, an American Board missionary,⁹ described the transfer in the following way:

On Sunday, Dec. 4 , 1921, the former American Board transferred its moral and ecclesiastical responsibilities to the Methodist Mission. Since then I have already made a round-trip through the various stations•••• In the morning of our joint congregation in Strumica the representative of the American Board [J . Riggs Brewster] spoke very movingly of his missionary relations to the work, of the trials which they underwent, of their lasting love for Macedonia, and of the realization of the importance of this region before the world. Then he addressed himself to the reporter and said: "My dear brother in Christ, the work of the American Board and this field, with these our children in the Gospel, I turn over to your care under the direction of your mission, the Methodist Episcopal Church." All our hearts were moved.¹⁰

The transfer was complicated by financial arrangements between the two Boards, especially concerning the Bitola school property. The American Board's position was that the Methodists should pay for the school property as they took the responsibility over the administration of the school, while the Methodists felt that the property should be turned over to them with a nominal or no charge, as they were already burdened by the great expenses of the

⁷ Annual Report,. ABCFM, 1921, pp. 62-63.

⁸ *Missionary Herald*, Vol.118 (October 1922), p. 399, and C. T. Riggs, *History of the Works of the ABCFM in the Near East, and More Specifically in Turkey, 1819-1934*, (typescript), p. 74.

⁹ Samuel Irwin and J. Riggs Brewster to ABCFM and Methodist Episcopal Board of Foreign Missions, July 17, 1921, Methodist Board of Missions Archives. Correspondence file #21-2.

¹⁰ *Verhaltungen*, 1922, p. 25. Also "Items from the Yugoslavia Mission Conference," 1922, Methodist Board of Mission Archives. (MBAr). Correspondence file #21-2.

school, whose location, organization, and some other features they did not like.¹¹ The issue was settled in 1925 when the Methodists terminated the existence of the school because of lack of funds and government pressure, and the American Board sold the property to someone else. The act of union, however, was not delayed by the property question. The former Congregational churches were united to the Methodist Episcopal Church at the Second Annual Mission Conference in Novi Vrbas, in May 1922. The ceremony took place in the newly erected church, dedicated at that occasion by Bishop Blake.¹² This church is still the most beautiful building of Yugoslav Methodism.

The Macedonian churches were organized into the second district, called the Southern District, while the work in Vojvodina was named the Northern District. The Southern District was divided into four circuits and Pane D. Temkov was installed as District Superintendent. Methodist churches were now at work in Strumica, Skopje, Bitola, Radovište, Murtino, Monospitovo, Koleshino, Rakliš, and Veljusa in Macedonia and Priština in Serbia. These churches were ministered by Pane Temkov, Maria Božinova, Mihail Velkov of Murtino, and Slavko A. Jonke, a former Catholic priest from Slovenia, who was assigned to Skopje.¹³

The Period of Expansion: 1923-1928

1. The State-Church Problem

In 1925, the Belgrade government showed a disposition to prohibit Methodist work. This alarmed Bishop John L. Nuelsen to such a degree that he requested the diplomatic intervention of

¹¹ F. M. North to S. W. Irwin, January 22, 1922; North to Irwin, July 9, 1923; North to Irwin, March 3, 1924; Harry Farmer to Irwin, May 8, 1924; and Farmer to Irwin, June 21, 1924; Irwin to North, October 15, 1924, all in MBMAr Correspondence file #21-2.

¹² *Festschrift, zur Feier des fünfundzwanzigjähigen Bestehens der Bischöflichen Methodistenkirche im Krg. S.H.S.* p. 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*

the government of the United States.¹⁴ The Serbian-controlled Yugoslav government feared all dissenting churches. It had welcomed the relief work of the Methodist Episcopal Church but thought that this was social rather than religious work. When they realized that the Methodists were in Yugoslavia as a church, they became very alarmed.¹⁵ Finally, they decided to take decisive steps to make an end of the Methodists. Nuelsen described this government in the following way:

The present government of Jugo-Slavia is ruthlessly reactionary and despotic. The political methods of Mussolini in Italy or the Bolschewiks [sic] in Russia are fully equalled, if not surpassed by the terrorism excercised [sic] by the Belgrad [sic] government in those sections of the country which formerly belonged to Austria or Hungary or Bulgaria. The government excercises [sic] a strict censorship over the papers thus preventing the details of its acts of repression and terrorism to leak out.¹⁶

The intervention of the American ambassador in Belgrade and of Bishop Nuelsen brought about governmental instructions to the local authorities in Vojvodina to "show broader tolerance toward the work of American Methodist mission there."¹⁷ But the situation in Macedonia remained the same and the Methodists there were faced with continuous opposition by some officials, though it had largely ceased in Vojvodina. This opposition was possible largely through the postponement of the recognition of Methodists as a religious community.¹⁸ Only in 1932 was a partial recognition granted. The repressive measures of the government cannot be here enumerated, but some should be mentioned. Pastors who were not Yugoslav citizens were threatened with prohibition of pastoral work¹⁹ or expelled.²⁰ In Macedonia, the incidents of persecution multiplied as the years went on. Lacking definite recognition and legislation, it was

¹⁴ J. L. Nuelsen to J. R. Edwards, March 6, 1925, MBMAr .Correspondence file #310. .

