

7-2018

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Recommended Citation

Mojzes, Paul B. (2018) "The Methodist Church in Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1965: A Case Study of an Ecumenical Protestant "Free Church" in a Hostile Environment," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 38 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

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THE METHODIST CHURCH IN YUGOSLAVIA FROM 1945 TO 1965

A CASE STUDY OF AN ECUMENICAL PROTESTANT “FREE CHURCH” IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT¹

By Paul Mojzes

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Abstract

Though in size resembling a sect, the Methodists of the former Yugoslavia functioned as a Protestant “Free Church” due to its international structural connection with a large worldwide Methodist Church. After disparate beginnings in the two locations, the Methodist of Vojvodina began to function in 1898 while in Macedonia, the former Congregationalist (called Evangelical) began their work in 1870 but were transferred to the Yugoslavia Methodist Mission Conference after World War I. In Vojvodina, most of the members were of German and Hungarian ethnicity who had already been Protestants before they joined the Methodists while in Macedonia, the members were ethnic Macedonians, formerly Orthodox Christians. In both localities, they sporadically experienced harassment and unequal legal status. When Yugoslavia became a communist country after World War II, ironically they obtained equal legal recognition as the other religious communities, but experienced various levels of persecution that were intense in the first decade after the war but gradually subsided with the liberalization of the society. In Vojvodina, the Methodists lost almost their entire German membership but these were replaced by the adherence of ethnic Slovaks in the late 1940s and early 1950s when their Blue Cross Society was banned. Theologically, the Methodists adopted the predominant view of nineteenth century pious Protestants that the large historical churches, especially the Catholic and Orthodox, have drifted away from the Gospel, but after World War II when the world-wide Methodist Church joined the World Council of Churches, a spirit of greater tolerance caused the Evangelical Methodists to cooperate with other churches. After the fall of Communism and the end of the wars following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, greater liberties were enjoyed. The greatest achievement was the election of one of its members, Boris Trajkovski, to the presidency of the Republic of Macedonia.

¹ This chapter was prepared for and published in *500 godina protestantske reformacije* edited by Dragoljub B. Djordjević and Dragan Todorović (Niš: Jugoslovensko udruženje za naučno istraživanje religije and Univerzitet u Nišu—Mašinski fakultet, 2017), pp. 35-54, reprinted with the permission of the editors. Most of the material in the chapter is either paraphrased or quoted verbatim from the author’s Ph.D. dissertation, “A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia” (Boston University, 1965), ch. 12, pp. 565-615.

Currently, the Evangelical or United Methodists are among the most dedicated proponents of dialogue and ecumenism in these lands.

Brief Historical Overview

The late George Williams, professor of church history at Harvard Divinity and a recognized expert on the Protestant Reformation, promoted a helpful distinction between the Magisterial and the Radical Reformation. The term “magisterial” was assigned to those Protestant churches that received the protection and formal legal status by the secular rulers of lands (in Germany, they are called *Landeskirchen* whereas in English speaking countries, they are considered the established church. These churches continued their entanglement with the governing authorities along a pattern created by Emperor Constantine the Great and his followers, which its critics sometimes sarcastically compared to the “Babylonian captivity.” In the former Yugoslavia, no Protestant church enjoyed such a status but the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the neighboring country of Hungary, with which they in the past shared common citizenship, retained some features of a “historical church” to whom certain privileges were accorded by the government.

The Radical Reformation did make a decisive and conscious separation from the state authorities, having decided that entanglement with state power corrupts the church and distances its message from the gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the early apostles. These were sometimes called “believers churches” because one became a member not so much automatically by being born into the community (often a national church) but made a conscious decision to become a member by a proclamation of faith. These churches supported themselves by free will offering rather than by church taxes collected by the government. And they retained the right to critically distance themselves from politics, though generally expressed loyalty to the state in most

matters, though some refused to wage war. These churches were often named “free churches” meaning that they were unencumbered by close ties to the governing authorities.

The Methodists, having evolved out of the Anglican Church in the early eighteenth century, through the evangelizing activity of its founder, Reverend John Wesley, very early in their history, particularly in America where they achieved their greatest numerical and theological growth, were clearly “a free church” heir of the Radical Reformation, although they remained doctrinally moderated but were distinct by their “methodical” piety and emphasis on living righteously and morally, often avoiding social evils that had destructive impact on individual and collective lifestyles.

The Methodist Church, at the time of its arrival in Vojvodina, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was called The Methodist Episcopal Church. The church has undergone a few name changes and is currently called The Evangelical Methodist Church in most European countries. American Methodist missionaries came in the nineteenth century to Germany and from Germany, it gradually spread by ethnic German Methodist pastors to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In 1898, Robert Möller, a Viennese pastor was evangelized in Bačka among the numerous ethnic Germans. Despite occasional police intervention, the number of converts increased among this German population, and also among some Hungarians, but very rarely among the Slavic population of Vojvodina. By 1911, there were some 800 members served by pastors from Germany or native German pastors. World War I did not disrupt the work but checked the growth of this church. After the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929), the churches in Vojvodina were incorporated together with former Congregational churches in Macedonia that were turned over by the American Congregationalist Church authorities to the Methodists and they together formed the Yugoslavian Mission

Conference. These newly Methodist church members in Macedonia were mostly of Slavic Macedonian ethnic origin. The Methodist Episcopal Church was not given official legal recognition as a church by the Yugoslav royal government but was able to function with occasional harassment as a private religious association. Ironically, the Methodist Church was given the same recognized status as a church by the communist government after World War II but suffered the same restrictions that were applied to all churches.

I. The Position of the Church Immediately after World War II

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

University, 1965). The dissertation has recently been scanned and published by the Evangelical Methodist Church in Austria in 2008.

* * * * *

The liberation of Yugoslavia found the Methodist Church in total disarray and paralysis. Except Georg Sebele, all the ministers in Vojvodina had left the country with the majority of the German membership of the church.² With the breakdown of postal and other communications between towns, Superintendent Sebele was ignorant of the fate of the various churches. The German and Hungarian membership was seized with anxiety and terror as to their future. They were under suspicion because Germany and Hungary were the enemies of the victorious Allies, and the Slavic population had built up enormous hatred toward them. The number of Hungarians in Vojvodina was large so that no radical mass measures could be taken against them. But the Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) were hated even more because their minority pro-Nazi faction had sinned grievously against Yugoslavia.

