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EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA AFTER THE WWII (1947-2017)

By Jovan Jonovski

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Abstract

The first Evangelical Protestant church in the territory of the present-day Republic of Macedonia was established in Bitola (Monastir) in 1873, which became the Methodist Church in 1922. The second one is the Baptist Church established in 1928 in Skopje. After WWII, both Churches (denominations) faced difficulties from the socialist government, and the activities of the Church became restricted to the church building. The general situation changed at the end of the 1980s when, in 1987, a new wave arrived with the beginning of activities with two other churches: Christ's Pentecostal (later Evangelical) Church and the Congregational Church. In the next 30 years, a total of ten Evangelical Protestant denominations with many home church groups and mission stations were established. This almost doubled their initial membership of a little more than 7,000 members representing 0.35 percent of the total population.

The legal position of the churches and believers are defined by the laws from 1953, 1977, 1997, and 2007, the last giving wide freedom for registering churches, religious communities or religious groups, as well as the freedom for different kinds of activities.

Key words: Protestantism in Macedonia, Christianity, Evangelical churches.

Introduction

Christianity has been present in Macedonia since the time of the Apostle Paul and has had a strong influence in the first seven centuries. It was juggled between the Patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople, then ended up with the Eastern Church. With the Slavic invasion, new missionary work was needed. The work of St. Cyril and St. Methodius and their disciples resulted in the spreading of Eastern Christianity in many Slavic areas, further resulting with Bible translations in the Old Slavonic language in the tenth century. However,

during the course of history with many migrations, followed by wars and devastation, this changed. During the period of the Ottoman Empire (14th-beginning of 20th centuries) with Islam as the official religion, the knowledge of the Bible as a base for true spirituality was very limited. The great numbers of priests were hardly literate, which contributed to the highly superficial folkloric form of ethno-Orthodoxy, full of superstitions. The Macedonian national Awakening happened in the second half of the 19th century with the Orthodox believers torn between Greek Patriarchate (using Greek language in worship services) and Bulgarian Exarchate (using Church Slavic and later Bulgarian) and the beginnings of the struggle for its own national church.¹

The modern Evangelical mission in Macedonia started with the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society (1826), and the Mission to European Turkey was started by the American Board for Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) from 1850 to 1912, subsequently renamed as the Balkan Mission. Mostly it consisted of missionaries from the Congregational Church. After establishing a center in Samokov—modern Bulgaria—where a theological school was formed, its students became engaged in missions in Bulgaria and Macedonia. The ABCFM started mission stations and churches called Evangelical, but they were Congregational in nature and affiliation. In Macedonia, the first one was established in Bansko in 1867, then another was established in Bitola (Monastir) in 1873 and in another nine cities and 12 villages. There were also many small groups of believers scattered across the entirety of Macedonia. The diplomatic status of the American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire generally helped the rather positive relation with the State.

¹ During national awakening, the Ohrid Archbishopric (1018-1767) was perceived as national Macedonian Orthodox Church that needed to be reestablished for which a thomos from the Patriarch in Constantinople as well as of the Ottoman Sultan was needed. Reestablishing of the Ohrid Archbishopric as national Orthodox Church was amongst first priorities. This did not happen and in 1870 Macedonian Orthodox Christians were split between Patriarchate of Constantinople and Bulgarian Exarchate, which later became the Greek and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches. Union with the Roman Catholic Church was seen as another option, and the first Union of Kukush was signed in 1859.

After the Balkan Wars (1912-13), Macedonia was divided between Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The movement of people and ideas across newly established borders was very difficult, which made missionary work very hard. The territory of the modern-day Republic of Macedonia became a part of the Kingdom of Serbia (1912), then the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenes (1918), and later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Due to huge difficulties to operate in the new postwar condition, the Congregational mission handed its work in Macedonia, with 10 churches and 220 members, to the Methodist mission in 1922. Therefore, the Evangelical (Congregational) Church ceased after half a century of existence and became the Methodist Church.²

The Methodist Church was not legally recognized in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and great pressure had been placed upon it, finally leading to a ban in 1925. The transition of Evangelical (Congregational) churches into Methodism only appeared to solve the problem of managing the mission. However, it failed to solve the problems of the local churches and scattered believers. Four preachers had been unable to serve nine churches, and many groups of believers scattered over a large geographic area. In order to survive with their new Evangelical Protestant identity, two groups of Macedonian believers became Baptists in Skopje (1928) and Radovich (1930), more as a *modus vivendi* than as a result of Baptist missionary effort.³

Methodist and Baptist churches went through a period of hardship in the interwar period as the Radovich Methodist church burned down in 1929, after several failed attempts of assassination on its pastor, Vladimir Daskalov. A few years later, the legal work of the Methodist Church continued. Baptists and Methodists in Yugoslavia had their centers in Novi

² cf, Paul Benjamin Mojzes, *A History of Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia*, Dissertation, Boston University, 1965.

³ Jovan Jonovski, "Baptists in Macedonia: From the Beginning to the Dawn of Regeneration 1970," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: 2011, Vol. 31: Iss. 2, Article 4. 24.

Sad where most of their members were German. They were mainly located in Voivodina, which until 1918, was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

During WWII, the territory of the modern-day Republic of Macedonia was divided between Albania and Bulgaria, with all the churches falling in Bulgaria.⁴

Churches after World War II

After WWII, most of the Methodist and Baptist church buildings in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia⁵ (FNRJ) were nationalized as the property of the Germans.⁶ In Bitola, in 1947, a building of the Methodist Church was seized with the explanation that it was for hospital needs.⁷ The Baptist Church had only one dilapidated building in Radovich.

In the northern district,⁸ only Superintendent Georg Sebele and two deaconesses remained. The situation in the People's Republic of Macedonia⁹ was far better with the five pastors: Pane Temkov, Vladimir Daskalov, Krum Kalajliev, Kosta Karamazov and Ceko Cekov. They served the churches in Skopje, Strumica, Prilep, Murtino, Monospitovo,

⁴For more detailed information see: Јован Јоновски, *Евангелско-протестантските цркви во Македонија*, (Скопје, Изгрев, 2017) Jovan Jonovski, *Evangelical Protestant Churches in Macedonia*, (Skopje, Izgrev, 2017).

⁵ Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija.

⁶ Most Germans retreated along with the German armies, and those who remained were put in camps. The second largest number of Baptist groups were the Slovaks, who along with the Macedonian were part of the Serbian district, while the other two districts were Slovene and Croatian. Jovan Jonovski *Baptizam u Makedoniji: od početaka do osamostaljivanja makedonskog baptistickog saveza 1991*, Master thesis, Protestant Theological Faculty, Novi Sad, 2008, 48.

⁷ Државен архив на Република Македонија, *Фонд Комисија за односи со верските заедници*, 1070. Извештај од Сојузно советување на Комисијата за верски прашања, 8.12.1955 - State Archives of the Republic of the Republic of Macedonia, *Fund: Commissions for Relations with the Religious Communities*, 1070. (Further DARM 1070) Report from the Federal Consultations of the Commission for Religious Affairs, 8.12.1955.

⁸ The Methodist Church in Yugoslavia before the Second World War was divided into two districts north, which included all churches, except those in Macedonia, which belonged to the southern district.

⁹ Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of 6 Peoples Republics: Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina and Slovenia.

Kolešino, Radoviš and Rakliš, and sometimes also Bitola, Priština and Kosovska Mitrovica.¹⁰ By authorities' decisions, their trips were often restricted.¹¹

The State wanted the headquarters of all the denominations to be in Yugoslavia, in order to prevent the connection of Evangelical Protestant churches from abroad. In 1947, at the request of Yugoslavia, there was a decision of the World Council of Churches to unite all Protestants in the FNRJ.¹² The Bishop responsible for the Methodist church in Yugoslavia was based in Zurich, although it was called the Geneva Central Conference. The Yugoslav government wanting an independent Methodist Church within the FNRJ, often did not approve visas, so the visits of the Bishop in charge were rare. However, the transfer of funds was not obstructed, which enabled the work of the Methodist Church.¹³ In 1945, the State Commission for Religious Affairs was formed as a body responsible for communication between the Council of Ministers (Government) and the churches.¹⁴

The Baptist Church in Radovich, in 1948, counted 32 members.¹⁵ The congregation gathered in an old dilapidated church building, without a preacher. During the 1950s, women were occasionally serving: Hilda Lechotski and Maria Andricki from Novi Sad, as well as Zora Vuchkova, preacher of the Methodist Church in Raklish.¹⁶ The church in Skopje had several members gathering in the house of Ivan Rusjakov.

The work of the church was under pressure from the authorities, especially in the postwar period. Once the Superintendent Sebele and the church sister Paula Mojzes visited the churches in the People's Republic of Macedonia, they were ordered to leave within a few

¹⁰ Pristina and Kosovska Mitrovica are cities in the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, part of Socialist Republic of Serbia..

¹¹ Mojzes, *"A History of Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia,"* 570.

¹² (DARM 1070) Извештај од Сојузно советување. Report of Federal Counseling 5.10.1954.

¹³ Mojzes, *A History ...*, 577.

¹⁴ Службен лист на ДФРЈ, Official Gazette of DFRJ, 62/45

¹⁵ Membership in the Baptist Church is formal and counts only faithful baptized as adults who have submitted a written application for membership. This means that the worship service always has more visitors than the number of members who may be regular and active, but without the status of members which are considered as a sign of full devotion.

¹⁶ Interview Jana Miroslavljev, Novi Sad, April 12, 2009.

hours. In the summer of 1950, two pastors were arrested, and one of them, Ceko Cekov, was sentenced to four years of hard forced labor. The accusations were mostly on a non-religious basis in order to not disturb the image of the declared religious freedom.¹⁷

During the 1950s, the relations of the state with the Evangelical Protestant churches were relaxing through the work of the Commission for Religious Affairs.¹⁸ The Federal Commission for Religious Affairs (the Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities) insisted on the formation of associations for priests, in which membership was encouraged, and they were to be part of the Socialist Union of the Working People¹⁹ (SSRN). However, the members of the SSRN were more likely to get managerial positions in the churches.²⁰

In 1953, a Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities was enacted,²¹ which provided prohibition of force against someone to become or to prevent one from becoming a believer of a Church. A baptism required the permission of one parent, and religious instruction from both parents. The most difficult provision was ban on religious gatherings in private homes. In many towns and villages, the congregations were too poor to afford a church facility, and they were gathering in homes, making their work illegal. This includes the Skopje Baptist Church that was gathering in the home of preacher Ivan Rusjakov, who therefore received a prison sentence.²²

¹⁷ Mojzes, *A History ...*, 577.