¹⁵ S. Irwin to E. Blake, November 1920, MBMAr . Correspondence file #21-2.

¹⁶ Nuelsen to Edwards, March 6, 1925.

¹⁷ Edwards to Nuelsen, March 18, 1925, MBMAr. Correspondence file #310.

¹⁸ Verhandlungen, 1930, p.145.

¹⁹ Nuelsen to Arthur B .Moss, December 27, 1924, and Nuelsen to Donohugh, December 30, 1924, MBMAr. Correspondence file #310.

²⁰ Heinrich Mann to Paul Mojzes, Frankfurt a/M., Germany, March 14, 1964.

difficult to seek protection. Moreover, feelings in favor of the Orthodox Church were strong among the Serbian officials ruling Macedonia. The difficulties became so great that Bishop Nuelsen suggested the transfer of the Macedonian congregations to some other Mission Board and this was authorized by the Executive Committee of the Board of Foreign Missions.²¹

The reason for the difficulties in Macedonia were given by Bishop Nuelsen as follows: The Belgrade government considers the unity of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia as absolutely necessary for the consolidation of the Yugoslavian state and nothing will be tolerated that in any way might weaken the absolute power of the Orthodox Church. It is not a religious question at all but purely a political question. The Orthodox Church is in the eyes of the Government a political organization.²²

The relentless persecution was mitigated in few cases by benevolent officers and even Orthodox bishops who protected the local Methodists from the fanatical priests, gendarmes, and other local authorities.²³ On the request of the Superintendent of the Southern District, the Ministry of Culture issued a letter on August 26, 1924, stating, "The Methodist Church is a private church and has the right to exercise its religion within the limits of the existing law, except for holding public processions."²⁴

The hope which arose from the seemingly changing attitude of some officials proved to be in vain.²⁵ Services in Skopje and Bitola were forbidden in 1926. Difficulties arose as to the ecclesiastical functions of baptism and burial. Civil marriages did not exist, and no marriages could be performed by Methodist ministers except in cases where both partners were Methodists; mixed marriages had to be performed by Orthodox priests.²⁶

Though this principle was acknowledged by the central government, local governments did as they wished. The children of Methodists could be baptized in Methodist churches but

²¹ Nuelsen to Edwards, March 23, 1925, in *ibid.*, also *Minutes, Executive Committee*, April 16, 1925, p. 226, MBMAr.

²² Nuelsen to Edwards, May 1, 1925, MBMAr. Correspondence file #310. •

²³ *Verhandlungen*, 1924, p. 32.

²⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 33. Translation from German is by the author.

²⁵ Donohugh to James Barton, June 23, 1930, MBMAr. Correspondence file #83-4.

²⁶ *Verhandlungen*, 1926, p. 19.

could not be registered as Methodists.²⁷ This gave rise to the attempt to re-baptize not only the children but also adults in the Murtino and Monospitovo region by force, with the cooperation of two Orthodox priests. Some families hid their children and took them to distant places where there were Methodist ministers to baptize them, while some were re-baptized, given Orthodox godfathers and different names. Those who resisted were jailed for a week.²⁸ The Methodists of Kolečino were under the suspicion of being traitors, a particularly difficult accusation because Kolečino was located on the Bulgarian border.²⁹ The minister in Radovište, Vladimir Daskalov, was threatened with death, his church was set on fire,³⁰ and a bomb thrown in his house where it exploded, but without injury to anyone.

Persecution was not restricted to Macedonia. In Senta, Vojvodina, the hall of the Methodist Church was closed, but was later re-opened after the intervention of the Ministry of Justice.³¹ Ferdinand Mayr from Novi Vrbas was disturbed several times and forced to leave for Vienna. Later, he applied for Yugoslav citizenship.³² Then he was accused of anti-state activity. Suspicion increased when it was discovered that he sent Sunday School material in the Bulgarian language to the ministers in Macedonia. This brought upon him the unpleasantness of a detailed police search of his apartment.³³ Heinrich Mann was expelled from Veliki Bečkerek to Germany on a short notice.³⁴

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ From the recollection of the older members of these two churches collected by Mrs. Paula Mojzes and sent to the author as source material for the dissertation.

²⁹ Verhandlungen, 1928, p. 20.

³⁰ Verhandlungen, 1930, p. 145.

³¹ Ibid.,

³² Verhandlungen, 1928, p. 21.

³³ Ferdinand Mayr, "Mitteilungen an Herrn Paul Mojzes,," p. 2.

³⁴ Heinrich Mann to Paul Mojzes, Frankfurt a/M, March 14, 1964.