The new communist government of Yugoslavia took extreme retaliatory measures upon all Germans still in the country at the time of the liberation, regardless of whether they were war prisoners or civilians, whether they had been active in the German National Socialist movement and committed crimes against humanity or whether, on the contrary, they had suffered under the Nazis. Virtually all Germans were taken to concentration camps intended to serve for purposes of extermination or forced labor. An undetermined but large number died in these camps and a large

²Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija", n, p. (Paula Mojzes was the author's mother.) The available written sources for this chapter are rather scant. Most of the material for this chapter comes from the author's own experiences and observations in the period from 1945 to 1957. In order to make it as objective as possible, references will be made to written primary sources as often as possible. The reader should take into consideration that the author is personally acquainted with nearly all protagonists in this chapter and is related to three of them.

number of able-bodied persons were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labor.³ Those who survived were not released for three or four years (early and middle 1950s) when they were permitted to migrate to West Germany, an opportunity which nearly all of them took advantage of. While in these camps, the German-speaking Methodists and other practicing Christians often met clandestinely for worship and mutual encouragement which helped their struggle to survive rather than to commit suicide or give in to their numerous difficulties.⁴

During the year 1945, Superintendent Sebele gradually received the news from Senta, Stari Bečej, Novi Vrbas, Vršac, and later in 1946, from Srbobran, that the Hungarian members were still in these towns, and as soon as the railroad connections were re-established, he visited these people trying to re-organize the work.⁵ Ferdinand Drumm, another ethnic German pastor, continued his ministrations in Vršac and Banatski Karlovac after his temporary release from concentration camp.⁶ He re-established contact with Sebele, who appointed him to minister to those who were left behind in Zrenjanin (formerly Petrovgrad or Veliki Bečkerek), Senta, and Bečej. In less than a year, Drumm was again apprehended with his family and placed in concentration camps where he was able to be the pastor to the scattered groups of Christians, especially the Methodists, Nazarenes, Free Brethren, Baptists, and Lutherans.⁷ Finally he was placed in a camp in which the entire Methodist congregation from Mramorak was interned. Drumm was able to serve them and other Protestants until his successful escape to Austria in 1947.

³ My research in the recent years has convinced me that Tito's Yugoslavian government carried out a genocide against Yugoslavia's German population. See Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers, 2011), pp. 109-121.

⁴Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija", n, p.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ferdinand Drumm, "Erinnerungen aus dem Werk des Methodismus in Ungarn und Jugoslawien, 1900-1947, wie es sich in meinem Leben and Wirken als Prediger widerspiegelt", Pasadena, Calif.; typescript sent to the author in February 29, 1964, for the purpose of this dissertation. p. 18.

⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

As the majority of the remaining members of German origin were now in concentration camps, the congregations consisted of very few older members. Virtually, this meant a new beginning. Sebele stood alone in this task until he was joined by Mrs. Paula Mojzes, the widow of Anton Mojzes, an independent non-denominational minister from Osijek, who was very close to the Methodists. Despite her husband's murder by the Nazis and her own persecutions, she was placed in a concentration camp as a German but was released in January 1945 on account of her clearly non-political sentiments. Superintendent Sebele and Paula Mojzes divided the responsibilities, alternately traveling each Sunday to at least one of the small congregations to revive them as well as serving Novi Sad, the central station.⁸ Connections with the Board of Missions in New York were not yet fully established, and the necessary money was obtained by Superintendent Sebele's selling his furniture, clothing, and other valuables.

In his first report to the Board of Missions in 1945, Sebele expressed the hope that the new government would now permit the Methodists to work in Macedonia using the native language, since the country was now established on the federal principle and granted equality to all nationalities and religions. He expressed the hope that the Board of Missions would consent to the requisition of the "Bethania" sanitarium in Novi Sad by the Yugoslav army as a military tuberculosis sanitarium.⁹ Sebele also pleaded for relief from the Methodist Church in America, telling them that the Second World War had left greater damages even than the first and that the lack was felt especially for medicine and clothes. The response from America and Switzerland was generous. This aid helped the members to survive the most difficult part of the post-war years, but

⁸Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija," p.5.

⁹Report of the Executive Secretary [hereafter RES], 1945, p. 76. The consent of the Board would at the best bring a little good will on part of the government but would not affect in any way the accomplished nationalization without compensation.

there was very little money for preachers' salaries, travel, and maintenance of property.¹⁰ Actually there was very little property left. Nearly all the chapels had been nationalized as property belonging to Germans. An exception was the house in Novi Sad which was left in the ownership of the Methodist Church, although rented to various tenants, with the exception of the preacher's apartment and the worship halls. The parsonage in Novi Vrbas was also saved because, under bombardment, the aged women from the home in Novi Sad had been moved, under the leadership of deaconess Bertha Kettenbah, to Novi Vrbas.¹¹ Repeated attempts were made to nationalize this house also.

All except two deaconesses left Yugoslavia with their families toward the end of the war. Margarete Merz was named by Superintendent Sebele as the main deaconess and she remained to work at the former "Bethania" Sanitarium.¹² Since her services as the most experienced nurse were needed by the sanitarium, she was not taken to a concentration camp but was interned at the sanitarium until 1948, and from then to October 1963, she served voluntarily and was even named the head nurse.¹³

When the American Bishop Paul N. Garber, the new Bishop of the Zurich area, visited Yugoslavia in 1946, he witnessed the extent of disintegration of the Methodist work in northern Yugoslavia. The work in Macedonia seemed more encouraging since five pastors, Pane Temkov, Vladimir Daskalov, Krum Kalajlijev, Kosta Krmazov, and Ceko Cekov, were still on their preaching places and continued their work.¹⁴ Georg Sebele thought that the Methodist Church should commence social and medical work in order to help the ravaged land and to strengthen the

¹⁰Oswald Bickel, "Wie Steht es urn die Arbeit der Methodistenkirche in Jugoslavien?" manuscript of the article which appeared in *Schweizer Evangelist*, January 1953.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Margarete Merz to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, January, 1964.

¹⁴RES, 1946, p. 56.

church, but this plan could not be executed, because the government would not permit any medical or social work to be done by private or religious agencies. The orphanage of the church in Srbobran ceased to function and the only kind of social work which was permitted, after considerable hesitation, was the Home for the Aged (old women) in Novi Vrbas (later transferred to Kisač) which was jointly supported with money and food by the members of the various congregations. This was still the only social work permitted until the Fall of Communism, and its existence is probably due to the very limited scope on which this work is being carried on, usually involving not more than five elderly women.

II. The New Relations with the State

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

time period blamed the communist governments for all the religious persecutions in Southeastern Europe.¹⁵ In reality, the minority churches enjoyed some liberties previously denied to them. True, these liberties granted to the church were very ambiguous.

A group of Protestant ministers traveling in Yugoslavia in 1947 said, “We saw no evidence and we heard no complaints at any time, that the government was conducting any antireligious or educational propaganda.”¹⁶ This statement is misleading. In Yugoslavia, many clergymen lived for years in terror of what might happen in the near future, many churches have been torn down in Communist-inspired riots, many clergymen and church members, the innocent along with those guilty of collaboration with the enemies during the war, met violence and death. Freedom of religion was limited to the freedom of worship. Worshipers were frequently intimidated in various ways and spies were placed in the congregation to report on the activities and sermons of the preachers and priests.¹⁷ Such a country could not possibly have been a showcase of religious liberty, as the seven eminent Protestant ministers were led to believe. They should have known the charges of religious persecution and try to get the full picture of the situation in Yugoslavia. They may not have realized that they did not have all the data. But if they did, they could have made a statement to the effect that their report was limited to the observable and not actual situation. If the communist government of Yugoslavia did not epitomize all evil in regard to its relation with the churches, and it was more lenient and liberal than most communist governments, it is equally evident that there was much that was wanting regarding religious liberty.

¹⁵E.g. Gary MacEoin, *The Communist War on Religion*, (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1951) and George N. Shuster, *Religion Behind the Iron Curtain*, (New York, The Maemil lan Co., 1954 and Martin D’arcy, *Communism and Christianity*, (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1957).