¹⁸ For the first time as a service established for religious affairs, it appears in the period from 1944 to 1945 as the Religious Authority. From 1945 to 1951 this body was located within the then Secretariat of Internal Affairs, Organized as a state (Federal) and land (Republic) Committee for Religious Affairs. Since 1951 it exist as an independent state office, until 1962 year with the title Commission for Religious Affairs, and from 1963 to 1976, as Republic's Commission for Religious Affairs, from 1977 to 2000, as a Republic Commission for Relations with Religious Communities (KOVZ), and from 2000 onwards, as the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups. <http://kovz.gov.mk/?ItemID=1906BEA071923A40B2ECFB5752517506> , (Retrieved 6.4. 2017).

¹⁹ Sojuz na socijalistichkiot raboten narod.

²⁰ Tomislav Branković, "Protestantske verske zajednice u Socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji", *Politikologija religije*. Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd. Godina 1 broj 1, 2007. 189-203.

²¹ Службен Весник на ФНРЈ, Official Gazette of FNRJ, 22/1953. 209.

²² (DARM 1070) Извештај од Сојузното советување, Federal Counseling Report 8.12.1955.

The activities of the State were aimed at attracting young people by forming youth organizations which organized various sports and various cultural and entertainment events in order to remove the youth from the church (religious life and practice) and catechism.²³ In 1954, The Methodist Church in Yugoslavia numbered 3,000 believers and had six preachers, while Baptists had 3,000 believers with 11 preachers.²⁴

The work of the Methodist Church was organized through Quarterly Conferences that were not always maintained, especially in smaller churches. Nevertheless, the Annual Conferences were held with great attendance. At the annual missionary conferences, representatives from the two districts were gathered, which, as a rule, should have been attended by the bishop from Geneva, which rarely happened. In 1946, Bishop Paul Garber chaired the conference, as well as Bishop Arthur Moore in 1953 and Arthur Sigg in 1957, when he appointed Krum Kalajliev as the first Macedonian Superintendent.²⁵

Superintendent Kalajliev was often summoned for investigation in the Federal Commission for Relations with Religious Communities in order to give a report on the work. The work of these churches and preachers was followed by the State Security Administration²⁶ (UDBA).²⁷ After each trip abroad, UDBA demanded all preachers to report, especially on the diaspora's hostile activities. The Commission was dissatisfied with the reports in this section, believing that Kalajliev hid this information.²⁸

Besides these, they also encountered other types of problems in their work. In 1955, the Methodist church in Murtino received permission to build a new church building. When the old one was demolished, and materials were gathered for the construction of a new church,

²³ (DARM 1070), Извештај од Сојузно советување на комисијата за верски прашања, Report from the Federal Counseling Committee on Religious Affairs, 11.10.1954.

²⁴ (DARM 1070) Извештај од Сојузно советување, Report from the Federal Counseling 5.10.1954.

²⁵ Paul Mojzes, "The Rev. Mojzes Paula: Methodism's First Female Superintendent", *Journal of the Historical Society of the EPA Conference*, 2004, 37.

²⁶ Udruženje za Državnu Bezbednost.

²⁷ Mojzes, *A History ...*, 597.

²⁸ (DARM 1070) Извештај од Сојузно советување, Federal Counseling Report No. 7, December, 1960.

the building permit was revoked. Six of the leaders were jailed for a month, and all the materials and finances were confiscated. The church was not built until many years later. It was similar with Methodist church in Strumica.²⁹ This was a regular practice of the authorities. In 1956, there were seven Methodist churches in Macedonia.³⁰

However, the hardest hit was the mysterious death of pastor Asen Palankov from Murtino. In the winter of 1958, while Palankov was at Bible school in Novi Sad, his body was found in the River Danube with the explanation from the authorities that it was a suicide. There is speculation it was done by UDBA.³¹

Since 1957, the Baptist church in Radovish started again with regular weekly worship services, which the church demanded they were to be visited by brothers from the north who would lead the services.³² Strahil Grozdanov also preached in the church occasionally. Grozdanov left for the Baptist Theological School (BTS) in Daruvar, Croatia and in Novi Sad, Serbia, 1955-1958.³³ In two years, the number of believers increased, and on June 28, 1959, Ludevrit Drobni baptized eight people.³⁴

In 1962, Methodist churches in Strumica, Koleshino, Murtino, Monospitovo, Veljusa, Radovish and Raklish had 1,930 believers with six preachers, and three in theological training. Sunday school for children, aged four to 15, had 90 children in three age groups. With the arrival of the female preacher in Raklish, she revived the woman's work.³⁵

²⁹ Mojzes, *A History* ..., 598.

³⁰ (DARM 1070) Извештај од Сојузно советување КОБЗ, Report from Federal Counseling KOVZ. 15.5.1956.

³¹ Paul Mojzes, *A History* ..., 598.

³² "Vesti iz Zemlje", *Glasnik saveza baptističkih crkava FNRJ*, broj 3, maj - juni, Rijeka, 1959, 43.

³³ Marko Grozdanov, "The Life and Legacy of Strahil Grozdanov (1920-1997) - Leader of the Macedonian Baptists in Socialist Times, 1950-1980", *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Sep 2007, Vol. 8 Issue 1, 26.

³⁴ "Vesti iz Zemlje", *Glasnik saveza baptističkih crkava FNRJ*, broj 4, juli - avgust, Rijeka, 1959, 60.

³⁵ (DARM 1070) Извештај, Републичка комисија за односи со верските заедници, Report, Republic Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, 19.4.1962.

Strahil Grozdanov moved to Skopje after returning from BTS, where on March 30, 1961, the first church facility opened.³⁶ In 1962, there were 37 Baptists in Macedonia, with one active preacher and one in theological training.³⁷ In 1963, a huge tax of 70 percent was imposed on foreign donations, the main source of finance. Domestic Missions decided that five preachers with the least support from their churches had to find work outside the Church. This group also included Strahil Grozdanov.³⁸ Despite having the new building, they could not always have regular worship services.

The preacher Kosta Karamazov was in charge of the Methodist church in Skopje, which was later destroyed in the 1963 earthquake. Methodists from around the world helped the faithful and the other victims in this event.

Ceko Cekov, the youngest of the preachers, had the greatest potential among them. However, after his time and torture in prison, it took a whole year for him to recuperate in order to serve in the churches in Strumica and the surrounding villages.³⁹

In March 1963, the Baptist church in Radovish applied for permission to build a new church building and obtained it only in May 1968.⁴⁰ The long wait caused other problems, such as the confiscation of part of the site belonging to the church.⁴¹ The same year the number of believers became 21.⁴² In September 1970, Marian Hlastan from Slovenia, after the completion of the BTS in Novi Sad, was appointed as preacher in Radovish and became

³⁶ Strahil Grozdanov, "Glas iz Makedonije", *Glasnik Baptističkih Crkava FNR Jugoslavije*, 1961, 46.

³⁷ (DARM 1070) Извештај од Сојузното советување, Report from the Federal Counseling, 19.4.1962.

³⁸ The first conference of Domestic Mision was held in Novi Sad on 25.10.1964, when it was decided to emphasize the self-financing, which in practice only two churches could achieve. Ruben Knežević, *Pregled povijesti baptizma na hrvatskom prostoru, Priručnik za interaktivnu poduku u vjeri*, Savez Baptističkih crkava u Republici Hrvatskoj-Baptistički institute, Zagreb 2001, 110.

³⁹ Paul Mojzes, *A History ...*, 596.

⁴⁰ Archive of the Christian (Baptist) Church of God's Voice (Further AHCBG) Letter from SBJ (Union of Baptists in Yugoslavia) to the Executive Council of SRM, 17.5.1968. no. 1203.

⁴¹ Letter from Strahil Grozdanov to Ivan Vlasic, Secretary of the SBJ, November 1, 1968. AHCBG no. 1801.

⁴² Minutes for Membership. 1968 year. AHCBG no. 501.

responsible for the entire Socialist Republic of Macedonia.⁴³ With his work, the number of believers in 1972 rose to 40 members,⁴⁴ and in 1973, to 48 members.⁴⁵

The financing of Baptist preachers was through the Domestic Mission (DM) of the Union of Baptist Churches in Yugoslavia⁴⁶ (SBCJ).⁴⁷ Half of the financing was given by the SBCJ, while the other half of the financing should have been given by the local church in which they served. The community in Radovish constantly suffered financial problems and provided little for its preacher.⁴⁸ In order to care for his family, Hlastan was forced to leave the service in January 1974, which resulted in the ordaining of Georgi Bakov as a deacon.⁴⁹

According to the Methodist principle, the preachers rotated from one place to another. In the church in Skopje, after Pane Temkov, the preacher had become Kosta Karamazov since 1975. He had previously been the preacher in Murtino and Monospitovo. He was replaced in 1980 by Ceko Cekov, who previously preached in Strumica. From 1984, the preacher was Mihail Cekov, and later in 1986, he was replaced by Kitan Petreski who was the preacher in Prilep previously.⁵⁰

After Karamazov's departure from Murtino, Asen Palankov preached there, followed by Zora Vuchkova who preached for one year and switched places with Kiro Buhov, who preached in Radovish and Raklish. Nikola Arnaudov preached in Strumica, while Nada Shamanova preached in Koleshino, and in the late 80s was replaced by Kitan Petreski in

⁴³ Decision for Appointment, Domestic Mission, 23.9.1970. AHCBG no. 225.

⁴⁴ Statistics for membership 1972. AHCBG no. 503.

⁴⁵ Statistics for membership 1973. AHCBG no. 504.

⁴⁶ Savez Baptistickih crkava Jugoslavije.

⁴⁷ The domestic mission (DM) of SBCJ was formed on 05.12.1961 with aim to coordinate of mission activities of SBCJ and for support and assistance of the preachers and other mission workers. The first secretary was Franjo Klem. DM is financed by gifts of individuals, from membership fees from the local churches and from donations from abroad.

⁴⁸ Report by Ivan Vlasic to Franjo Klem, August 26, 1972. AHCBG no. 209.

⁴⁹ Letter from Marian Hlastan to the SBJ, December 13, 1973. AHCBG no. 1920.

⁵⁰ Interview with Vase Azmanov, April 9, 2013.

Prilep. Boris Donchev preached in Koleshino, then Murtino, and Bozhin Kostadinov preached in Bitola after Kalajliev.⁵¹

Methodist churches in Macedonia were deeply committed to their work, but they were poorly organized. Due to poverty, the financial participation of the congregation was very small. The most active church was in Koleshino, which had youth groups and a Sunday school.

To a large extent, the work was based on the service of women. Sunday schools, despite the two trainings for teachers, were very poorly organized. The young did not have any special programs to attract them, so there was only the hope that the constant prayer and evangelization would keep them in church. The Church did not care about the problems of young people and had very rigid attitudes towards dancing, make-up, clothes, going to the movies and to dances, and against all forms of "worldly entertainment." The Church's message about the impending end of times was also not very appealing to young people.⁵²

The Methodist and Baptist Churches exchanged preachers, and many of the Methodist pastors were educated at BTS.⁵³ There were also several mixed marriages.