2. Relations with Other Churches

Under the existing conditions, the relationship between the Eastern Orthodox and Methodists in Macedonia could not have been too cordial. There were certain exceptions on the individual level, but in general, the Methodists were subjected to intimidations, pressure, and outright persecution. This was not conducive to the establishment of a constructive approach between the two churches.

The same could be said for the relation between the Roman Catholics and Methodists. The Methodists of Yugoslavia never questioned the appropriateness of doing missionary work among the Roman Catholics. They said that if two equal opportunities for work came in two cities of which one would be predominantly Roman Catholic and the other Protestant, they would always choose the former.³⁵

The priests attacked Methodist teachings charging their faithful to abstain from any contact with the Methodists. The Catholics of the village of Velika Greda in Banat were told by their priests that misfortune would strike everyone who accepted Methodism, interpreting an accident which had befallen a Methodist family as their punishment for abandoning the Catholic faith.³⁶

Von Seiten der verschiedenen Kirchen wird ein indirekter und oft auch ein direkter Kampf gegen uns geführt. . . . Auf einigen Plätzen hat man den Kindern in der Schule verboten, zu uns zu gehen. Anfangs wirkte es, doch jetzt sind unsere Sonntagschulen wieder voll, und die Statistic zeigt uns eine Zunahme von 30 Sonntagschülern. Wir haben keine Angst vor offenem oder verstecktem Kampf.³⁷

While the Lutherans were not friendly toward the Methodists, whom they considered unworthy of serious disputation, some of their ministers and some of the Reformed Church, were on cordial relations with Methodist ministers. In Veliki Bečkerek, Georg Sebele maintained very

³⁵ Verhandlungen, 1927, p. 17.

³⁶ Verhandlungen, 1930, p. 146.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 137-138.

close relations with the Reformed minister,³⁸ and later became one of the closest friends of Bishop Ágoston from Feketić. Johannes Jakob organized in Novi Sad an Alliance meeting which was probably the first interdenominational conference in the city and perhaps in Yugoslavia,³⁹ giving Novi Sad a tradition of cooperation which has been preserved to the present. Besides a few Methodist ministers, this meeting of November 17, 1929 was attended by three Lutheran, one Reformed and four Baptist clergymen, and a number of laymen. A good relationship was maintained between the Lutheran minister, Jakob Kettenbach, and the Lutheran teacher, Samuel Schumacher, who came regularly to Methodist services and conducted the choir. He later decided to study theology and became a Lutheran minister.⁴⁰

In other towns and villages, the relationship was not so good, and the Methodist ministers felt that this was because the Lutheran clergy did not try to understand the Methodist position. But the larger Protestant Churches also reacted positively to the Methodists, as they did in Germany and elsewhere,⁴¹ when they elected to follow Methodist practices in Sunday School and youth work, woman's work, temperance, and other forms of activity.⁴² The Methodists regarded all this as an indication of their own success.

The Methodists experienced difficulties with other small denominations and sects. Each of the denominations in Yugoslavia, characteristic of the fundamentalist evangelical pattern, claimed to be the only true avenue to salvation. The Methodists, the least exclusive of the smaller church groups, suffered from this sort of propaganda by the Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals, who were not above recruiting their membership from among the recent

³⁸ Verhandlungen, 1927, p. 20.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁰ Mayr, "Mitteilungen . . ." p. 2.

⁴¹ Paul F. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1939), p. 267.

⁴² Mayr, "Mitteilungen . . ." p. 2.

Methodist converts. Naturally, the Methodists experienced frustration when their members left the fold in this manner.

The greatest difficulties in the 1920s were experienced with the Pentecostals, particularly in the vicinity of Novi Vrbas, where a large number of Methodists became convinced that Pentecostals were bringing church disunity into the congregation. To make the situation more difficult, the pastor of the Novi Vrbas church, Heinrich Mann, found that his own assistant, Jakob Schmidt, had become an adherent of this movement. The situation became critical and was resolved only when the Quarterly Conference refused to renew Schmidt's license to preach. He and his followers joined the Pentecostal Church.⁴³ This particular difficulty with the Pentecostals did not subside immediately, and denominational rivalries remain a feature of church work to the present day, though they have never been critical.

c. The Period of Reduced Growth: 1930-1940

1. The Difficult Years

A number of difficulties beset the Yugoslav Methodists at the beginning of the 1930s. The Yugoslav Methodists were well on their way to complete self-support,⁴⁴ when the world financial crisis disrupted matters. This was nothing new. In 1922, the financial difficulties almost led to withdrawal from Macedonia.⁴⁵ The decrease of appropriations in 1925 had forced the mission to work out very careful adjustments.⁴⁶ In the beginning, the financial crisis did not seem to influence the people greatly, but as time went on it became a very serious problem threatening

⁴³ Verhandlungen, 1926, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Ann. Rep. MSMEC, 1923, p. 546.

⁴⁵ *Christian Advocate*, July 13, 1922, p. 873.