¹⁶*Religion in Yugoslavia: A Report on the Conferences with Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Moslem, Jewish and Protestant Leaders, and Investigations through the Medium of Religious Institutions and Documents* by Seven American Protestant Clergymen and Editors of Religious Journals who visited Yugoslavia the summer of 1947, p. 9.

¹⁷Alex N. Dragnich, *Tito's Promised Land*, (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1954), pp. 146-157. Dragnich's evident anti-Titoist bias should not rule out the use of his evidential support even though one may not concur in the conclusions drawn from the evidence.

There was no lack of promises of religious liberty. The Tito-Šubašić agreement of 1945 contained guarantees of freedom of worship. Guarantees of religious liberty also found their place in the Constitution of January 31, 1946. Articles 22, 25, and 37 of this Constitution carry provisions declaring the equality of all citizens irrespective of creed, the abuse of which is punishable by law. Citizens were also guaranteed freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, the churches being free to conduct their religious affairs and to administer religious rituals. The churches were separated from the state and the schools.¹⁸

A law of July 11, 1946, prohibited incitement to hatred and discord on national, racial, and religious basis. The law stressed again the equality of all religions and forbade any propaganda and activity which would damage the equal rights of all citizens and the unity of the Yugoslav people. It then defines incitement to religious hatred in the following way: The offence of incitement to religious hatred consists in the attacking of one religious denomination by the adherents of another or in the provoking, on the basis of religion, of hostility on the parts of members of one religious denomination towards the members of another. Scientific criticism of religion in general and criticism of improper actions of religious representatives or ecclesiastical officers cannot be regarded as incitement to religious hatred.¹⁹

This law, basically good and necessary for the wellbeing of the nation, contained a number of dangerous provisions which the administration could interpret as it wished. It guards only against "unscientific" incitements to religious hatred, but does not guard against "scientific" dialectical materialist incitement of antireligious hatred, which led not infrequently to bloodshed.

¹⁸J.B. Barron and H.M. Waddams, *Communism and the Churches: a Documentation*, (London; SCM Prass Ltd., 1950), p. 90.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

This law, like other laws in Communist countries, could be helpful provided the administration cease to use its interpretive powers in an-arbitrary way.

On December 5, 1946, a law was issued concerning the nationalization of private economic enterprises. This law was subsequently modified and enlarged under the law of April 28, 1948, which included within its scope the nationalization of foreign properties, including hospitals, clinics, orphanages, etc., maintained by foreign missions.²⁰ As a result, the Methodist irretrievably lost the "Bethania" Sanitarium and the orphanage, without compensation. Several houses used as chapels and parsonages were expropriated by the government, to be regained only after years of painful and costly legal procedures.

The provision of March 1947 granting all churches the freedom to evangelize in all parishes of other denominations was probably not conceived in the conviction that such freedom should be fully employed, but rather to irritate the larger denominations.²¹ It is hazardous to pry into the motivations of governments, but it is clear that the government had no intention of guaranteeing freedom of religious propaganda. The law supported complete freedom of anti-religious propaganda but guaranteed freedom of worship only in the most limited sense, i.e., in holding religious ceremonies inside the church. Even such innocent activities as taking Sunday School children on a picnic out of doors has usually been forbidden.

In 1948, the government set up a Commission on Religious Affairs²² to facilitate communication between the government and the churches. The secretary of that commission declared that the churches were allowed to cooperate in government welfare planning and that they might have ordinary contacts with churches abroad, provided that this did not result in their

²⁰Ibid., pp, 97f.

²¹Cockburn, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²²It is called the *Komisija za verska pitanja* which literally means the Commission on Religious Questions.

opposition to the government.²³ This change of policy toward the churches manifested itself increasingly as the government developed its anti-Cominform policies, from 1948 on, and foreign contacts of the churches have never since been severed.

Due to the episcopal system, the Methodists in Yugoslavia could not and did not want to be independent of the international connectional system which ties it to the Geneva Episcopal area. The government would much rather have had an independent Methodist Church in Yugoslavia with its own bishop and own separate organization,²⁴ and had frequently blocked the admission of the bishop.²⁵ However, no radical steps were ever made to force the severance of connections. The Methodists in Yugoslavia held most of their Annual Mission Conferences without the presence of a bishop, but the government had on many occasions recognized the Methodist foreign connections by receiving representatives of the Board of Missions, bishops, and other ecclesiastical functionaries at the headquarters of the Commission on Religious Affairs in Belgrade. The government also permitted missionary financial aid from the Board of Missions and other Methodist agencies to flow regularly into Yugoslavia, making possible the continuous existence of the Methodist Church there.

III. The Gradual Renewal in Church Work

A. Before 1953

Renovation of church activities in Vojvodina and the recovery of the work in Macedonia took place gradually. Five ministers in Macedonia served congregations in Skopje, Strumica, Prilep, Murtino, Monospitovo, Kolečino, Radovište, Rakliš and less frequently in Bitola, Priština,

²³Ibid., p. 97.

²⁴The Bulgarian government succeeded in accomplishing this (temporarily) with the Bulgarian Methodist Church.

²⁵Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Basel, Switzerland, September 3, 1963.

and Kosovska Mitrovica. They were often limited by the arbitrary decisions of Communist officials, resulting in restrictions not unlike those experienced before the war.

Restrictions were made on traveling. On one occasion, Superintendent G. Sebele, and church sister²⁶ Paula Mojzes, just as they started a tour of the churches in Macedonia, were given a few hours notice to return to Vojvodina. The reason for the greater pressure in Macedonia was that the officials there were less educated and experienced men, with little prudence in dealing with their people, but rather, an eagerness to outdo the orders of the central government. So they frequently threatened and imprisoned the Methodists. In the summer of 1950, two Macedonian pastors were arrested,²⁷ and one of them, Ceko Cekov, was sentenced to four years of hard labor for allegedly aiding a relative to escape over the border into Greece. According to the opinion of Cekov's associates, the charges were trumped up for the state did not want to break flagrantly the promises of religious freedom. They preferred to accuse a minister who was in their way with non-religious charges, and then sentence him after a mock trial. Cekov was a natural target as he exercised great influence in Kolečino, where about half of the village belonged to the Methodist Church, not at all to the liking of the Communists. Despite the appeal of Mrs. Cekov, even to the President of Yugoslavia, he was not pardoned. At the time of his release, he was deeply traumatized from abuse in prison but happily, he recuperated after a year of rest.

Before 1948, the revival of the congregations in Vojvodina was fairly slow. Small groups of five to ten people gathered for prayer and worship in Zrenjanin, Vršac, Novi Vrbas, and Novi Sad. Superintendent Sebele, realizing that he could not carry on the work alone, decided to follow a radical course. Since men were not available for leading worship services, he appointed women

²⁶Church sister (*crkvena sestra*) is the term used by Yugoslav Methodists for lay women engaged in preaching, teaching, and serving actively in the church because of the lack of pastors. They receive some theological and administrative training.