Methodist church sisters and lay preachers did not have a formal theological education,⁵⁴ and their sermons were either prepared from the Bible and the songbook, or from an accessible copy of daily devotion literature. In order to improve this situation, Georg Sebele and Paula Mojzes organized a two-month basic theological course, which was held in the winter months as most members were farmers. The first course, in 1954 in Novi Sad, was held by two pastors from the Reformed church, an Orthodox priest, and a Baptist pastor. The

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Paul Mojzes, *A History ...* , 604.

⁵³ However, occasionally they saw a dose of rivalry.

⁵⁴ Most were only with elementary 4 years, later 8 years, who did not speak foreign languages. Theological literature in English and German was of no use.

course was attended by 15 men and nine women.⁵⁵ Kiro Buhov, Georgi Milchev, Asen Palankov, and the church sisters Vera Azmanova and Zora Vuchkova attended this course.⁵⁶

This course was not considered sufficient for ordination, so Krum Ivanov, Boris Donchev and Bozhin Kostadinov continued at BTS.⁵⁷ Kitan Petreski was enrolled in 1964,⁵⁸ and towards the end of the 1960s, the church had become much better. At that time, the preachers were Kosta Karamazov, Krum Kalajliev, Ceko Cekov, Gorgi Milchev, and Zora Vuchkova.⁵⁹

The Baptist church in Skopje again received permission to gather in Strahil Grozdanov's home in 1969, for which a room was adapted and fully dedicated, and he was again appointed as a legitimate preacher working voluntarily without a salary. The church also came to life through the work of the sons of Strahil, Ivan and Samoil, and the first students who were converted.

In 1970, the Methodist Church in Skopje was built, where Mihail Cekov was preacher. Kitan Petreski was a preacher in his native Prilep and then preached in Skopje, and the church in Bitola was built in 1979 where Bozhin Kostadinov and Kosta Rabrovaliev preached. In Prilep, the preacher was Nada Shamanova, and Zora Vuchkova in Raklish and Radovish, and Pavle Cekov in Koleshino.⁶⁰

From 1978 to 1988, Boris Trajkovski⁶¹ was the chairman of the Commission for Children and Youth Work at the Methodist Church. In 1989, he was elected a member of the

⁵⁵ Paul Mojzes, *A History ...*, 609.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 610.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 611.

⁵⁸ *Letter from* George Conklin to Linda Bloom, 18 Apr 1996.

⁵⁹ Историја на евангелско-методистичката црква, 25.

⁶⁰ Interview with Aco Mitev, May 8, 2013.

⁶¹ Boris Trajkovski was born on June 25, 1956 in Strumica. In 1980 he graduated from the Faculty of Law in Skopje, after which he specialized in business and labor law. In 1997, he was appointed Head of the Cabinet of the Mayor of the Municipality of Kisela Voda, and in 1998 he was elected Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia. In his party, VMRO-DPMNE, he was chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee and the main political advisor for foreign policy of the former party president Ljubcho Georgievski. Trajkovski for 12 years was the president of the youth of the United Methodist Church in the former Yugoslavia. He was also a member of the Presidency of the non-governmental organization Pan European Movement of the Republic of

Church Council of the Methodist Church of Yugoslavia and was a lay preacher who preached occasionally.

Chedo Ralevic from Pech, Serbia, on completion of studies at BTS in 1975, became preacher of the Baptist church in Radovich.⁶² He preached in the surrounding villages where he established small groups consisting of members who were unhappy with the status of Methodism in their communities and who showed an interest in the "baptism of faithful," which for the common believer was the main difference between the Methodist and the Baptist theology. Although many people came to church services, they formally remained members of their "old" church. Our assumption is that, although they accepted the new way of worship and liked the more lively way of preaching, they did not go to the end to be "baptized again," which, according to their perceptions, would mean that until that moment, they were not true Christians.

With systematic work and enthusiasm, the Baptist Church began to grow again. The work was expanding in the villages of Murtino and Koleshino, and several families were converted in Bansko. They began a church there, and it is also where Sande Kotev enrolled at BTS in 1976.⁶³ Meanwhile, Chedo's health had worsened and the church stagnated. In October 1980, he left for Nish, Serbia where he was appointed as a preacher.

The Skopje Baptist church, was led by Strahil Grozdanov with two services on Sunday and Wednesday.⁶⁴ During 1979, the church grew to 13 members.⁶⁵ In the following years, many young people gathered and a youth group was formed by Ivan Grozdanov, who began

Macedonia. He has also participated in numerous international conferences with topics on conflict resolution, religious tolerance and religious freedom.

On December 15, 1999, he was inaugurated as the second president of Macedonia. President Trajkovski played a key role in signing the Framework Agreement in 2001, which put an end to the armed conflict in Macedonia. Killed on February 26, 2004 in a plane crash near Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. <http://mk.voanews.com/a/a-42-a-2004-02-26-2-1-86609807/449552.html>. (checked on 3.4.2017).

⁶² Report to the Secretary of the SBCJ 23.3.1976. AHCBG no. 1318.

⁶³ Letter from the BC Radovich to the SBCJ 15.07.1976. AHCBG no. 1119.

⁶⁴ Interview with Bore Blazhevski, Skopje, June 18, 2008.

⁶⁵ Statistics of membership, 1979. AHCBG no. 612.

to gradually take over the preaching duties. The youth group had as many as 19 visitors.⁶⁶ Friday was designated for lectures on contemporary and everyday topics, which was also led by Ivan Grozdanov. Samuel Grozdanov also preached, along with the frequent guest preachers Simo and Chedo Ralevic, and Dragisha Armush, who later became a preacher in Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia. Bore and Zaharula (Rule) Blazhevski were sent to two-year studies at BTS in Novi Sad in 1983 when the church had 20 members.⁶⁷ The Baptist church was also visited by people of the Methodist church, most of them young and dissatisfied with the conservative understandings, practice and rigidity of their church hierarchy.

The Baptist church in Radovich during 1983 had 24 members (four from the congregations in Bansko and four in Murtino). In 1984, the congregations in Bansko counted seven, Murtino six and Koleshino four members.⁶⁸ In Radovich, Kosta Grozdanov was appointed as a responsible person,⁶⁹ and in January 1985, Branko Trajkovski returned from Australia, who completed theology at the London Theological Seminar, was appointed as the preacher in Radovich.⁷⁰

In 1985, Ivan Grozdanov and Panche Panov from Murtino were ordained as deacons, and⁷¹ Bore and Rule Blazhevski began a full-time preaching and mission service. In the following year of 1986, the church continued to grow and Samoill Grozdanov was appointed as the acting pastor, who after his theological studies in the United States became a full-time pastor.⁷²

Sande Kotev preached in Murtino until the ordination of Panche Panov as a deacon in Murtino, where regular worship services started in his house on September 3, 1986. Branko

⁶⁶ Minutes, Youth Council of the SBCJ, September 13, 1980, AHCBG no. 1323.

⁶⁷ Report, 1.4.1984. AHCBG no. 2520.

⁶⁸ Report, 12.5.1984. AHCBG no. 2518.

⁶⁹ Directory for 1985. AHCBG no. 2716.

⁷⁰ Branko Trajkovski, interview, June 9, 2008.

⁷¹ Report, October 1, 1985. AHCBG no. 2432.

⁷² Invitation to the members of HBC Radosna vest, October 12, 1986. AHCBG no. A1.

Trajkovski also preached there.⁷³ Panche Panov was sentenced to 30 days in prison because, contrary to the law, he held a religious rite in his house.⁷⁴ The congregation continued to gather after Panov's imprisonment, and on March 29, 1987, police raided the gathering and found 17 people, including four children.⁷⁵ The only way to form a legal gathering was to have possession of a "legal" religious building, and therefore, one room was built to legalize the church in Murtino. Evangelization was held in Radovish and Murtino, but not outside the church building, which was forbidden. Sande Kotev served full-time in Bansko.⁷⁶

A local community that gathered in Ohrid and the surrounding areas in the 1930s, connected with Christ's Spiritual Church with a center in Vinkovci, Croatia, had also practiced washing of feet at Lord's Supper. In 1964, the community in Ohrid was declared as a missionary field of the church in Vinkovci. In 1968, the name changed to Church of God in SFRJ. The church in Ohrid was led by the pastor Vasil Gavrilovski, and the main elder was Angele Ginoski.⁷⁷ They rotated in these two positions where the pastor was responsible for the spiritual guidance, and the chief elder was responsible for organizational and administrative leadership. The church gathered in the house of a woman who emigrated to the United States. The local churches of the Church of God were led by deacons, recognized preachers, and an ordained preacher who served unpaid, with a profession outside of the church, rather than traveling preachers who received compensation for it. The training of preachers takes place through seminars.⁷⁸

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⁷³ Letter from David Ogrizovic to Branko Trajkovski and Pance Panov, February 4, 1986. AHCBG no. 2302.

⁷⁴ The municipality of Strumica and the local community of the village of Murtino were duly notified, but the court did not consider the built-up part of the house as a religious building for that purpose, but regarded it as a summer kitchen. (Application to the Municipality of Strumica, 4.2.1986 AHCBG No. 2415.) Panche received a complaint from the Ministry of Interior on 13.5.1986. and the court in Strumica on February 15, 1987 sentenced him to 30 days in prison. Decision of the Basic Court Strumica 15.02.1987. AHCBG no. A3.

⁷⁵ Report of the Ministry of Interior, April 6, 1987. AHCBG no. 2417

⁷⁶ Report 27.1.1989. AHCBG no. 2307.

⁷⁷ Sons of the first converts from Ohrid in Uruguay.

⁷⁸ Interview with Pavle Ginoski, Ohrid 31. 3. 2013.

The basis of the beliefs and practices of Methodism are given in the Catechism, which was first published in Macedonian in August 1968.⁷⁹ It contains the foundations of faith, given as questions and answers, with additional biblical texts.⁸⁰

The rules for "Church Discipline" stipulate that those who want to become members of the Methodist Church should fulfill their faith, unite with other members of the church community and undertake the following obligations: to recognize the leadership of Jesus Christ and to submit to Him, to live the Christian faith according to Scripture and to testify about it, to lead a regular life and to be faithful to Christ's church, to remain faithful to the Evangelical-Methodist Church and to support it with prayers, work, and voluntary gifts in the church.⁸¹

The Baptist beliefs and practices are given in the "Internal Statute with the Creed."⁸² Those are given as theological concepts: Bible, God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Salvation, Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Marriage, Eternal life and Salvation, the Day for Worship, and State authority. After each item a list of applicable Bible verses is given.