⁴⁶ Ann. Rep. MSMEC, 1925, p. 280.

the existence of the church. As young people left the region in great numbers in search of work, there was a loss of capable young members.⁴⁷ The people did their best to support the church, but the crisis was long in duration and financial difficulties caused increasing distress. The establishment was too underdeveloped to be able to survive without injury when first, 17 percent⁴⁸ and then more than half of the former appropriations was cut off.⁴⁹

Economic uncertainty, ethnic antagonism, religious strife, political distrust, class hatred, general expectation of an unavoidable war, tremendous military preparations involving almost unbearable financial burdens are evident everywhere in the Balkan countries. Our work in Austria, Hungary and Jugo-Slavia is young, our congregations—and this refers also to Bulgaria—are still small, our equipment very meager, our resources inadequate, our difficulties many. Yet, our workers are courageous and loyal. They are borne by the compelling conviction that God has called their church and themselves to work, and, as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, they go ahead. Even before the 50 per cent cut was made, the appropriation was insufficient. After it was cut into one half the situation became pathetic. In those countries almost the whole appropriation was used for evangelistic work, for the support of the pastors, for rent of halls and for interest and amortization where money was borrowed to purchase property. There is practically no institutional work. Hence the deficiency could not be absorbed. The whole burden fell on the pastors and their families.⁵⁰

Two of the Macedonian pastors, Veljkov and Zaev, had to leave their parishes and move to America. A third pastor, Arsić, not accepting the Methodist system of appointment or transfer by the bishop was unwilling to move from Skopje to Strumica and left the work in order to be employed by the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁵¹ Arsić was the only pastor of Serbian origin. He was converted in Argentina and returned to Yugoslavia having been promised a good salary by an American church. This support did not materialize and Arsić was placed on a probationary status with the Yugoslavia Mission Conference. He was kept on probation for a longer time than

⁴⁷ Verhandlungen, 1930, p.137.

⁴⁸ Donohugh to Shepard, November 26, 1930, MBMAr. Correspondence file #279.

⁴⁹ Nuelsen to Donohugh, November 8, 1932, MBMAr . Correspondence file #310.

⁵⁰ Ann.Rep.MSMEC, 1930 and 1931, p. 169.

⁵¹ Verhandlungen, 1930, pp. 144-145.

the other ministers, seemingly because national jealousies and tensions prevalent in the country were reflected even among the ministers.⁵²

Danger loomed over the Yugoslavia Mission Conference, especially over its work in Macedonia, which was in chaos and leaderless.⁵³ The number of ministers was drastically reduced both in Macedonia and in Vojvodina. Ministers from Switzerland returned to their country for lack of support. Most assistants had to be released for the same reason.⁵⁴ Aid from abroad was needed in order to survive the difficult trials.

The work in Yugoslavia . . . would have to have been given up if the Swiss Methodists had not come forward and in a superb manifestation of missionary devotion accepted the challenge. The Swiss Missionary Society assumed the support of the work in Yugoslavia. When the Swiss creditors relinquished one-third of their claims, the Conference, with the help of Bishop Nuelsen, took over the two-thirds of the debt and repaid those creditors who had advanced their savings in good faith, but were now in need of money as a result of the financial depression. This action of the Swiss Conference is unparalleled in the annals of Methodism and deserves the unstinted praise of churchmen around the world.⁵⁵

Financial difficulties were accompanied by political troubles which resulted in the abolishment of the constitutional government and the constitution and the establishment of the royal dictatorship of King Alexander. The atmosphere of dictatorship was not favorable to the church.⁵⁶ Yet in 1931, Bishop Shepard succeeded to obtain for the Methodist clergymen the right to baptize, to marry, to bury the dead, and to record membership.⁵⁷ This brought about an atmosphere of "hopefulness and determination."⁵⁸ This work was started by Bishop Nuelsen and was, to a large measure, due to the diligent support of Sebele and Lichtenberger. It brought about

⁵² Shepard to Edwards, November 1, 1928, MBMAr . Correspondence file #279.

⁵³ Shepard to Donohugh, March 3, 1930, MilfAr . Correspondence file #279.

⁵⁴ Mayr, "Mitteilungen . . . ," p.3.

⁵⁵ Paul Douglass, op.cit., p. 254. Also see on the same matter Donohugh to Nuelsen, November 26, 1930, and March 9, 1931, MBMAr .Correspondence file #310, and *Journal of the Annual Meeting of the Board of Foreign Missions*, 1930, pp. 112f.

⁵⁶ Ann.Rep .MSMEC, 1929, p.238.

⁵⁷ Ann .Rep .MSMEC, 1930 and 1931, p. 170.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

a larger measure of legality into church-state relations. By virtue of this permission, one pastor baptized 104 children in Macedonia in one month after the privilege was granted.

2. Evangelizing Activities

a. Characteristics of the Work.

Throughout the 1930s, the ecclesiastical work of the Methodists did not differ from that of the 1920s, achieving about the same results as to the number of newly received probationers or members. The statistics of the church did not reflect this adequately, for the statistical increase was rather small until 1938, due to the large number of migrations⁵⁹ resulting from the financial depression and the unemployment crisis, as well as the mortality rate, as many of the original members were older people.