²⁷RES, 1950, p. 57.

to carry the burden of the work.²⁸ It was believed that no other Mission Conference had relied so heavily upon women as the Yugoslavia Mission Conference.²⁹ In 1948, he appointed Mrs. Anna Fiala to take care of the small church in Vršac with 21 members and a few more sympathizers. She also helped revive interest among the Germans in Mramorak and Banatski Karlovac,³⁰ who by this time had been released from concentration camps. The freeing of the local Germans, and the relaxation of internment measures of German war prisoners, caused a large increase in membership and attendance. There was still danger in working among Germans, and in small places, like Mramorak, visitations by Sebele and Paula Mojzes were obstructed. But as a rule, the conditions in Vojvodina were much more conducive to freer work. In most congregations, there were members speaking Serbian, Hungarian, and German. It was felt necessary to use these languages not through interpreters, but by the successive preaching in each language by the same person. This required much skill and language training on the part of the preacher and patience on the part of the congregation, yet it was done and with great success.

From 1950 and 1951, the exodus of Germans caused great losses to the Methodist Church.³¹ By 1958, almost all the German nationals had left Yugoslavia, and the Methodists lost an estimated 300 to 500 members, who in many cases composed the core of the congregations. In some places, such as Vršac and Novi Vrbas this meant a considerable reduction in membership,³² while in some others, like Mramorak, it spelled the end.

²⁸Paula Mojzes, "Metodizam", p. 67.

²⁹*Annual Report of the Division of World Mission of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church*, (New York, Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1955) p. 40. [Hereafter abbreviated to *Ann. Rep. DWM*].

³⁰Anna Fiala to Paul Mojzes, Vršac, Yugoslavia, December 11, 1963.

³¹RES, 1951, p. 42.

³²Anna Fiala to Paul Mojzes, Vršac December 11, 1963 and Mihajlo Olejar, "Autobiografija," Novi Vrbas, January 1964, p. 3.

The Macedonian churches had experienced a small revival in 1952.³³ At the same time the relations with the government improved. The Methodists in Yugoslavia gained more freedom than those in other Eastern European countries.³⁴ Thus, for example, a youth meeting was permitted in Vršac in 1948 in which some 30 young Methodists from all over Vojvodina gathered for a weekend of witnessing, singing, and recreation. This strengthened the local congregations³⁵ and established a pattern to be followed as often as possible. This was forbidden by the government on only a few occasions.

B. From 1953 to 1963

1. Relaxation of State Control

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

In May of the same year the National Assembly passed the Religious Communities Law,³⁶ as a supplement and elaboration of the constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion.³⁷ The leadership of the Methodist Church awaited this law with both anxiety and

³³RES, 1952, p. 29.

³⁴RES, 1951, p. 42.

³⁵Anna Fiala to Paul Mojzes, Vršac, December 11, 1963.

³⁶Rastko Vidić, *The Position of the Church in Yugoslavia*, trans. By Veselin Kostić (Belgrade, Yugoslavia: Jugoslavija, 1962), pp. 128-133 contains the complete English translation of the legal text.

³⁷Robert Lee Wolf, *The Balkans in Our Times*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 511.

anticipation. The reaction was a sense of relief since it brought no startling changes. It merely formalized existing practices, though its text allegedly reflects a document based on free and amicable discussions between the government and the churches. The Methodist Church had not been asked to contribute anything to this discussion, if, indeed, it ever took place.

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

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

The churches might not operate parochial schools, except for ministerial training. The churches were to choose their own faculties and curricula for the theological schools, but the state reserved the right to supervise these schools. Periodicals and newspapers might be issued by the churches within given guidelines. The churches could be supported by voluntary collections taken inside but not outside the churches. The government had the right to grant subsidies to churches, such aid to be used without restrictions, unless specifically designated. In reality, the Methodists have not received any subsidies from the state.

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

For the Methodists, the most crippling clause was the one prohibiting the use of private homes for religious services. In many towns, the Methodists had gathered in homes as the congregations were too poor to be able to afford a chapel. When the new regulation was issued, it seemed that activity in a number of towns and villages would have to be abandoned, particularly the smaller ones. Had it not been for prompt aid from a number of individual churches³⁸ and the Board of Missions, this would have happened, but in a few years, it was possible to purchase houses for each congregation.

2. The Slovak Blue Cross Societies and the Church

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Methodism in Yugoslavia had its origin in German and Hungarian members of the Blue Cross Society, with very few Serbs joining the churches. Fifty years later, the Methodist Church in Vojvodina was strengthened by a new infusion of members of the Blue Cross who were Slovak nationals. Numerous Slovak colonies, often making up entire villages, were formed in Vojvodina between the eighteenth and twentieth century when both Slovakia and Vojvodina belonged to Hungary, when many Slovaks moved to Vojvodina in search of better land. Large and prosperous villages were formed in Bački Petrovac, Kovačica, Pivnice, Kisač, Padina, as well as large parts of Bačka Palanka, Šid, Ilok, and many other places, the inhabitants of which were primarily Evangelical Lutherans or Roman Catholics.

³⁸For example the College Heights Methodist Church from Lakeland, Florida, purchased a house for the congregation in Ilok, Vojvodina, for \$550 and thus enabled the continuation of services there.

The Blue Cross Society had considerable success among these Slovaks. This laymen's Christian movement, not connected with any church, found support among many Slovak Lutherans who experienced conversion and regeneration trying to bring individuals to a total dedication to Christ, in the belief that only thus can the power of addiction to alcohol and other sins be broken.³⁹

The Blue Cross missionaries from Slovakia brought inspiration to the Slovaks in Vojvodina. Stara Tura in Slovakia was the center from which radiated the blessed influence of Christine and Marie Roy, daughters of a Lutheran minister, who had dedicated their lives fully to the Lord. Christine wrote Christian pamphlets and books which were translated into many languages and were propagated by tract societies in many regions of the world. Marie composed music. Together they published a song book in which both words and music, were mostly of their own composition.⁴⁰

Jan Rohachek, a layman, from Stara Tura, Slovakia, felt called to organize Blue Cross Societies in Vojvodina, and he settled in Kisač in 1910. "He opened his home for religious worship and was instrumental in leading many a soul to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. When he died . . . in 1939, there were at least eight such centers among the Slovaks in Yugoslavia."⁴¹ Around 1920, a Slovak colporteur, Djuro Lukač, established temporary residence in Šid, and there, with the aid of Jan Rohachek, and two missionaries from Slovakia, Jan Horvat and Samuel Chinchurak, started a Blue Cross Society which was later lead by Mihal Hovan, Ondraš Djurik, Jano Olejar, and others.⁴² A similar society was organized about 1925 in Erdevik by Ribar, Rohachek, Hovan,

³⁹ Joseph Paul Bartak, "Quo Vadis Yugoslavia?" an unpublished article written but not accepted for publication after Dr. Bartak's return from a visit to the Yugoslav Methodists in spring 1957.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 4.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 4f.