⁷⁹ Теофил Шпери, *Катехизам*, Секретаријат на Методистичката Црква во СФРЈ. Нови Сад. Одговорен за текстот Суперинтендент Крум Калајлиев, Размножено на гештетнерот на М. Црква во Зрењанин, 1968. Teofil Spire, *Catechism*, Secretariat of the Methodist Church in SFRY. Novi Sad. Responsible for the text Superintendent Krum Kalayliev, Reproduced on the Geshtetnor of M. Church in Zrenjanin, 1968.

⁸⁰ It consists of 11 parts: 1. *The revelation of God*, where the attributes and characteristics of God are given; 2. *God, our Creator and Lord*, speaks of God and His attitude toward man; 3. *Sin and its consequences* speak of sin, death, and God's judgment; 4. *The Savior and His advocacy for us*, explains the life of Jesus Christ; 5. *The Word of God and the Holy Spirit* gives a description of the Bible and the action of the Holy Spirit; 6. *Receiving and experiencing salvation*, writing about repentance, belief and re-birth; 7. *Obedience to God's commandments*, speaking of what God expects of us and of sanctification; 8. *Prayer* writes about prayer and prayers; 9. *The Christian Church*, the role of the church and the duties of the faithful to the church; 10. *Special means of mercy of the Church of Christ*, explains church sacraments, preaching the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper; 11. *The Christian hope for the future*, for death and Resurrection. Теофил Шпери, *Катехизам, на Евангелско-методистичката црква во Македонија*, Евангелско-Методистичката Црква Македонија. Струмица. 1997. Theophilus Speer, *Catechism, the Evangelical - Methodist Church in Macedonia*, United Methodist Church Macedonia, Strumica. 1997. Теофил Шпери, *Катехизам, на Евангелско-методистичката црква во Македонија*, Евангелско-Методистичката Црква Македонија. Струмица. 1997.

⁸¹ Ружица Цацаноска, *Протестантизмот во Република Македонија*, Дисертација, УКИМ, Скопје. Ruzica Sacanoska, *Protestantism in the Republic of Macedonia*, Dissertation, UKIM, Skopje, 2000. 163.

⁸² Translated in Macedonian from 1987 Statute of the Union of the Baptists of Yugoslavia.

The basic rule of Protestantism, *Sola Scriptura* (Only the Scripture), which involves reading the Holy Scriptures in the mother tongue, was a problem for the translation of the entire Bible into Macedonian. It was published only in 1990 among the latest translations in one of the European languages.. The first translation of the New Testament in the modern Macedonian language appeared in 1967, translated by Archbishop Gavril (Gorgi Miloshev). The revised edition was published in 1975. The Old Testament, which was mostly translated by the same translator, was published in 1990 by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).⁸³

The long waiting of the Bible (Old and New Testament) in Macedonian, prompted the Macedonian Evangelical Protestant Christians to seek another translation. In 1983, Kitan Petreski sent a letter to the British and Foreign Bible Society about the possibility of issuing another translation of the Bible.⁸⁴ This was a translation by Dr. Dushan H. Konstantinov from Bitola. A redaction of the text was required, in which a poetic language with many words from Old Slavic were used. The translation was finally published in 1999 by the Lucas Foundation.⁸⁵

In the postwar period, there were very rarely any publications of Christian literature in Macedonian available. Only in the second part of the 1980s did this start to change. Much emphasis from the Baptist church in Skopje was on the publishing of a multitude of leaflets and books in standard Macedonian: "*Bozhilak*" (*Rainbow*), a periodical magazine, is published three or four times a year, the first issue came out in 1986. Other publications consisted of the first spiritual songbook with notes in the Macedonian language "Hristijanski

⁸³ Ацо Гиревски, *Македонскиот превод на Библијата*, Православен богословски факултет „Свети Климент Охридски“, Скопје, Асо Girevski, *Macedonian translation of the Bible*, Orthodox Theological Faculty "St. Clement of Ohrid", Skopje, 2004. 106.

⁸⁴ Ibid 154.

⁸⁵ Konstantinov, for many years, did not allow the necessary editorial work to be performed to the text in a modern standard language. Ace Mitev was the editor. Konstantinov translation to the new Testament will undergo a serious revision, and will be published as a "Standard Translation" in many editions so far, published by Every Home for Christ.

Pesni” (*Christian Songs*) (1987), a collection of 365 texts for daily devotion "Utrinska Rosa" (*Morning Dew*) (1987), and a collection of spiritual teachings and wisdom "Duhovni Biseri" (*Spiritual Pearls*) (1989).⁸⁶ The publishing was realized mostly in cooperation with the publishing activity of BTS—"Dobra Vest" from Novi Sad.

The New Wave

In the period prior to the second half of the 1980s, there were two main denominations, Methodists and Baptists, mainly in the southeastern part of the country and in Skopje. There was another small church, Church of God, in Ohrid, in the other part of the country. Evangelical Protestant churches in Macedonia were traditional, and most of the members were born in the church, making the faith part of the tradition. The great pressure from the authorities did not allow revival, and most of the activities of the churches only maintained the minimum level of faith. The spread of ideas and evangelism outside of the church yard was banned, and the preachers were also controlled and intimidated by the authorities. In those circumstances, the training of church workers was at a lower level. There was also shortage of Bibles and other literature in the Macedonian language.

The situation began to change in the second half of the 1980s when general changes in society led to the weakening of the ideology and pressure of the State in the religious life of the Evangelical Protestant churches. This built on the contemporary influences and the methods of the churches of Yugoslavia, above the Danube,⁸⁷ as well as the opportunity for freer communication with churches abroad.

Many young people with traditional Evangelical Protestant backgrounds from the Strumica and Radovich regions went to study in Skopje. There they met a more relaxed

⁸⁶ Mainly from *Our Daily Bread*, Radio Bible Class.

⁸⁷ Danube River used to be the border between Western Europe and Ottoman Empire, and is the symbolic border European and Eastern culture and thinking.

environment and the opportunity to develop academically, as well as spiritually, with a greater influence of Evangelical Protestant Christianity from other parts of Yugoslavia, where a freer and more open Christian culture was cultivated. This Christian culture tried to respond to the challenges of the youths, which was not met in the traditional closeness of the Evangelical Protestant Christianity in Macedonia.

In such conditions, there have been various changes in the existing churches. The Skopje Baptist Church received and applied this modern thinking, which led to an increase in the influx of students. Meetings were held to address issues that were relevant to the youths, such as science and other issues.

On the other hand, the Methodist Church remained traditional and opposed these modern ideas and the desire for change. This led to the separation of one group, which, since 1987, gathered regularly for worship in their homes and started the Congregational Church.⁸⁸ The same year, another group started, they became Christ's Pentecostal Church (later called Evangelical Church). With this, a new period for Evangelical Protestant churches in Macedonia began with a larger influx of believers by their choice and not by tradition.

The year of 1987 was the watershed of the Evangelical Protestantism as it marked the initial beginnings of two new denominations, as well as the changing quality of the traditional denominations. That year the Baptist Church in Macedonia had four churches in Skopje, Radovish, Murtino and Bansko. For the Skopje Baptist church, which was gathering in the adapted cellar of Ivan Grozdanov's house, a house in the city center was purchased, which had been unthinkable earlier. Still, as it was not allowed to change the outer facade to look like a church, the building was intensively adapted for the next two years. The same year,

⁸⁸ Mostly from the youth of the Methodist Church who disagreed with the traditional conservative episcopal arrangement, and began to gather in homes, practicing a congregation type of organization.

acting pastor Samoill Grozdanov left for the United States for postgraduate studies in Theology, which had also been unthinkable earlier.⁸⁹

The first formal worship in the new church building at was held on May 21, 1989.⁹⁰ The church was visited by members of the group gathering in houses, from which the Congregational church would be formed, as well as of the group that would become the Pentecostal church. Samuel Grozdanov returned at the end of 1990, and he took the lead of the church.⁹¹ The first baptism was performed in a baptistery in the yard of the new church building, in June 1991, when five were baptized.⁹²

During June 1987, Aleksandar Vuletić, who was converted into Pentecostal Christianity in Germany,⁹³ saw a group of young hippies gathering on the plateau in front of the Stone Bridge and received a strong urge to join them and witness to them about Jesus Christ. After the first initial contact, a group of 15 young people gathered each evening to discuss Jesus Christ. With this newly emerged situation, he invited missionaries Dimitrie and Cveta Popadić from Temerin, who were a part of the Christ's Pentecostal Church in Yugoslavia. A few months later, independent American missionaries Jeff and Ellie Baker arrived.

In early 1988, Christ's Pentecostal Church in Yugoslavia (later renamed as the Evangelical Church) officially began its religious activity in Skopje. The same year, missionaries Budimir and Asterija Jakić went to Shtip. For decades, Budimir traveled throughout Macedonia as a colporteur. In the meantime, a house that was adapted was purchased, and officially, on April 28, 1991, the first worship service was held in Shtip.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Contract of the SBCJ with Samoill Grozdanov on January 24, 1987. AHCBG no. 2424.

⁹⁰ The ceremony was also attended by the Secretary of the SBCJ, Shime Orcic and the treasurer Vinko Peterlin. Brochure 20 years from the first service in the new building, 2009. AHCBG no. AA3.

⁹¹ „Crkva u Skopju dobila svog pastora“, *Glasnik saveza baptističkih crkava u Jugoslaviji*, Sjećanj-Veljača, 1991, broj 6, Sekretarijat saveza, Novi Sad. "Church in Skopje got her pastor", *Bulletin of the Union of Baptist Churches in Yugoslavia*, January-February, 1991, number 6, Secretariat of the Union, Novi Sad.

⁹² Goran and Lence Stojanov, Marko and Ana Grozdanov and one student from Strumica.

⁹³ He was baptized in the Church of God in Ohrid Lake in the summer of 1985, as his mother was from the Church of God from Tordini, Croatia. Interview with Aleksandar Vuletić, Skopje, November 19, 2012.

⁹⁴ In September 2007, Petre Petrov was appointed as a pastor, Petre Petrov, Questionary, 26.4.2017.

The group in Skopje held Bible study in the homes of Popadić and Vuletić, who married Marija Kostadinova, a daughter of a former Methodist preacher in Bitola in 1988. The same year a group of 15 young people, was baptized on the Treska River near Skopje.⁹⁵ Aleksandar and Maria went to theology studies in Osijek, Croatia.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Dimitrije Popadić oversaw the group, which grew to 30 people. After returning from his studies in 1991, Vuletić was ordained as a pastor, while Dimitrije Popadić left for the United States for his master's degree. Christ's Pentecostal Church changed their name to the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia and is now based in the center of Skopje, on Franklin Ruzevelt str. 16. A larger group of new believers went to study at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Osijek—Mirche and Nada Andreevi, Stojan and Lenche Petrovski and Kosta Milkov.⁹⁷

In the course of 1991, the Christian Publishing House, run by Daniel Dorushak,⁹⁸ a student from Osijek,⁹⁹ started to work. The following books were published: "Who Is Jesus" by Josh McDowell, "The Happiest Men of the Earth" by Demos Shakarian, "The World on the Run" by Michael Green, and many others. A lot of books and materials for training were translated, as well as a lot of brochures and leaflets that were constantly distributed in the streets and squares.