Church work in most places vacillated from prosperity to abandonment, and again to a renewal of vigor. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this was the unsettled political situation in Europe, the rise of Nazism and the threat of war, together with the depression which brought on an all-time low in the standard of living. Another reason was that difficulties with the Orthodox Church and with local governments continued and even increased in the 1930s. This was especially the case in Macedonia, although it abated to a degree toward the end of this period.⁶⁰

b. The Ministers.

Another factor in the relative slow-down was the inadequate number of ministers. The decline of activity was no reflection on the efforts of the ministers. Comparisons of the duties of the Methodist pastors in Yugoslavia, against those of most other countries, show that they spent

⁵⁹Verhandlungen, 1936, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Verhandlungen, 1934, p. 101 and Verhandlungen, 1939, p. 126.

themselves unsparingly, making enormous sacrifices. Salaries were so low that Superintendent Sebele announced that it would be impossible to maintain the mission if something were not done. He stated that the pastors were spending half their salary for fuel alone.⁶¹

Very few new ministers were received into the Mission Conference in this period. Theodor Lichtenberger came in 1936, but he was later incapacitated because of illness. Freiderich Oberlis from Germany was received in 1938 but was forced to leave the country shortly before the World War. Zdravko Jankov and Ceko Cekov were sent to study at the seminary at Frankfurt,⁶² while Stevan Traikov and some other prospective Macedonian students could not get passports to St. Andrea, Austria. Stephan Lerch was released from his ministerial duties by the Conference in 1933; Werner Hafner attached himself to another denomination during his studies in Switzerland; Rudolph Lerch abandoned his preaching post in Strumica in 1937; Wilhelm Lichtenberger was employed at the Bible School in St. Andrea in 1937, and Ferdinand Mayr, the Superintendent of the Bačka District, was transferred in 1937 to Graz, Austria.⁶³

When preachers became ill or were drafted to the army, other preachers served the circuits, while all the work suffered. Especially difficult in this respect was the situation in the South where the ministers Temkov, Daskalov, Kalajlijev, and Krmazov were unable to take care of a rapidly developing district. The South developed more rapidly in the 1930s than the North, reversing the trends of the 1920s. They were aided by the Bible woman, Maria Božinova, and by the local preachers, Nikola Arnaudov and Stevan Traikov, as well as after 1938 by the Swiss missionary, Rosa Isler⁶⁴ and Maria Lichtenberger.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Verhandlungen, 1938, p. 99.

⁶² Verhandlungen, 1939, p. 143.

⁶³ Verhandlungen, 1937, p. 77.

⁶⁴ Verhandlungen, 1938, p. 114.

The superintendency of the whole Yugoslav Mission Conference was taken over in 1937 by Georg Sebele, previously superintendent of the Banat and Southern District. He was stationed first in Petrovgrad (former Veliki Bečkerek) and then in Novi Sad, which after World War I became the chief city of Vojvodina and the seat of the administrative region, *Dunavska Banovina*. As such, it became the headquarters of the Yugoslav Mission Conference. In the North, Sebele was aided by the remaining preachers, the brothers Ferdinand and Adolf Drumm, Lorenz Stahl, Philipp Grailing, Antal Takács, and Theodor Lichtenberger. While the ministers working in Macedonia were all Macedonian Slavs, the preachers in Vojvodina were all Germans with the exception of Georg Sebele and Antal Takács, who were Hungarians.

Since there were so few ministers, the work had become "personality centered," i.e., each man became very important in each church. They were energetic preachers who won the hearts of the people through their self-sacrificing services.⁶⁶ This was true also of Temkov and Daskalov from Macedonia. Of all these ministers, Temkov has given Macedonia the greatest number of years of service. He was an able organizer always combining his work as pastoral counselor with the distribution of Bibles and tracts.⁶⁷ In his many years in Strumica and Skopje, the two central churches in the south, he ministered to all Protestants, as the Methodist Church was the only Protestant church in Macedonia. Foreigners and soldiers who happened to be in Skopje came to him, he regularly visited the hospitals, and he opened his poor household for visitors in such numbers, that in 1936, he counted over 700 people.⁶⁸ He felt that he was not a

⁶⁵ Paula Mojzes, *Metodizam: Kratka Istorija Metodističke Crkve*, (Novi Sad, Yug.: Sekretarijat Metodističke Crkve u FNRJ, 1962), p. 71. From an appendix to the book by Pane Temkov, "*Počeci misijskog rada u Makedoniji*." The title of the book in English is "Methodism : A Short History of the Methodist Church." The title of the appendix is, "The Beginning of Mission Work in Macedonia."

⁶⁶ Sebele, Kalajlijev, Krmazov and Cekov will be characterized in a later chapter.

⁶⁷ Verhandlungen, 1934, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Verhandlungen, 1936, p. 20.

good preacher,⁶⁹ and the attendance in Skopje tends to support this, but all reports testify to his success in pastoral work. Throughout the period between the two World Wars, Pane Temkov was the central figure in Macedonian Methodism, held in high regard by the pastors and the people. He was a superintendent only in 1922 and 1923.