⁴²Mihailo Olejar, to Paul Mojzes, Novi Vrbas, Yugoslavia, [December 1963].

and others, including some deaconesses from Slovakia, but this group never became large.⁴³ In some places, the society did very well; for example in Pivnice it had over 180 members.⁴⁴

Already in 1940, the members of the Blue Cross Society in Kisač had turned for assistance to the Methodist Church. Paula Mojzes visited them and held services in place of the late Jan Rohachek.⁴⁵ Jan Rohachek had been in close touch with the Methodists and preached in some Methodist churches in Banat. He suggested that all members of the Blue Cross societies in Kisač, Kovačica, and Padina become Methodists, but this was not accomplished because of disagreement among the leaders.⁴⁶

About 1948, the government ordered that the Blue Cross Society must register as a church within six months or cease activities. Through the indecisiveness of the leadership, the Blue Cross failed to register and the government banned it. Thereafter some of the leaders refused to obey the ban, and continued to meet. This resulted in the imprisonment of Tomaš Slamaj, Jano Podlavicki, and Mrs. Bireš from Stara Pazova.⁴⁷

Various factions of the Blue Cross later associated themselves with Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Free Brethren, and Methodists. The majority eventually joined the Methodist Church because these people held much the same theological views, and used much the same methods as the Methodists. The chief difference was their lack of ecclesiastical structure. However, in a number of places, such as Padina, very un-Christian scandals broke out in regard to the property of the society and confusion and quarreling was the order of the day.⁴⁸

⁴³Maria Dudok to Paul Mojzes, Erdevik, Yugoslavia, January 6, 1964.

⁴⁴Lajoš Papp to Paul Mojzes, Pivnice, Yugoslavia, [December 1963].

⁴⁵Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija", n. p.

⁴⁶Ondriš Sjanta to Paul Mojzes, Padina [December 1963].

⁴⁷Jano Olejar to Paul Mojzes, Sid, Yugoslavia, January 7, 1964.

⁴⁸Ondriš Sjanta to Paul Mojzes, Padina, Yugoslavia, [December 1963].

The members of the former society in Kisač were the first to join the Methodist Church in 1949 under the leadership of the daughter of Jan Rohachek, Marta Rohachek.⁴⁹ When the others saw what a tremendous improvement the Kisač congregation made under Methodist auspices, they sought incorporation into the Methodist Church. The second congregation to seek membership was from Bačka Palanka.⁵⁰ This trend continued until 1954. A number of people who joined the Methodist Church in this way later drifted into Baptist or Free Brethren Churches, when they were convinced of the need of adult baptism, weekly communion, or other theological points insisted upon by these two denominations. But in general, the situation remained stable.

Superintendent Sebele and Mrs. Mojzes tried to minister to these new churches, traveling ceaselessly to strengthen Methodist influence. In addition to the former Methodist preaching places, there were now congregations in Kisač, Bačka Palanka, Ilok, Pivnice, Šid, Stara Pazova, Kovačica, Erdevik, and Padina, all in Vojvodina but at considerable distance one from another. Being unable to handle the work alone, they sought help among laymen, as well as lay women, whom they called "church sisters." Paula Mojzes' niece, Ljubica Vojvodić, was stationed in Zrenjanin in 1952 to take over the burden of the few Banat churches. Marta Rohachek, Beta Fiala, Katka Simon, Katarina Papp, and Katica Dukai entered the work of the church. Franja Žunk, a student at the University of Belgrade also traveled extensively and served as a lay preacher. The church sisters had the duty of preaching occasionally, and taking care of the daily program of the church, calling upon members, especially the ill, inviting people to services, holding Sunday Schools and women's meetings, prayer services, and other work. Their inestimable contribution is much beyond any merely factual account. The services in the local churches were held by former lay leaders of the Slovak congregations, or new leaders that came to the fore. They became local

⁴⁹Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n, p.

⁵⁰Pavle Zajac to Paul Mojzes, Bačka Palanka, Yugoslavia, January 3, 1964.

preachers, of whom some were ordained and others only licensed. All of them continued their old employment in farming or other crafts, and gave to the church their spare time, for which some were paid by the central church treasury. The local church collections covered the cost of electricity, heat, and traveling expenses of the preachers, so that the meager salaries had to be paid by the treasury maintained through Board of Mission appropriations and special gifts.⁵¹ These preachers were Jano Podlavicki, Tomaš Slamai, Pavle Zajac, Ljudevit Pelah, Paljo Djuriš, Jano Olejar, Ondriš Sjanta, Martin Lenhart, Lajoš Papp, Djuro Lukač, and others. None of these men had any theological training, but they did their work with great enthusiasm. Sermon preparation was by and large unknown among them. The procedure as to preaching was to seek "the inspiration by the Holy Spirit." It was not unusual for the preachers to continue for an hour or more whether or not he held the attention of the congregation.

The influence of these former Blue Cross Society members was very wholesome, and they showed great enthusiasm and faithfulness to the Methodist Church. Their accession in such large numbers⁵² just after the rest of the Germans left, played a crucial role in the continuation of the work in Vojvodina. New property problems arose in connection with this incorporation, because the government expropriated almost all the property of the Blue Cross Society. As long as the government permitted meetings in private houses, this was not a great problem, but when this was forbidden, properties had to be purchased in almost all Slovak localities. This was a great burden for the church, but also a great victory after it was achieved.⁵³

⁵¹*The Journals of the Annual Meetings of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church* for the period of 1954 to 1960 specify the amounts of appropriation from \$1,711 in 1954 to a high \$4,139 in 1957, with a basic \$3000 appropriation in 1959 and 1960.

⁵²There has been no official estimate of the number of Slovaks who joined the Methodist Church. An estimate of ca. 250 does not seem unrealistic. Additional members joined afterwards.

⁵³Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, September 8, 1959.

3. Ecclesiastical Organization and Work

In Yugoslavia, the Methodist Church was organized according to the common book "Methodist Discipline." But some adaptations were necessary. Indeed, the church was never a slave of rules, and flexibility was always maintained. The Quarterly Conferences⁵⁴ were not regularly held, especially in the smaller churches. At least one Quarterly Conference of each church was held annually and these were usually well visited by members and workers of the local church and from the vicinity.⁵⁵

The churches in Yugoslavia were divided into the Northern or Voivodina district and the Southern or Macedonia district. The Annual Mission Conference consisted of the two districts but the bishops of the Geneva area could seldom preside, because of the government's refusal to issue a visa. In 1946, Bishop Paul N. Garber presided over the Conference, in 1953, another American, Bishop Arthur J. Moore, who had just taken over the jurisdiction of the Geneva area, led the conference in Novi Sad, and finally in 1957, a Swiss national, Bishop Ferdinand Sigg, elected Bishop of the Geneva Area in 1954, came to Novi Sad. The communication with the first two of the bishops just named was a little difficult because of the language barrier, but when Dr. Sigg assumed the episcopacy it was much easier to communicate with him in German.⁵⁶

a. The Leadership of the Church. From 1945 to 1953, there were six active preachers, one in the North and five in the South. The superintendent was Georg Sebele. In 1953, Vladimir Daskalov and Pane Temkov were retired and the former died shortly thereafter. The brunt of the work fell on the remaining four pastors. The outstanding figure of Yugoslav Methodism was Georg

⁵⁴ Every three months each local congregation is to hold a business meeting by all church members to evaluate the work and to plan for the future. Normally the District Superintendent, a pastor appointed by the bishop, presides.

⁵⁵Bickel, "Wie steht es um die Arbeit der Methodistenkirche in Jugoslawien?" II, p. 3.

⁵⁶Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija," n. p.

Sebele. In a small church, much more than a large one, the key personalities tend to mold the character of the whole church.