That same year, in cooperation with the Swedish mission, the first large evangelizations in Skopje started at the city camping site in the city park. This led to a large increase in the number of visitors, which reached 100, most of whom were young and between the ages of

⁹⁵ Among them are Risto and Stojan Petrovski, Olivera Dorusak and others.

⁹⁶ The Evangelical Theological Faculty (later the High Evangelical Theological School) in Osijek, started operating in 1983, although it has its beginnings since 1972.

⁹⁷ Nade, Lenche and Kosta are from Strumica and are with Methodist background, Stojan Petrovski, interview 3.4.2013.

⁹⁸ He married one of the first baptized, Olivera, and remained in Macedonia. Later, he became a pastor in several cities in Macedonia.

⁹⁹ The Faculty of Osijek, since 1986, began educating in Macedonia through the ICI (International Correspondence Institute) program. There were many students in Macedonia who completed their first year at the faculty through it. They were based in Greece, and the materials were in Croatian. Correspondence with Pavle Kostadinov, 18.05.2017.

16 and 25. Missionary trips through other cities in Macedonia started soon, with the first group created in Kumanovo.¹⁰⁰

A group of 30 people from the Methodist Church, who regularly gathered for worship in their homes since 1987, got in touch with the Congregationalists in America through Michael Johnson in 1989. In November 1990, in the villa of Vlado Karamazov, 60 members held the founding assembly of the Evangelical Congregational Church. The assembly was attended by President of the World Association of Congregational Churches, Cliff Christensen and Secretary-General David Saunders. Since then, this church has become a part of the World Association of Evangelical Congregational Churches.¹⁰¹ The registration took place on November 20, 1990, and the name was taken in memory in an effort to restore the Congregational Church which existed until 1922, before the administrative transition in the Methodist Church.¹⁰²

After the Independence of the Republic of Macedonia

At the beginning of 1991, the Union of Baptist Churches of Yugoslavia ceased to exist, and every republic should have formed its own alliance.¹⁰³ The Board of the Christian Baptist Church "Radosna Vest" in Skopje,¹⁰⁴ decided to hold the founding assembly of the Union of Christians - Baptists in the Republic of Macedonia May 5, 1991, in Radovich.¹⁰⁵ With this, the Macedonian Baptist Union became a union of individuals, not of churches, with the

¹⁰⁰ Stojan Petrovski, interview, 3.4.2013.

¹⁰¹ Vase Azmanov, interview, 9.4.2013.

¹⁰² Religious Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia, Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups, Skopje, 2010, 109.

¹⁰³ The need for a reorganization of the SBCJ was reviewed on 9 February 1991 in Belgrade, at the extraordinary session of the Assembly of the SBCJ. It is concluded to dissolve the SBCJ and to form the Unions in the Republics, as well as a new SBCJ from the republics unions. (Yugoslavia was composed of 6 Republics) The decision was confirmed on 2.3.1991, at a session of the Executive Board of the SBCJ, in Novi Sad.

¹⁰⁴ Composed of Bore Blazevski, Strahil, Ivan and Samoil Grozdanov, Ljubomir Nikoloski and Sime Nikolovski.

¹⁰⁵ Conclusion of the Board of the CBC Radosna vest, 27.4. 1991 year. AHCBG no. A9. The Statute and the credo were adopted on 1.6.1991

members of the Skopje church "Radosna vest," the Radovish and Murtino churches, and individuals from other cities in which there are no churches.

During the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Bishop of the Methodist Church was Heinrich Boleter, and the Superintendent was Martin Hovan from Novi Sad. Due to the episcopal arrangement of the Methodist Church, the changes in the breakup of Yugoslavia and the independence of Macedonia did not lead to some major changes in the Methodist Church, apart from the division of the southern district and the appointment of another superintendent for the Republic of Macedonia.¹⁰⁶

The Church of God in the Republic of Macedonia became independent from the Church in Yugoslavia in 1992 with a church in Ohrid, in which Pavle Ginoski was a responsible person, and there was a missionary station in Veles.

The Congregational church again introduced the management of the congregational type and the church covenant and accepted the baptism of the faithful. In the swimming pool "Karposh" in Skopje, on December 18, 1994, 16 people were baptized by Pastor Nikola Nedelchev from Sofia and Dick Volton, a professor at "Logos," Evangelical Theological School in Sofia, Bulgaria. After the baptism, the church gathered in a rented space in the Novo Malo neighborhood. Vase Azmanov was appointed as the responsible person, and the spiritual committee consisted of Vlado Karamazov, Bozhin Kostadinov, Pavle Kostadinov, Kosta Karamazov, Dragan Cikalov, Stefan Mancev, Ilija Cekov and Kiro Milchev.¹⁰⁷ The preacher was Pavle Kostadinov.

In the period immediately prior to independence, the religious activity of the Evangelical Protestant churches began with modest beginnings, which would soon fit into the new times. After the collapse of socialism, which did not support religiousness, people quickly turned to new, previously unknown spiritual experiences and were quite receptive.

¹⁰⁶ Heinrich Boleter, interview, 5.5.2013.

¹⁰⁷ Vase Azmanov, interview, 9.4.2013.

Changes that occurred at the end of the 80s, allowed free evangelization in the public space and the sharing of brochures with the basic message of the Gospel, something that for many years was allowed only within the church facility. In 1991, 1992 and 1993, large evangelizations were organized with the title "Christian Europe for Christian Skopje," with participation of participants from abroad. There were good connections between the youth of the Baptist, Evangelical and Congregational church, which together informally organized numerous tracts that were distributed, street witnesses, and evangelistic celebrations with music in the parks and squares. This attracted new people.

The Evangelical Methodist Church continued to work and act in the traditional way, mostly between its members, with minimal cooperation with other Evangelical Protestant churches. So it will only be part of the processes that will follow later. Martin Hovan of Novi Sad remained superintendent until April 1993, when Kitan Petreski was appointed. He remained in that position until June 1996, when Wilhelm Nausner from Austria was appointed as the Superintendent.¹⁰⁸

Most of the Baptists in Skopje are the first generation, which means they themselves believed and accepted the evangelical Protestantism. When the second generation reached teen years, in 1992, a youth gathering started on Saturdays, named Intro Club, for teens and young people. Ivan Grozdanov led in the work, and later Goran and Lenche Stojanov, as well as a number of other members of the church. This Intro club also attracted young people from other churches that were slowly forming and did not have teenage and youth services.¹⁰⁹ This group attracted other young people who were first introduced to the Gospel.

In the Evangelical church, services are available every day, and Fridays and Saturdays are for coffee and tea and an informal gathering of young people with spiritual conversations.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rev-dr-kitan-petreski-0249b450/> (visited on 2.5.2017).

¹⁰⁹ Pastor Samoil Grozdanov at the beginning of 1992 reintroduces second service, on Wednesday. Two young people were baptized (Jovan Jonovski and Saso Spasoski) from Skopje, in the church in Radovis, 12.4.1992.

Many of the members from both churches are young. Baptisms in the Skopje Evangelical church take place on the Treska River.¹¹⁰ In the Baptist church, 11 people were baptized in 1993.¹¹¹

The period that follows is characterized by active evangelization and distribution of literature, with which the Baptist, Congregational and Evangelical churches slowly grow. Many books in the Macedonian language are published, mostly from the Baptist Church and the Christian Book Publishing House at the Evangelical Church.

In 1993, Ivan Grozdanov left for the United States and, at the beginning, services were held by young people.¹¹² Eventually old Strahil Grozdanov took the lead, then retired preacher from the United States, George McCole in February 1993 preached, and finally, from August 1994, Bore Blazhevski preached regularly. In 1995, nine people were baptized.¹¹³ Upon the return of Ivan Grozdanov, he helped Bore lead the church, and they preached alternately.¹¹⁴ The next year, four were baptized¹¹⁵ and the first modest attempts of humanitarian aid to refugees from the former Yugoslavia began.

In 1992, the first missionary Eric Palmquist came from the Evangelical Congregational Church in cooperation with the US mission, and later Philip Jackson¹¹⁶ along with many others. They increased church activities and started home groups in several neighborhoods in Skopje. In 1993, the Evangelical Congregational Church rented space in the center of Skopje on Blvd. Ilinden, and over the next three years the church grew with groups in Skopje's suburbs, Drachevo and Shuto Orizari, where the church services are in the Roma language.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ And several times in the gospel church in Pristina.

¹¹¹ Baptism is performed by Ivan Grozdanov on 13.6.1993.

¹¹² Jovan Jonovski (21), Sasho Spasovski (19) and Marko Nikoloski (17).

¹¹³ The Baptism is performed by Bore Blazevski on 2.7.1995.

¹¹⁴ AA1, AHCBG.

¹¹⁵ On 13.7.1996.

¹¹⁶ In 1995.

¹¹⁷ Juliana Velevska, interview, 27.4.2017.

After the initial period of growth in Skopje, in 1995, the first difficulty aroused which led to the separation of the Pentecostal church from the Evangelical church, and in late 1997, the Christian church of God's voice from the Baptist church.

The “Swedish Church” and missionary Tommy Naumann from Sweden, played an important role in the creation of the Christian Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Macedonia. The Pentecostal Church began with meetings in homes, and organizing various events and concerts in 1993, with more emphasized charismatics than that of the Evangelical Church. In 1995, the church started functioning officially with pastor Aleksandar Vuletić. In the Skopje Evangelical Church, Mircho Andreev became pastor in his place. The Christian Pentecostal Church started to work in Gevgelija and Gostivar in the next year, where it came to the success and joining of 40 people, but due to the great pressure from the local Orthodox priest and the local population, the services there ceased. Then they began worship services in homes in Veles.¹¹⁸

In this period, the missionary spreading of the Evangelical Church in other Macedonian cities began. The first mission station started in 1993 in Kumanovo, where Stojan Petrovski from the Evangelical Church in Skopje held worship services in private homes. In April 1994, he moved to Kumanovo, and worship services were held in his own home.¹¹⁹ In May 1997, the church in Kumanovo leased a business center in the city center.¹²⁰ Since 2004, the preacher has been Sasho Georgievski, and since 2010, the religious services have been held in a new church building.

In 1994, missionaries Philip and Lilia Brower were sent to Struga, and Venco Nakov, who finished theology in England, was sent to Kochani by the church in Shtip.¹²¹ The

¹¹⁸ Tommy Naumann, interview, 27.4.2017.