Vladimir Daskalov served parishes in the Strumica River Valley, centering in Strumica. He had great success as a preacher organizing what were the largest congregations in Yugoslavia, with membership approaching 400. On holidays, as many as 700 people filled a room which could not well accommodate half that number, so that many stayed in the halls and courtyard, while many had to leave for lack of space.⁷⁰

The level of theological education of these pastors was never high. It was accomplished either through private study, with examinations taken during Annual Mission Conferences, or at either the Frankfurt Methodist Theological School in Germany or the Bible School in St. Andrea in Austria. Both these schools were willing to meet some of the expenses of the Yugoslav students, as none of them was able to pay. Frequently, the remainder was made up through gifts from the German and Swiss congregations and special gifts of Bishop John Nuelsen. Both of these seminaries were evangelical in emphasis and provided the student with practical knowledge for the pastorate. The prior education of these prospective pastors was insufficient to admit them to the best German universities, but for the type of work for which these men were preparing, primarily among ignorant peasants or artisans, what they received at St. Andrea and Frankfurt may have been better.

⁶⁹ P. Temkov to Paul Mojzes, Skopje, January 3, 1964.

⁷⁰ Verhandlungen, 1934, p. 105.

c. Work in Macedonia.

Despite the greater difficulties, the work developed faster in Macedonia than in Vojvodina.⁷¹ The work in Macedonia was not thorough and it did not spread into many localities, but it was certain the congregations were larger than any of the northern churches. The work spread from three centers: Skopje, Strumica, and Bitola.

Skopje was rapidly gaining in importance as the central city in Macedonia and Pane Temkov was selected as the most experienced pastor to serve there. He also maintained occasional work in the Kosovo region of southern Serbia, in the towns Pristina and Kosovska Mitrovica, and villages Vučitrn and Ljibljani, as well as the Macedonian town Gostivar. However, these places were far from Skopje and could not be regularly visited, so that the 70 or more members invited the Baptist minister, Vacek, from Zagreb who had the reputation of exclusiveness and of the desire to lure other Protestants into Baptist churches.⁷² The Methodists would have liked to provide a preacher for this region, but they could spare no one. The problem was solved when in 1938, most of the Methodists of that region, who were mainly Slovaks, moved back to Kovačica, Banat.⁷³

In Skopje, Temkov ministered to an international and interdenominational Protestant community. He was requested to bury all Protestants who died there and to baptize all Protestant children. The army requested him to visit all Protestant soldiers in hospitals and brought Protestant soldiers to his services on holidays. On a normal Sunday, 20 to 30 soldiers attended the services.⁷⁴ The work was generally undisturbed. Good interdenominational contacts were

⁷¹ Verhandlungen, 1934, pp. 103-104.

⁷² Verhandlungen, 1935, p. 154.

⁷³ Verhandlungen, 1939, p. 133.

⁷⁴ Verhandlungen, 1937, p. 54.

maintained by letting the Lutheran and Reformed ministers from the North hold services for their soldiers in the Methodist chapel. The only problem which presented itself was the request for marriage ceremonies by several Adventist couples. Temkov felt compelled to refuse this because the Adventists were openly persecuted by the state and the Methodists who were still under suspicion felt that such officiating at an Adventist wedding ceremony could be interpreted as an association and likely to renew persecutions.⁷⁵ In the South, the Methodists would not risk the alienation of the new of *Vardarska Banovina*,⁷⁶ who was friendly to them because he learned about the Wesleyans during his stay in England. In the North, the church felt much safer and such a wedding would have been performed by any Methodist pastor.

When Krum Kalajlijev returned from his studies at St. Andrea, he served in the southeastern corner of Macedonia, reviving the work in the former station at Bitola (Monastir) which had been idle for over 10 years. By 1936, Kalajlijev had a good congregation in Bitola and had established a number of preaching places in the vicinity, such as Resen, Ohrid, Meševište, Botun⁷⁷ and Prilep, which developed an independent congregation with its own chapel and a large membership. The result might have been even more impressive had not his assistant, Osterhaus been forced to leave Macedonia, since the Serbians did not permit foreigners to work there.⁷⁸ Kalajlijev was a very successful evangelist and an untiring worker; his influence spread rapidly but there was occasionally doubt in his own mind as to the seriousness of their commitment as was the case of a group of 100 Resen Orthodox who expressed the desire to abandon the Orthodox church as a group and join the Methodists.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Verhandlungen, 1936, p. 20.

⁷⁶ *Ban* was the highest administrative officer in a large area called *Banovina* formed during the 1930's in Yugoslavia. It would roughly correspond to the position of a governor.

⁷⁷ Verhandlungen, 1936, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Verhandlungen, 1937, p. 56.

⁷⁹ Verhandlungen, 1938, p. 93.