Georg Sebele was the soul of Yugoslav Methodism. Small in stature, a model of patience and kindness, he seemingly could not make enemies even among declared enemies of the church. He had a very strong sense of duty, and a great store of energy for traveling at the most dangerous and inconvenient times, on foot, by bicycle or by trains, even after he was well over fifty. His unassuming leadership was unquestioned because of his seniority and experience. When advancing in years, he was still studying Serbian and English and he started with Slovak, in order to be more useful to the church. He was a very humble person, who did all that he could to advance the interests not only of his church but of the Kingdom of God. "George Sebele is one of the epic heroes of Methodism in our day, but he would be amazed to have anybody say so."⁵⁷ When he died suddenly in the fall of 1955, the church experienced its heaviest loss. Besides the loss of personal friendship, "the death of a capable, and almost irreplaceable leader in Yugoslavia, Rev. George .Sebele, has also created a problem in administration."⁵⁸ The bishop then appointed Mrs. Paula Mojzes to serve as the acting superintendent besides her duties as the secretary of the church administration. This she did until Bishop Sigg could come to the Annual Conference in 1957 to appoint pastor Krum Kalajlijev as the new superintendent of Yugoslav Methodism. Paula Mojzes was on that occasion ordained a deacon of the Methodist Church with three men, Lajoš Papp, Paljo Djuriš, and Ljudevit Pelah. She was then appointed the supervising pastor of the Northern District.⁵⁹ Beside teaching and translating from German for the Bible course in Novi Sad and doing

⁵⁷Eugene L. Smith (General Secretary of the Board of Missions in New York), "Yugoslavia", an unpublished travel report, 1954. BMLib.

⁵⁸*Ann. Rep. DWM*, 1956, p. 38.

⁵⁹Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija", n. p. She is considered the first ordained Methodist woman in Europe and the first woman District Superintendent according the United Methodist Historical Archives.

extensive traveling to preach and administer the sacraments in the church she was the editor of *Put Života* (The Path of Life) and *Crkvene Vesti* (Church News) as well as its contributor. She also wrote a short history of Methodism called *Metodizam* and helped with the creation of a Macedonian hymnbook. The burden of the work in Vojvodina fell on her and the church sisters.⁶⁰ She was characterized by the General Secretary of the Board of Mission, Dr. Eugene L. Smith as "one of God's best achievements."⁶¹ She held at the time one of the most responsible places of any woman in any of the Annual Missionary Conferences of the Methodist Church.

Krum Kalajlijev was the worthy successor of Georg Sebele. A powerful evangelist, on whose face there was a constant expression of his goodness, he traveled from station to station two or three times a year besides serving his own church in Prilep. He was the first Macedonian to become the superintendent of an Annual Mission Conference. Fortunately, the government occasionally permitted him and Paula Mojzes to travel abroad and participate in the various international Methodist Conferences. These visitations have significantly strengthened the ties of Yugoslav to world Methodism as have the visits of American, German, Swiss, and Austrian Methodist leaders. Kosta Krmazov was the preacher of the Skopje Congregation with the aid of the retired Pane Temkov. His congregation suffered extensively during the earthquake in Skopje in August 1963 and the chapel was greatly damaged.⁶² A team of pastors and church members immediately started to work on the chapel and the parsonage.⁶³ Methodists all over the world, including the Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief, the American, Scandinavian, and Swiss

⁶⁰Helmut Nausner, "Die Arbeit der Methodistenkirche in Jugoslawien", in *Der Methodist*, February 1960, p. 3.

⁶¹Eugene L. Smith, "Yugoslavia", an unpublished travel report, 1954, MBMLib.

⁶²Paula Mojzes to Gaither P. Warfield, Novi Sad, October 7, 1963, and also Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad October 21, 1963.

⁶³Ibid.

Methodists and the World Council of Churches helped the church members and the general populace and a new church building had been erected.⁶⁴

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

b. The Work in Individual Churches. Relaxation of state control did not mean its complete disappearance. The preachers in Macedonia, especially Superintendent Kalajlijev were frequently called to give account of their work to the Commission for Religious Affairs.⁶⁵ Similar investigations were being carried on by the secret police. It must be said in the case of the activities of Georg Sebele and Paula Mojzes, the approach has usually been civil though intimidating.⁶⁶ Investigations consisted of not necessarily unpleasant conversations as to what is going on in the churches, who the foreign visitors were, what they had to say, and other internal business of the church. Such investigations were dreaded by the people who undergo this sort of questioning. The secret service agents usually already knew what had transpired in the church before their interrogation.

Two flagrant cases of state intervention occurred. Around 1955, the Murtino Church in Macedonia received the permission to build a new church. When the old structure was torn down and new material was brought to the site by voluntary labor of the membership, local state officials, on a pretext relating to a building permit, took it away, in a most brazen fashion, and repeatedly

⁶⁴Gaither P. Warfield to Paula Mojzes, New York, January 2, 1964.

⁶⁵Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Basel, Switzerland, September 3, 1963.

⁶⁶The author was a personal witness of such investigations by plain clothes policemen of his mother.

imprisoned six church leaders for periods up to a month, expropriating all the money and the building material. By 1963, the church had not yet been built.⁶⁷ Similar interference with building was experienced in Strumica.

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

Another case of state pressure, not so tragic but nonetheless very real, came about as follows: Without warning the church was taxed in the amount of 70 percent of all monetary gifts from abroad, including the appropriations from the Board of Missions. This was a staggering blow.⁶⁸ Moreover, the publication of periodicals was not to be supported, nor were the church workers to receive their salaries from abroad. These measures were brought out in full knowledge of their impact upon the smaller churches. In Novi Sad, the large apartment house was nationalized and placed under collective management, the church receiving only the use of the church hall.

Through such economic pressure as well as intimidation and mockery of people attending services, especially students or workers, and through continuous anti-religious propaganda, the Methodist Church was continuously menaced. The leadership felt that the field for their labor was

⁶⁷Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, 1963, No. 2.

⁶⁸Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, September 7, 1960.

shrinking. The pressure upon the church varied with the political aims of the state; when rapprochement with U.S.S.R. was the order of the day, the churches were under greater pressure; and when the West was to be pacified, the churches felt a little more freedom. The deeper meaning of terror in a totalitarian state is not so much overt persecution as the fear of unknown hostile measures that may be arbitrarily invoked.

The lack of adequate statistics prevents the exact estimate of the numerical strength of Methodists in Yugoslavia. The membership was variously estimated from 755⁶⁹ to 2300.⁷⁰ These reports, especially the lower figure, are inaccurate. According to the 1959 figures of the secretariat of the Methodist Church in Novi Sad, there were 3000 Methodists in some 40 congregations, with three ordained elders, 10 church sisters, 16 local preachers, and 400 children in Sunday Schools.⁷¹ One should keep in mind the possibility of "pious exaggeration," arising by not striking names of those who have ceased to attend, in the hope that they will return. It might at best be optimistically assumed that the Methodist Church in Yugoslavia has approximately 3,000 members. This figure was perhaps somewhat lower in 1961 and 1962.⁷²

In Macedonia, there were several congregations of 200-300 Methodist Christians who were deeply dedicated but poorly organized. The potential of these churches is not used to the full because of lack of attention such as is possible in smaller groups.⁷³ The most active church was at Kolečino, which has a fine youth fellowship and large Sunday School. A number of church sisters were added to the list of workers in these congregations. The poverty in Macedonia was a disabling

⁶⁹"A Progress Report on World Mission," in *World Outlook* April 1959, p. 15.

⁷⁰Stewart Winfried Herman, *Report from Christian Europe*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), p. 129.