¹¹⁹ Stojan Petrovski, interview 30.3.2017.

¹²⁰ Notification to the Ministry of Interior - City Administration Kumanovo, 7.5.1997, Archive of the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia (AECRM)

¹²¹ Stojan Petrovski, interview 30.3.2017.

following year, Daniel and Ole Dorushak were sent to Probishtip¹²² where there was already a faithful family. Since 2001, they have been gathering in rented premises, and Venco Nakov has been responsible for the service in Probishtip.

That year, a group in Monospitovo held worship in the home of Toni and Desa Barbutovi, which, in 1997, joined the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia. In 2000, land was purchased on which a church building for Monospitovo was built.

In Veles, a joint mission was started by Evangelical churches from Shtip and Skopje in 1997. The church was officially established in 1999, and Goran Iliev was responsible.¹²³ Since 2009, the church was led by Dragan Manev, and since 2017 by Filip Ivanov.

In Negotino, the mission work began in 1998 where Goran Iliev moved from Skopje, and in 2000, started the official work of Evangelical church in Negotino.¹²⁴ In 2003, a church building was built.

The Church of God started a local church in Kumanovo, in 1994, with Marijan Angelovski and Vlaste Petrusevski as leaders.¹²⁵

In 1997, Kyle Kirkpatrick, a Baptist missionary from the International Mission Board came. The following year, after a series of disagreements, the decision of the Union of Baptists of Macedonia was to establish a new church community in the Skopje neighborhood of Kisela Voda. The church chose the name "God's Voice,"¹²⁶ became independent in 2000, and colloquially is known as the second Baptist church. The church led by Bore Blaževski and other elders had many of the members rotate preaching, and they grew rapidly, especially during the time of the Kosovo crisis, when they were engaged in humanitarian work. The

¹²² Olivera Dorusak, interview 31.3.2017.

¹²³ Notification to the KOVZ, 30.12.1999, AECRM.

¹²⁴ Notification to the KOVZ, 10.3.2000, AECRM.

¹²⁵ After him, the church was led by Sasha Petkovski, then again Petrusevski, Boban Kolevski and Vlasta Petrusevski again.

¹²⁶ Following the 1997 law, it must be registered with the official name "Religious group Christian church" "God's Voice", and when the register virtually loses its regulatory role, on 29.11.2003 the "Religious group" part is rejected.

same year there were 24 members, while regular attendance was 90-110 people, who flooded the church space. The church in Radovish, since 1992, was led by Dragi Georgiev from Murtino.¹²⁷ He renewed the community in Murtino, but in 1999 left Radovish, and the church then became headed by Ilija Bakov.

In 1999, the Kosovo crisis resulted in a big influx of refugees, and the Evangelical Protestant churches became involved in large-scale humanitarian aid. For that, the existing humanitarian organizations were activated, and new ones were formed: AGAPE, of the Evangelical Church, a Generous Hand of the Baptist Church, New Life¹²⁸ of Congregational Church, and the MZHP¹²⁹ at the Pentecostal Church. Commitment to humanitarian work has brought about the benefits of a large number of assisted families and individuals, not only refugees from Kosovo, but also to the domestic population. This led to large attendance in churches. The involvement in the humanitarian aid continued during the Macedonian crisis of 2001. This led to the certain increase in respect for the Evangelical Protestant churches and their role in society.¹³⁰

Involvement in this humanitarian crisis has led full resources and attention to be focused on humanitarian aid, which has moved the churches from focusing on themselves and the problems of the past in the processes of separation. Relations between churches improved and there was a first attempt to start a joint body with the Alliance of the Evangelical Protestant Churches in Macedonia, which would represent the interests of these communities in front of the State. From this period, the churches were multiplying for better missionary action. Thus, in 1999, the Christian church “Word of Hope” emerged from the

¹²⁷ Dragi Georgiev, interview 29.8.2008.

¹²⁸ Nov Zhivot (New Life) has been organized since 1995 to help refugees from the wars in Yugoslavia. Perhaps it can be considered as second humanitarian organization registered in Macedonia after the Red Cross. Pavle Kostadinov, communication with the author, 18.5.2017.

¹²⁹ Macedonian Society for Humanitarian Support.

¹³⁰ http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/pr.cfm?articleid=2235&CFID=47073693&CFTOKEN=57253126 (accessed on 05/05/2013).

Evangelical Congregational Church, which concentrated on the work in Skopje's neighborhoods Aerodrom and Madzari.

In the course of the Kosovo crisis, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Boris Trajkovski, a Methodist and a laity preacher, was responsible for the coordination of humanitarian assistance in the Republic of Macedonia which raised his popularity. In 1999, Trajkovski became the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for President of the Republic of Macedonia. In the election campaign, the main argument of the other candidates against Trajkovski was that he is a Protestant, and as such, he was to be perceived not as a native Macedonian who is unworthy of being a President. However, Trajkovski was elected as the second President of the Republic of Macedonia.

After the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement¹³¹ in the new constitution, in addition to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Islamic community and the Evangelical-Methodist Church entered into Article 19. Thus, one of the Evangelical Protestant churches became a "Constitutional Church," even though the article itself says that these five and all other religious communities are equal before the constitution and the laws.

The declared multi-confessional of Macedonia led to better relations with the Evangelical Protestant churches, the State and the Macedonian Orthodox Church. This was especially shown following the sudden accidental death of President Boris Trajkovski in February 2004. Even after his death, his character and his contribution to the peaceful solution of the military conflict and the period after him began to be respected much more. As an attempt to resolve the 2001 conflict, Trajkovski gathered the leaders of the religious communities to find a solution to the crisis, which was initiated by the World Conference on

¹³¹ Ohrid Framework Agreement ended the war conflict in 2001 between Albanian guerrilla from Kosovo and Macedonian security forces. The agreement provided for several changes to the Constitution, giving better position to the Albanian minority.

Interreligious and Inter-Civilization Dialogue. This takes place every three years with representatives from all religious communities from the country.¹³² In 2004, the Interreligious Council of representatives of the largest religious communities, i.e., those who would later be mentioned in the constitution was created.¹³³ The Evangelical Methodist Church directed its cooperation to the five "Constitutional" religious communities, though there is very little official cooperation with other Evangelical-Protestant churches, with the exception of cooperation on a personal level among believers.

The missionary understanding in the 21st century is of reaching all people with the Gospel, through the launch of more small church communities that would bring the Gospel message throughout Macedonia. Many communities were formed, some were gathering in homes, and some gathered in rented spaces. The increased missionary activity led to further multiplication of the Evangelical Protestant churches. All denominations started their own communities in other cities and villages in Macedonia. Most of them gathered in homes or rented spaces, often without official status.

The Christian Pentecostal Church, which later took the name Christian Center in the Republic of Macedonia, had three local churches with 130 believers, not counting the children, in 2004 in Skopje; then there were two local churches in Veles, where the leader was Nikola Kimov with 70 members, and communities in Struga, Gevgelija, Bogdanci, Kavadarci with 10 believers each. There were 60 believers in Strumica and its surroundings.¹³⁴

From the Christian Center in 2005 the Evangelical Protestant Church Glasnost emerged with the leaders Alpin Pop Nikolov and Aleksandar Madjarovski, which was dedicated to the

¹³² 2007 and 2010 in Ohrid, 2013 in Skopje and 2016 in Bitola, but with a significantly smaller format, where representatives of the Evangelical Protestant churches were not invited.

¹³³ This body survived practically during the MCMS project for interreligious cooperation in Macedonia, 2004-2008. <http://www.mcms.org.mk/mk/za-nas/107-megureligiska-sorabotka-vo-makedonija.html> (visited on May 12, 2017).

¹³⁴ Almanac 2004, 131.

mission among the youth in a more non-traditional way.¹³⁵ The following year, Zoran Spasovski became responsible for the Christian Center, from which the Christian community Trinitas grew in 2015 headed by Vuletić. It aimed at reaching the people in the most urbanized municipality in Skopje, Aerodrom.

The Evangelical Church continued to spread to other cities. First, in 2001, in the village of Volkovo, where Risto Petrovski and Sokrat and Lenka Apostolovski were responsible.¹³⁶

The work in Bitola started with Slave Popovski, a man from Sweden, born in Bitola, started a church in his home in June 2001. In that September, David and Brenda Aderhold and Nikola and Anet Maria Galevski joined him. After the departure of Nikola Galevski, Mark and Becky Mindek stayed for four to five years, and then Pastor Josip Pastor was appointed.

In 2002, registered work between the Roma officially began in Prilep, and in 2004, Edian Salioski was appointed as elder. From this point, the church started its mission in Bitola, and Tefik Musoski was appointed as an elder in 2006. In Marvinci, a house was rented for the Church in 2005, and Dimche Nakov from Negotino was responsible.¹³⁷ The work in Strumica started in 2006 from the Evangelical Church in Monospitovo, and in 2008, the work of the Evangelical Church in Strumica officially started. From the Evangelical Church in Negotino, a mission in Kavadarci started in 2009, where Goran Iliev was responsible.¹³⁸ A Roma community opened in 2012.

Within the Evangelical Church in Skopje, an international church also became active, and was intended for foreigners staying in Skopje, the services are in English. Also, the Evangelical Church Full Gospel from 2009,¹³⁹ the Evangelical Church Soulcraft from 2011

¹³⁵ Aleksandar Madjarovski, Interview, 1.4.2017.

¹³⁶ Notification to the KOVZ, 24.9.2001, AECRM.

¹³⁷ Notification to the KOVZ, November 18, 2005, AECRM.

¹³⁸ Notification to the KOVZ, 2.9.2009, AECRM.

¹³⁹ Notification to the KOVZ, December 15, 2009, AECRM.

with pastor Nikola Galevski,¹⁴⁰ and in 2016, Evangelical Church Saraj, a Roma church with leaders Sokrat and Lenka Apostolovski.¹⁴¹

In Gevgelija, a group that operated from 2001 as an association of citizens "Emanuel" decided to become part of the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia,¹⁴² and in 2013, they became the Evangelical Church Gevgelija with pastor Zoran Kolev.¹⁴³ In the last two years, two churches in Struga¹⁴⁴ and Ohrid¹⁴⁵ started to work.

Within the Evangelical Church, the humanitarian organization AGAPE has been registered with the task of conducting humanitarian and charitable work of the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia and spreading understanding among people based on the Bible teaching for helping the needy and other Christian practices. This includes helping helpless people, regardless of nationality, religion, race or gender. It also includes caring for the old and sick, disabled, poor, refugees, exiled, lonely, abandoned children, spiritually burdened, and all others who need spiritual or physical care. AGAPE offers appropriate aid, and it also promotes the religious education and spiritual culture through offering assistance, organizing concerts of spiritual music and the promotion of peacemaking, the opening of a public kitchen for feeding the homeless and poor, establishing orphanages, homes for elderly, opening a counseling center, visiting prisoners and offering spiritual support. AGAPE also implements development projects with a primarily wider social community benefit. It also often organizes free courses for English, computers, etc. AGAPE performed these activities most actively during the Kosovo crisis and the years thereafter.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Notification to the KOVZ, November 1, 2011, AECRM.