The superintendent and ministers in the North were generally suspicious about the seriousness of the desires of the Macedonians to enter the ministry or the deaconess work of the church. This was largely due to the lack of more intimate mutual relations and knowledge of the situation in the South for which they otherwise expressed fondness and sincere missionary zeal. The southern district was always looked upon by the northern Methodists as a missionary field, for which they were responsible although they themselves were a mission in a real sense. A certain feeling of superiority and distrust of the Macedonians as a people was not entirely absent although not intense.

The most active work in Macedonia was carried on in the Strumica Valley towns of Strumica, Murtino, Monospitovo, and Kolečino Superintendent Sebele characterized the Strumica church as the most active and most intelligent, the Murtino church as the largest, and the Kolečino church as the most faithful in Macedonia.⁸⁰ Two ministers, Daskolov and Krmazov, two lay preachers, Arnaudov and Traikov, and a Bible woman, Božinova, helped by other local men and women, held services in the above mentioned four communities as well as in Veljusa, Doiran, Kosturnovo, Mokrievno, Gabrovo, Valandovo, Bistrica and other places. In Radovište and Rakliš, strong evangelical centers, services were prohibited by the local authorities for six years, until Bishop Nuelsen persuaded them to permit his church to hold services again in 1935.⁸¹

Because of the conflicts with the Orthodox Church, and because it was here that the Methodists for the first time gained the loyalty of sizeable parts of villages, the pastors had to face a number of problems for which there were no precedence. In Kolečino, the Orthodox priest interrupted a service held by Arnaudov and argued from the pulpit that he had the right to

⁸⁰ Verhandlungen, 1936, p. 2.

⁸¹ Verhandlungen, 1935, p. 151.

persecute them unless they attended his church.⁸² A similar event occurred to Krmazov in Monospitovo when an uninvited priest came and preached in the church, an act which Krmazov resented. As the movement toward Protestantism advanced in the Strumica Valley, it forced many Orthodox priests to include sermons in their services in order to keep their members satisfied.⁸³ Other priests decided in favor of more violent means. In the cases of a mixed marriage when the groom asked the Protestant minister to marry them, a priest beat him with the handle of his pistol and threatened to kill him unless he was married in his own church. In another case, a priest threatened to kill the couple and menacingly stood on the other side of the pulpit during the wedding in the Methodist Church, although he did not carry out his threat.⁸⁴ The reason why this problem became so important was that the Orthodox Church in Macedonia now required that the non-Orthodox party become Orthodox before he or she could marry an Orthodox. Burials also caused disputes, as the Methodist ministers did not know whether to bury those members who were ousted from the Methodist Church. Priests refused to bury such people, and the members of the congregation were not in favor of offering this last rite to an ex-member.

Difficult problems also arose in connection with baptism. A large number of children of Methodist parents were forcibly re-baptized by the Orthodox priest in Murtino.⁸⁵ This caused some consternation among the parents, who wanted their children to be Methodists but the Orthodox priest claimed that they were of his faith.⁸⁶ In Macedonia, a marriage in which one partner was not a Christian was invalidated and marriages of Christian women to Moslems were unrecognized. A number of women who contracted common-law marriages asked the Methodist

⁸² Verhandlungen, 1933, p. 65.

⁸³ Verhandlungen, 1934, p. 104.

⁸⁴ Verhandlungen, 1938, p. 92.

⁸⁵ Verhandlungen, 1939, p. 131.

⁸⁶ This rebaptizing is not a part of Orthodox practice, although it is occasionally defended on theological grounds if the religious community to which the child or member belongs is considered totally without grace. Interview with Danilo Krstić, Serbian Orthodox priest and later bishop, February 18, 1964.

ministers to baptize their children, which again caused conflicts of desires; the desire by Methodist pastors to baptize and the prohibition by the state to do so. Most of these problems were not resolved until the end of World War II when the introduction of Communist laws rendered these problems obsolete.

In 1932, the churches in the Strumica Valley started founding youth organizations. This effort revitalized the churches with a thirty percent increase in membership.⁸⁷ Despite the primitive transportation (donkey, mountain horses, and on foot), circuit youth rallies were held, which attracted around 300 to 700 people. It was believed that the membership would have multiplied three-fold had the people been freely allowed to become Methodists.⁸⁸

During evangelizations, a small village like Murtino would turn out 200 to 250 people every night for a week eager to hear the speakers.⁸⁹ The greatest problem was that there was virtually no religious literature in the Serbian or Macedonian language, while Bulgarian was not allowed to be used. The ministers were compelled to rely solely upon the Bible, the hymn book, *Slavopoj* (Songs of Glory), and the periodical *Put Života* (The Way of Life). Had there been a person or persons capable of writing Serbian religious literature, better overall results could have been achieved. As it was, preaching and reading of the Bible was not sufficient to ground them deeply in evangelical or Methodist principles. Taking all this into consideration, one must say that it is amazing that the Macedonian Methodists were so faithful and vigorous.