⁷¹Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, May 22, 1959.

⁷²Paula Mojzes, "Izveštaj Sekretara Godišnjem Bratskom Sastanku Jugoslovenske Misijske Konferencije", Kisač, 1961. Typed report to the Annual Mission Conference, p. 3.

⁷³Martin Hovan to Paul Moizes, Zrenjanin, January 3, 1964.

factor, the contributions of the congregations being very small. The Novi Sad congregation in Vojvodina, if not large was considered one of the most active and the most sacrificing.⁷⁴

The administrative headquarters remained in Novi Sad. Virtually all initiative and planning came from the secretariat of the Church.⁷⁵ Novi Sad is the center of the Bačka circuit, including Kisač, Novi Vrbas, Pivnice, Bačka Palanka, and Ilok. The Novi Vrbas congregation lost nearly all its members through emigration. The Slovak churches in Pivnice, Kisač and Bačka Palanka have recorded a small growth, while the Ilok congregation has declined to a handful of people.⁷⁶

The Srem circuit consisted of congregations in Belgrade, Stara Pazova, Šid, Sremska Mitrovica, and Erdevik. The last two meet only occasionally when visited by some preacher. The Šid and Stara Pazova congregations are increasing only slightly, but they have been the source of several younger workers. In Belgrade, the congregation consisted mainly of Methodists who have moved to the capital. They met in the hall of the Reformed church.⁷⁷ Services have been conducted by Boris and Nikola Andonov, by a Baptist minister, Aleksandar Birviš, and by visiting preachers.⁷⁸

The Banat circuit includes congregations in Zrenjanin, Vršac, Kovačica and Padina. The first two suffered by the emigration of the German population, and the separation of the Baptists who worshiped with the Methodists until they acquired their own quarters. The Padina and Kovačica churches improved their chapels and have expanded in membership so that they are considered among the best congregations.⁷⁹

⁷⁴Paula Mojzes, "Izveštaj Sekretara Godišnjem Bratskom Sastanku .Jugoslovenske Misijske Konferencije" Kisač, 1961. Typed report to the Annual Mission Conference, p. 3

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 4 and 6.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 5.

⁷⁸Nikola Andonov to Paul Mojzes , Claremont, California, December 15, 1963.

⁷⁹Martin Hovan to Paul Mojzes, Zrenjanin, Yugoslavia, January 3, 1964.

A Hungarian circuit in northern Bačka consists of congregations in Senta, Stari Bečej and Srbobran. Of these, the Senta congregation is by far the most vital. Here, the ecumenical spirit has progressed greatly as the Evangelical Lutherans and Reformed Christians worshiped with the Methodists.⁸⁰ The Stari Bečej church, at one time very active, has become one of the weakest, as many members moved or died, and the rest degenerated into practicing black magic, spiritism, and superstition.⁸¹ In Srbobran, the church is disorganized because the house in which the orphanage formerly was located, where services were held, has been nationalized.⁸²

Methodism in Vojvodina largely rested on the work of women. There are congregations, such as in Erdevik which are entirely made up of women.⁸³ Women's societies contribute not only to the spiritual well-being of the church, but also take care of the needs of the Home for the Aged in Vrbas⁸⁴ (which was later moved to Kisač). There is an absence of young people in the congregations in the North, but this is not the case in Macedonia: the Sunday Schools, despite two training courses for teachers, are weak, with some notable exceptions, such as Bačka Palanka. The burning problem for churches in Communist countries is how to enlist more young people. Occasionally there has been an increase in young people's attendance, but the church has planned no solution except the hope that constant prayer and evangelism will produce miraculous results. There is very little in the church that is truly attractive to youth. The church is not concerned with the specific problems of youth, and is very rigid in its attitude toward dancing, smoking, make-up, dressing, movies, and all types of "worldly entertainment." The church's message of an impending doom⁸⁵ was not exactly cheering and a number of young people were undoubtedly repelled by its

⁸⁰Paula Mojzes, "Izveštaj Sekretara . . .," 1962, p. 6.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Paula Mojzes, "Izveštaj Sekretara . . .", 1961, p. 5.

⁸³Maria Dudok to Paul Mojzes, Erdevik, Yugoslavia, January 6, 1964.

⁸⁴Paula Mojzes "Izveštaj Sekretara . . ." 1962, p. 7.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 1.

inflexible demands for a visible rebirth and radical change of life, as well as the refusal to accept any scientific theories which seem to contradict the Bible. The government took advantage of this in alienating the youth from all churches, as a part of the secularization of society.

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

4. Ecumenical Relations

The ecumenical movement has influenced the Yugoslav churches. With few exceptions they have not responded enthusiastically. As a rule, a "bad neighbor" policy prevailed among the churches, as it did among the Balkan states, and only recently, under Communism, were they forced by external threats to co-operate, though the old suspicions still linger. The ecumenical encounter with other Protestants had been accepted as early as the 1920s, although it was not practiced extensively. Very limited cooperation was developed with the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The extent of cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church was that one priest, Ugrešić, the secretary to the Orthodox bishop of Novi Sad, taught at a small seminary for Methodist lay preachers and attended a number of ecumenical prayer services. Methodist representatives were

received in audience by the late Patriarchs Vikentije and German and the chairman of the Association of Orthodox Priests, archpriest Milan Smiljanić. The Serbian Orthodox Church had not joined the World Council of Churches during the time period under discussion, and no other ecumenical contacts have been made with the Orthodox. The Orthodox in general regarded the Methodists as unwelcome foreigners. Especially in Macedonia, the Methodists had very bad relationship with the local Orthodox churches, which subsequently improved.

With the Roman Catholics, there were no relations whatsoever. The Methodists were anti-Catholic and frequently regarded that church and the pope with great distrust and enmity. The ecumenical tendencies of the Roman Catholic Church displayed at the Second Vatican Council and the whole Christendom for unity are regarded as significant but not essential because many Methodists believed that it has nothing to do with the unity of real Christians who have been reborn, who have always enjoyed the real unity in Christ. According to some of them, the unity of all Christians will not be the unity of which Christ speaks. The real unity refers to the body of Jesus Christ and not to a great general Christian church It is true that Christianity made many mistakes, but this has nothing in common with Christ. He who loves Christ, that is, who is born again, loves his neighbor as himself and consequently cannot do any injustice to his brother or sister. In Christ end all differences between races, classes, and sex as well as all struggles except against sin. Such Christians will always be in the minority; they will always remain the "little flock" to whom Jesus said "be not afraid". The person who belongs to this fold has the promise that even the gate of hell can not harm him. . . . Real Christianity will never be a mass movement but always consist of individuals who washed their clothes in the blood of Jesus Christ. They will always be a thorn in the side of both Christians and non-Christians.⁸⁶

Clergymen of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches were suspected of insincerity in their Christianity if they smoked or drank alcoholic beverages. Close relationships with these men developed in only a few cases, such as with Reformed Bishop Sándor Ágoston from Feketič and Lutheran senior Šoštarec from Subotica. Such men were frequently invited to evangelize in Methodist Churches and very cordial relations followed. Despite the feeling that these churches are too formal, and that they do not insist on rebirth as a measure of membership, the Methodists invited some of their ministers to teach at the seminary for lay preachers. They cooperated each

⁸⁶Paula Mojzes to Paul Mojzes, Novi Sad, July 16, 1963. Translated from the Serbo-Croatian by the author.

year in the organization of a prayer week in Novi Sad in which the Baptists and Free Brethren also took part.