¹⁴¹ Notification to the KOVZ, October 6, 2016, AECRM.

¹⁴² Application for membership in the EC RM, May 29, 2011, AECRM.

¹⁴³ Notification to the KOVZ, 31.12.2013, AECRM.

¹⁴⁴ Notification to the KOZZ, 9.6.2016, AECRM.

¹⁴⁵ Notification to the KOVZ, 15.2.2017, AECRM.

¹⁴⁶ Religious Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia, Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups, Skopje, 2004, 125.

Within the Evangelical Church, other ministries are: "Royal Ranger", "Exodus Student Organization," Society for Promoting Bible Values and Parts of the Bible "Bible League" and the Association "Youth Challenge," which has its own center for the release of drug addicts, alcohol, etc.¹⁴⁷

In 2004, when the Evangelical Methodist Church entered as one of the five religious communities in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, it was organized in seven districts with 13 churches and one social center: Skopje (including Drachevo)—responsible Mihail Cekov, Strumica (Veljusa, Kochani)—Mirche Tanchev, Murtino—Slavcho Azmanov, Monospitovo—Zhivko Penev, Koleshino—Mirche Tanchev, Radovish (Rakhlish)—Zora Vuchkova and Prilep—Nada Shamnova (Bitola—Aco Mitev). In addition to regular religious services, the church actively takes care of the spiritual education of children and young people through classes held by professionally qualified persons. The church has two informative magazines. "Path of Life," a monthly magazine dealing with topics from the spiritual sphere, contains various information of the activities within the church. "Charisma" is a magazine for women, published four times a year, and deals with topics related to spiritual issues and topics that are directly related to women's needs. An annual calendar, which includes texts and interpretations from the Bible, is regularly printed. In addition to these regular informative editions, the church prints books and brochures with diverse spiritual and historical content.¹⁴⁸

The social service of the Evangelical Methodist Church was organized in "Diaconia Macedonia," which organizes various activities: camps for young people, camps for children with special needs, humanitarian aid for single mothers, for social cases, disabled persons, etc. "Miss Stone Center" was built in 2000, and started working in 2001. From the kitchen in

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 127.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 58.

“Miss Stone Center,” about 150 people received food daily.¹⁴⁹ The number of members in the Evangelical Methodist Church in Macedonia is different. According to the book on the history of Methodism, that number is 6,000.¹⁵⁰ At the 2002 census, as Evangelical Methodists, 1,303 people were enlisted,¹⁵¹ but a better estimate is about 4,000.¹⁵²

The First Baptist Church was led by Marko Grozdanov since 2006, while Ivan Grozdanov has been dedicated to literature from the early 1990s. Under his leadership in 1999, the Dynamic Translation of the New Testament was published. He issued many titles through the “Otkrovenie” (Revelation) publishing house and held classes for studying the Bible and other topics in the Aerodrom neighborhood. The Christian Church of God's Voice had 36 members and many visitors in 2007, and with the help of missionaries from IMB, missions were opened in Ohrid (2006) and Prilep (2007). In 2016, the former Methodist church from Bitola with the preacher Aco Mitev joined. On September 26, 2016, an all Baptist meeting was held in celebration of the 88th anniversary of the first Baptist baptism in Macedonia. The following year, a joint Christmas and Easter service was held.

The Church of God from Kumanovo started a church in the village of Klechovce in 2001, where Zoran Kolevski was responsible. Two groups that were formerly part of the Methodist Church in Prilep¹⁵³—where the leader was Trajche Azirov, and Kochani, with Bojan Arsov in 2002—joined the Church of God. In 2012, Trajche Azirov became head of the Church of God in the Republic of Macedonia.¹⁵⁴

The congregations of the Evangelical Congregational Church in Shuto Orizari grew up in the church “Nevi Gili” in 2001 with Usain Raman as responsible. The church in Drachevo

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ (Mihail Cekov) History ..., 25.

¹⁵¹ Address Book ..., 58.

¹⁵² Cacanaska, Ruzhica “Protestantism in Macedonia Today,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 38: Iss. 1, Article 4. (2018). Table 4. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol38/iss1/4>

¹⁵³ This church started with Roma in the 1960s with Krum Kalayliev, and by 1994 it was part of the Methodist Church.

¹⁵⁴ Trajche Azirov, interview, 10.5.2017.

had Tale Talevski responsible in 2006. There were also church communities in Sveti Nikole and the village of Peshirovo, established in 2004, in Volkovo (2007), Gorno Lisiche and Gjorce Petrov (2009), as well as in Topana in 2011. The membership of the Evangelical Congregational Church was estimated at 530 members with three pastors and 12 evangelists.¹⁵⁵

From the Evangelical Congregational Church in 2005 came the Free Evangelical church Good News with Mite Goshev, that is the gathering in the House of Humanitarian Organizations Dare Dzambaz. The church had two communities in Aerodrom and Drachevo.

From the Evangelical Church in Shtip, a group began to gather in homes in 2007 because they wanted for freedom in the church.. From that first group, the current Christian Church “Oaza” developed with Angel Pavlov as a leader, and officially registered as a religious community in 2010. The same year, religious services were held in the rented space of Radio Channel 77. The church was active in the surrounding places cities as Delchevo, Veles, Kratovo. In 2014, Zoran and Ole Ilievski started the Christian Church “Oaza” in Skopje. Great emphasis was placed on the distribution of free Christian literature in the Macedonian language. Efforts were then made to make the New Testament and Bibles available to the Evangelical Protestant churches.¹⁵⁶

Legal Position

The first law dealing with the religious life in FNRJ was the Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities of 1953.¹⁵⁷ According to the Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities¹⁵⁸ from 1977, all religious communities have the same rights. Nominally, there

¹⁵⁵ Vase Azmanov, Questionnaire, 28.4.2017.

¹⁵⁶ Angel Pavlov, communication, 11.8.2017.

¹⁵⁷ Службен весник на ФРНЈ, Official Gazette of FRNJ 22/1953.

¹⁵⁸ Службен весник на СРМ, Official Gazette of SRM 39/1977.

is no state church, but the state strongly supports the Macedonian Orthodox Church,¹⁵⁹ especially after independence.

By law, there is no registration, but only reporting of the religious communities to the Ministry of Interior without having established criteria. Religious communities have the status of private legal entities. This vague formulation is often used to prevent the various rights of the Evangelical Protestant churches. The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups from 1997 provides freedom of activities, but only for registered religious communities. A distinction is made between religious communities and religious groups, where the religious community is a voluntary, non-profit community of believers from the same religion. A religious group is considered a group of believers who do not belong to a registered religious community, which puts the religious group in a lower position. There should be only one religious community for one religion. In fact, the Law wants to distinguish between old "traditional" religious communities and new religious groups.

The law stipulates that only a religious group can be registered, but not a religious community. Registration requires 50 believers who are citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, and registration is done at the Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities (KOVZ),¹⁶⁰ with which the status of a legal entity is acquired. For activities of unregistered church communities, the penalty is equivalent to 1,000 to 1,500 German marks.¹⁶¹ For religious rituals in public places, prior approval by the KOVZ is required.

¹⁵⁹ After becoming part of Serbia in 1912, all Orthodox Christians fell under the Serbian Orthodox Church (officially in 1922). Macedonian national identity and language were suppressed. After the WWII, authorities of Socialist Republic of Macedonia banned the return of bishops and priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church that were serving from 1918-1941. After failed negotiation with the Serbian Orthodox Church for granting independence to Macedonian Orthodox Church, MOC proclaimed Autocephaly unilaterally in 1967 with strong support from the authorities. Macedonian Orthodox Church claims membership of 66% of the population. It is still unrecognized by other Orthodox churches.

¹⁶⁰ Komisija za odnose s verskimi zajednicami.

¹⁶¹ Roughly about 5 to 7 monthly wages.

Many of the articles of this law have been abolished by the Constitutional Court, with which the Law loses the reason of its existence.¹⁶² With the Law on the Legal Status of a Church, Religious Community and Religious Group of 2007,¹⁶³ registration is done by the Court with the terms church, religious community or religious group, having no difference at all, and the registrant chooses according to their preference. All religious communities registered, until the adoption of the 1997 Law, were automatically transferred to the Single Registry of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups. Of the 17 registered religious communities in 1997, which were transferred to the new register, there were six Evangelical Protestant churches: the Evangelical Methodist Church, the Christian Baptist Church "Good News," the Evangelical Congregational Church, the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia, the Christian Center in the Republic of Macedonia and the Church of God in the Republic of Macedonia.¹⁶⁴

The new law required re-registration of six "religious groups" that had been duly reported in the KOVZ in the period from 1997 to 2007, from which the Evangelical Protestant churches were: Christian Church "Word of Hope," Christian Church "God's Voice" and several others whose registration documents were not received by the Commission since the law-making process began.¹⁶⁵ The "New Hope" religious group began as an organization whose main goal was to show the film "Jesus," and now it works among students through other churches.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Decisions of the Constitutional Court of 24.12.1998 and 10.11.1999.

¹⁶³ Службен весник, Official Gazette 113/2007.

¹⁶⁴ Addressbook of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups in Macedonia, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Skopje 2008/2009.

¹⁶⁵ The Independent Church of Christ and the United Bible Church will eventually cease, while the Christian Church "Blaga vest" will cease to be considered an Evangelical Protestant church.

¹⁶⁶ This is actually the Campus Crusade for Christ - CRU organization in Macedonia. First, it was registered as an association of citizens, but because its activity was interpreted as a religious activity, it had to be re-registered as a religious group.

The law came into power on May 1, 2008, and all requests for registration from the first year had been rejected by the Court on various banal bases.¹⁶⁷ The first registrations, contrary to the Law, were not registered by the Court as churches, religious communities or religious groups, but as “voluntary communities of individuals,”¹⁶⁸ and the church was given in quotation marks along with the name of the church. This was done in order to prevent giving the official status of “Church,” and especially to find “legal” basis to not register the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric.¹⁶⁹ Due to this, the Evangelical Protestant churches suffered.

At the beginning of 2017, the Evangelical Protestant churches registered in the Single Register of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups were:¹⁷⁰

Evangelical Methodist Church in Macedonia;

Christian Baptist Church "Good News;"

Church of God in the Republic of Macedonia;

Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia;

Evangelical Congregational Church;

Christian Center in the Republic of Macedonia;

Christian Church God's Voice,

Christian Church Word of Hope;

Free Evangelical Church "Good News;"

Evangelical Protestant Church Glasnost;¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ For example, the request of the Evangelical-Baptist Church has been rejected due to a typo in the request.