The charge of alien influence was still frequently brought against the Methodists, particularly in Macedonia. In Vojvodina, it was true that the members belonged to national minorities, and it was difficult to refute charges of foreign influence and disloyalty, not because they were true, but because such charges were too abstract to be concretely repudiated. The

⁸⁷ Verhandlungen, 1933, p. 65.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Verhandlungen, 1934, p. 104.

fortunes of the Methodists differed in various locations and at various times. There is no simple answer to the cause for this phenomenon; each particular situation was caused by a separate set of circumstances. The basic reason why Methodists experienced difficulties with the government and other churches in one place and did not in another, was the prevalence of lawlessness in a bureaucratic despotic country, where laws were made to be broken arbitrarily by the local officials who were not punished for their deeds as long as they backed the main policies of the regime. It was the local authorities who determined whether to create difficulties for the Methodists or not. Other factors, such as the personal attitude of the Methodist pastors to the authorities and other churches, the relative strength and unity of the congregations, and the whole cultural background of all those involved, must be taken into consideration. It might be said that in places where the authorities were ignorant, uncultured people, where sizeable national minorities lived, where the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics used to be in undisputed position of influence which was now being challenged by the Methodists, there the difficulties were likelier to occur.

The Period of World War II: 1941-1945

1. Under Bulgarian Occupation⁹⁰

The situation in Macedonia during period of World War II is obscure. The Bulgarian occupation did not disturb the work greatly. The Bulgarians considered the conquest of Macedonia as the liberation of their unjustly lost territory and ruled in it as they would in their own country. This rule found many sympathizers in Macedonia. Even the Macedonian Communists sought ties with the Bulgarian Communists, rather than Yugoslav Communists. There is nothing to indicate that this was not the case with Macedonian Methodists. They were

⁹⁰ It would be desirable for someone to provide a more thorough investigation of this period.

taken into the Bulgarian Mission Conference, under the supervision of the German Methodist Alphons Pratsch, who was well known to the Yugoslav Methodists as he frequently visited their Annual Mission Conferences. No internal dissension seems to have been caused by the war and during the whole war, the Macedonian Methodists did not suffer more than the general population. On the whole, they were reported in far better condition than the churches in the North.⁹¹

2. The Disruption of the Work at the End of the War

While the Methodists in Northeastern Yugoslavia did not suffer heavily during the first and middle part of the World War, they were brought to a chaotic state when the German Army was being pushed out of the Balkans by the Russian Army, the Partisans, and the Western Allies. As the Eastern Front was nearing Yugoslavia, flight psychosis gripped almost all German nationals, without regard to their sympathies with National Socialism.⁹² Endless caravans of German inhabitants followed the German army toward Austria and Germany, feeling that the hatred and revenge of the suffering nations of Eastern Europe might descend upon them regardless of their personal guilt. Some 520 Methodists joined this massive flight and in some instances, not a single member of some German speaking Methodist churches remained in Yugoslavia.⁹³ All of the preachers of the Northern district joined this human stream, except the Superintendent Georg Sebele and Ferdinand Drumm, who felt that their place was to stay and serve those who remained in their communities regardless of the circumstances.

⁹¹ *The Report of the Executive Secretary of the Division of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Church* (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extensions of the Methodist Church, annually), 1946, p. 56.

⁹² Georg. Sebele , typed manuscript without title or date, probably written in 1945 or 1946, p. 4.

⁹³ Ibid.

Those preachers who fled were motivated not only by the desire for personal safety but also by the desire to minister to a congregation which was leaving behind all their property and moving into an unknown future.⁹⁴ Some pastors intended to return when their congregation safely reached their destination, but were unable to do so because of the Russian and Yugoslav Communist occupation of Vojvodina, which happened in October and December 1944. Some continued to work in Hungary, as the Bačka Methodist ministers were appointed to the Hungarian Mission Conference by Bishop F.H. Otto Melle, and later accompanied the German speaking congregations from Hungary proper, when they were expelled to Germany.⁹⁵ Ferdinand Drumm and his family were interned in a Yugoslav concentration camp for Germans and were saved from possible extermination by fleeing illegally from their camps to Germany.⁹⁶

In some parts of Vojvodina, there was heavy fighting by the combined Yugoslav Partisan, Russian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian forces against the German and Hungarian forces. The last months of 1944 were among the darkest experienced in all Yugoslav Methodism. The work came to a complete stop, as many churches were abandoned. In other churches, the few members of the congregation were afraid to meet, while transportation came to a standstill, so that even with the best of intentions, Georg Sebele was unable to minister to the few remaining Methodists. In few short months, the once vigorous movement of the Methodists in Vojvodina seemed extinguished beyond restoration.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Adolf Drumm to Paul Mojzes, Worsdorf, West Germany, January 7, 1964.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Oswald Bickel, "Schweizer Erfahrungen in Oesterreich," in *Schweizer Evangelist*, January 9, 1949, p. 26. Also Ferdinand Drumm, "Erinnerungen . . .", p. 20.

⁹⁷ The period after WWII will follow in the next issue.