With the smaller denominations, such as the Baptists, Free Brethren, Pentecostals, and Adventists, there was a great deal of rivalry, and they were all accused of trying to draw away members and in some places, distrust and bitterness have been common. In Pivnice, for example, an evangelist, Hlavach from America, disrupted and nearly destroyed a new congregation consisting of former Blue Cross members after presenting himself as a friend. He severely criticized the Methodist Church in America and insisted on the necessity of adult baptism for salvation.⁸⁷ Similar incidents occurred in Bačka Palanka, Padina, Erdevik, Šid, and other places.⁸⁸

The relation between the Baptists and the Methodists was not wholly one of rivalry. In Vršac, in the absence of a minister, a few Baptists joined the Methodists for regular worship services.⁸⁹ Frequently, the two churches shared visiting evangelists of both denominations. James Lowden from Chicago, a fundamentalist evangelist, visited Yugoslavia some five or six times for considerable periods, preaching in almost every Baptist and Methodist Church with great success and impartiality. He also spoke to President Tito on behalf of these two churches hoping to evoke good will.⁹⁰ Another encouraging development was that five young Methodist ministerial candidates studied for four years at the Baptist Theological School in Novi Sad.

5. Theological Education

⁸⁷Lajos Papp to Paul Mojzes, Pivnice, [December 1963].

⁸⁸To this testify almost all the letters received from the leaders of the Methodist congregations in these places.

⁸⁹Anna Fiala to Paul Mojzes, Vršac, December 11, 1963.

⁹⁰"Audience of Jim Lowden with Marshall Tito: December 31, 1953". (Mimeographed.)

A very burning problem is the education of preachers. Yugoslav candidates were not allowed to go for studies to foreign countries and foreigners could not go to Yugoslavia to work.⁹¹ The church sisters and lay preachers had no formal theological education and as most of them had only elementary schooling and did not read German or English, they were unable to profit from the existing religious literature in these languages. They were restricted essentially to the Bible and the hymn book, or perhaps a devotional book or two, for the preparation of their sermons. There was a great need to improve not only their general education and culture, but even more to give them basic religious training. There being no Protestant theological faculty or school in the country at that time, the leaders of the Methodist Church, particularly Georg Sebele and Paula Mojzes decided to organize a two-month basic theological training course, to be held during the winter months when the people, mainly farmers, could find time to improve their knowledge.

In the first course so organized in 1954, help was received from two Reformed pastors, one Orthodox priest, and one Baptist pastor.⁹² About 26 attended this course of which nine were church sisters. Meetings were held in the small worship hall at the Novi Sad Methodist Church. The students contributed their labor and part of the food, attending classes nearly all day long. Courses such as Survey of the Old and the New Testament, Exegesis, Homiletics, Discipline of the Methodist Church, and similar subjects were offered. This course was again held for two months in 1955, 1956, and 1957. After Georg Sebele died in the fall of 1955, the course was administered by Paula Mojzes, with the help of James Lowden from U.S.A., and Oswald Bickel and E. Voelmy from Switzerland.⁹³

⁹¹Oswald Bickel, "Wie steht es um die Arbeit der Methodistenkirche in Jugoslawien?" original typed copy of an article which appeared in *Schweizer Evangelist*, January 1953.

⁹²RES, 1954, p. 41 and Paula Mojzes, "Autobiografija", n.p.

⁹³Partial source is *Ann. Rep. DWM*, 1955, p. 40.

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

Two young men, Mihailo Olejar and Martin Hovan, both Slovak nationals, intended to enter the ministry of the church but these courses were not sufficient for the ordination. When the Baptist Theological School opened in Novi Sad in 1957 in the rank of a secondary theological school, these two students were sent there. Their theological education lasted three years, with a fourth year in which they studied at home prior to the final examinations.⁹⁴

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

6. Theological Beliefs

The religion of the Methodist in Yugoslavia is experience centered, the basic necessities for salvation being considered to be rebirth, and the continuous fight against sin so as to preserve purity of the life in grace.⁹⁵ It is held that it is not very important what one believes, as long as he

⁹⁴Martin Hovan to Paul Mojzes, Zrenjanin, Yugoslavia, January 3, 1964 and Mihailo Olejar to Paul Mojzes, Novi Vrbas, Yugoslavia, [December 1963].

⁹⁵"Bog ima odgovor za tebe", in *Put Života*, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, Vol. II. No. 5 (February 2, 1964), p. 1.

is motivated to live a Christian life by repentance of sins and by full acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior. The central message of the Methodists is the love of God expressed through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; unless one has the secure knowledge that this act was done by Christ for the individual personally, he or she cannot be saved, no matter what she or he may believe, or to what church she or he may belong.⁹⁶

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

The basic beliefs of the Methodists are unsystematically presented in the two periodicals, *Put Života* and *Crkvene Vesti*, both of which have appeared on a more regular basis since 1963. In their pages the emphasis is on the need to be saved through belief in the work of Christ on the cross, the love and faithfulness of Christians, scorn of human wisdom and the glorification of faith as opposed to reason, piety and the need for visible fruits of faith such as bringing new adherents

⁹⁶"Omotni papir" in *Put Života*, Vol. I, (December 15, 1963) No. 38, pp. 1-2.

to the churches, and the like. The special emphases on the second coming and life after death result from the long existence in a hostile society where very little recompense could be expected for good deeds. Their eschatological beliefs and social concern are not quite reconciled but not mutually contradictory. They live in the hope of an impending second coming of Christ, yet their time of waiting is filled with good deeds toward others, which are the result of their rebirth.

The distrust in theological speculation can be traced to the lack of such theological training. The strong belief in the infallibility of the Bible causes the nonexistence of any but very conservative theology. Modernism, liberalism, and neo-orthodoxy are perhaps known to exist but none of the pastors understood such theological trends, while the members have never heard that there is any other Protestant theology than their own. Such is the conservative theology which all the churches in Yugoslavia preach, with a few technical variations as to the type of baptism, church organization, and the like. Moreover they feel the need to defend themselves from materialistic and atheist philosophy by means of something completely authoritative. If the Bible were not considered absolutely and exclusively authoritative, and above recourse to reason, the whole foundation of faith would be shaken.

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

this explanation of the grounds of their theological convictions is incomplete, as is the attempt to describe and explain the whole development of the churches under consideration.

The Methodist Church in Yugoslavia continued its proclamation of the Gospel and there were some encouraging signs that some difficulties were being successfully surmounted. A number of congregations, especially in Macedonia, have steadily increased, as did the total membership, if only by 20 or 30 members annually. A number of younger men have dedicated themselves to church work which is considered a welcome addition. As the exercise of religious convictions has not been seriously challenged by the government in the recent years, a fairly optimistic atmosphere prevailed among the leadership of the church. To them this improvement of conditions was evidence that God protects and guides his church continually, in good and in evil times. In the middle of the 1960s, there was some evidence of the further liberalization of the regime which would definitely broaden the religious freedoms. And there were no signs that the country is doomed to disintegrate by the beginning of the 1990s so that Methodists of Macedonia and Vojvodina no longer live in the same country but continue to maintain friendly relationships.