¹⁶⁸ According to Article 2 of the Law.

¹⁶⁹ During the negotiations between Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Church, with the Nish Agreement of 2002, 5 of 7 Bishops of MOC accepted to return to canonical fellowship with the autonomy within the SOC, in order later to get the autocephality in the canonical way. But this caused media outrage, and all the bishop retreated, only Bishop Jovan (Vranishkovski) continued to support the Nish Agreement. The Holy Synod of MOC has expelled Bishop Jovan, but the Serbian Patriarch made him the head of Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric (POA in Macedonian) with title Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje. This group is recognized by all other Orthodox churches, but the Government of Macedonia has prevented it from registering, and has jailed Bishop Jovan on numerous prison sentences. It is estimated that POA has no more than 100 members.

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.kovz.gov.mk/?ItemID=625A03A44FFB9A479DA77DF1C5CD4E3E>

¹⁷¹ Loudness.

Christian Church Oasis in the RM;

Christian community Trinitas.

Mutual Co-operation

In the 1990s, there was often a spillover of membership from an existing church with the formation of new churches, and the mutual relations were with a dose of rivalry and mistrust. The first formal joint project of the Evangelical Protestant churches was the "Global Mission with Billy Graham" in 1993 and 1995. However, the first attempt to bring them together was a joint event held in June 1997, organized by missionary Philip Jackson of the Evangelical Congregational Church who had high credibility among all the communities. The convergence of the Evangelical Protestant churches and their cooperation continued into 1998 with the first joint Christmas concert, organized by Juliana Velevska from the Evangelical Congregational Church. Such Christmas concerts continued over the next 4 years, in which most churches, as well as groups, choirs and individuals from all over the Balkans—Albania, Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia—took part. There was a great choir of the Evangelical Protestant churches in Macedonia, composed of members from all denominations, led by conductor Rick Show.¹⁷²

This rapprochement between believers and leaders led to an attempted institutionalization by forming the Alliance of Protestant and Evangelical Churches of the Republic of Macedonia (APEC) on June 12, 1999, which officially registered on June 4, 2001. The APEC's aims were to advocate its members to the government, to draft a new law on religious communities that would be more convenient than that of 1997, as well as to

¹⁷² Also a missionary at Evangelical Congregational Church Skopje who was responsible for organization and financing.

coordinate projects of common interest.¹⁷³ However, this form proved to be inadequate and the APEC died out in 2003.

Various other ideas came, mostly from abroad, which promoted reconciliation and unity, concepts that brought fruit in other contexts. But in Macedonia, these concepts were short-lived. With the more liberal Law of 2007—for the registration and work of churches—formal "association" of churches became less relevant, and forms for informal cooperation were sought. Different foreign ideas were tried, such as Evangelical Unity, City Church, etc. On the other hand, there were many events organized by one or more churches, which were joined by members of other churches. These events consisted of children's and teenage camps, Christmas concerts and events, such as Global Day of Prayer, Reformation Days, Vision Fest, etc.

The new form of cooperation and action took place in 2011 in preparation for the census. For a better representation of the Evangelical Protestant believers in Macedonia, most of the churches agreed and called for their members to declare themselves as Evangelical Protestant Christians on the census. This initiative is called the Evangelical Protestant Initiative (EPI) and is an informal, non-binding initiative in which churches associate themselves with certain efforts, at their own discretion. This way of acting proved to be appropriate for Macedonian conditions, and the EPI has appeared as the organizer of several other events.

The EPI aims to unite the EPC for topics and projects of common Christian and Evangelical interest, to strengthen the already existing cooperation between the EPC, and to give impetus to cooperation on more important issues. One of the main reasons was that instead of the usual formulation of "Evangelical Protestant churches," only the Evangelical

¹⁷³ APEC ideas date back to 1997, when the idea was originally called MAPEH (Macedonian Association of Protestant Evangelical Christians). Notification and invitation for MAPEH from 1.4.1997. AECRM.

Methodist Church was mentioned in the Constitution. It was clear and unequivocally indicated that this decision was unfair.

The planned census in October 2011 mobilized the Evangelical Protestant churches that, through a clear statement of the census, would *de facto* prove to be the third largest religious entity, followed by an initiative to change the Constitution and expand the legal framework with members that included this group of Macedonian citizens.

The first meeting of the Evangelical Protestant Initiative was held on September 14, 2011, at the Evangelical Church Skopje. At the meeting, a unanimous conclusion was reached on the joint and equal participation of the upcoming census, but also on other topics of interest to the EPC. In the EPI today, the following Evangelical Protestant churches are participating:¹⁷⁴

Christian Baptist Church "Good News;"

Christian Center in the Republic of Macedonia;

Christian Community "Trinitas;"

Christian Church "God's Voice;"

Christian Church "Oasis" in RM;

Christian Church "The Word of Hope;"

Evangelical Church in the Republic of Macedonia;

Evangelical Congregation Church;

Evangelical Protestant Church "Glasnost;"

Free Evangelical Church "Good News."

¹⁷⁴ Only two EPCs do not participate in the EPI, the Evangelical Methodist Church, for reasons outlined above in the text and the Church of God, probably because they do not have a community in Skopje, where as in the capital, practically all EPI activities have been takem place.

The EPI continues to act until the achievement of their goals set by its members are met, and through which they will contribute to the success of the Republic of Macedonia.¹⁷⁵ The last event organized by the EPI marked 500 years of the Reformation in the months of September and October 2017.

Conclusion

Although the Evangelical Protestant churches in Macedonia have been present for more than a century, the complex historical and political relations were strongly against their actions and development in the socialist regime. Only in the late 1980s, the internal and external conditions brought about a series of changes. The practical dualism of the Evangelical-Methodist and Christian Baptist Church, which lasted 60 years, were complemented by two new churches in 1987. One, the Evangelical Congregational, started with members of the Methodist Church, who took the Congregational type of management, except the baptism of adults and a new type of proactive action. The other, the Evangelical Church, practically started with new people and became the largest and strongest Evangelical Protestant denomination in Macedonia.¹⁷⁶

These church communities worked openly and enthusiastically on the propagation of personal faith in Jesus Christ, the study of the Bible and other Evangelical Protestant doctrines and principles. In the same period, the crisis of the values of the socialist system and of the Yugoslav identity came, so that people searched for identity, values and ideas. This also caused an interest in spiritual and religious topics, which had been suppressed for decades. Therefore, the reception of the new Evangelical Protestant ideas and values was enormous compared to the small and modest beginnings.

¹⁷⁵ Nikola Galevski, communication with the author, 18.5.2017.

¹⁷⁶ Part of the leadership or their wives comes from the Evangelical Methodist Church.

Although there are theological differences between Evangelical Protestant churches, the larger differences are in the way and purpose of function. The various formats of worship, especially in the use of music and the type of church management, became recognizable characteristics. The characteristics of the personality of leaders and their religious backgrounds were also important here.

A distinctive feature was the methods of evangelization and their goals. They varied from strengthening the institutional capacities of existing church communities, to the spread of gospel news to home groups with the intent not to institutionalize them. The difference also arose in the issue of educating believers and educating future leaders and their status. Those who advocated more formal institutional functioning were for the formal theological education of their potential leaders, while those on the other side of the spectrum were educating all members through various seminars and trainings.

Formal theological education was mainly obtained in Osijek, Croatia and Novi Sad, Serbia,¹⁷⁷ and at other theological schools abroad. Informal theological education came through the churches themselves organizing various lectures, usually with lecturers from abroad, who were invited to be members of other churches.

Attempts for more formal education were few. During the 1990s there were theological trainings that were organized in Macedonia by the Bible Academy Logos from Bulgaria (from several professors). The idea was to provide basic theological education that would help interested people complete the theological studies for at least one year before continuing at the Sofia Faculty.¹⁷⁸ The Institute for Spiritual Development has been operational since 2008 with Aleksandar Vuletić as the president, and the Evangelical Theological Institute in

¹⁷⁷ BTS in Novi Sad in 2000 became Theology Faculty - Novi Sad. In 2008, the Faculty was renamed Protestant Theological Faculty and moves the Reformed Christian Church in Serbia, and within the Baptist Church of Serbia, the BTS was rebuilt somewhere in 2009 with much more modest beginnings.

¹⁷⁸ Pavle Kostadinov, communication with the author, 18.5.2017.

Kumanovo started with the first generation of students in 2016 with Dr. Sasho Georgievski as the director.

This creates a group of highly educated leaders who can cope with contemporary challenges, which is something that was missing in the previous period. Increasing numbers of local national leaders results in less need for help from abroad, and it provides locally authentic expressions of faith and social existence.¹⁷⁹

If at the very beginning of the 1990s, the main factor deemed necessary was an institution with visible features, as a dedicated church facility, later the emphasis was put on evangelism and a greater vision for starting new churches in all towns and villages in Macedonia. From the original three communities with about 100 people, it is now estimated that there are about 100 churches, mission stations, and local communities with believers whose number is estimated to be more than 7,000.¹⁸⁰

Greater cooperation between churches and organizations is at a stage where a balance has been achieved, where each church is leading its goal and program, but it is also ready for cooperation when it is considered appropriate. It is simply accepted that everyone has certain differences in the way of acting, but that the goal is identical—all people in Macedonia have the opportunity to make an informed decision to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, and of his teachings in the Bible as guides in all spheres of life.

On the other hand, there are Christian organizations where the primary goal is the spread of the Bible (the Biblical League and Lovers of the Christian Gospel)¹⁸¹ or for the provision of materials and training for leaders working with children (the Mission of

¹⁷⁹ Eric Palmquist, communication with the author, 17.4.2017.

¹⁸⁰ Cacanaska gives the number for Evangelical Protestant Churches of 6755, excluding the members of Christian Center, which are 300, so together it will be 7055. Cacanaska, Ruzhica "Protestantism in Macedonia Today," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 38: Iss. 1, Article 4. (2018). Table 4. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol38/iss1/4>

¹⁸¹ Every Home for Christ.

Evangelizing Children).¹⁸² In working with students, the organizations New Hope¹⁸³ and SEAM Exodus¹⁸⁴ are involved. Lately there are several Christian organizations that take care of various aspects of society: the center for counseling and assistance to women with unplanned pregnancies "Lidia—the heart that knocks," "United all together" for the help of people with mental disabilities, etc.¹⁸⁵

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¹⁸² Children Evangelization Fellowship.

¹⁸³ Campus Crusade for Christ, later CRU.

¹⁸⁴ International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

¹⁸⁵ Philip Jackson, communication with the author, April 26, 2017.

Evangelical Protestant Churches in the Republic of Macedonia (RM) After the WWII (1947-2017)

