

THE BAPTIST MOVEMENT ON THE BALKAN PENINSULA

Part I: HISTORICAL CHANGES ON THE BALKANS IN THE PERIOD 1st - 18th Century

Where is the Balkan Peninsula? The British Prime Minister Tony Blair informed the public in early 1999 that “Kosovo is on the doorstep of Europe”. Yet no geographer would consider Kosovo and its neighbors part of Asia. If neither in Europe nor in Asia, where does the Balkan Peninsula lie? This is the question of Misha Glenny in his book “The Balkans”. (1)

It is said that the Danube River is the northern border of the peninsula. This would all but exclude Romania. After World War I politicians frequently referred to Hungary as belonging to the peninsula. Since



Map of the Balkans 1815-1905

Greece, Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania (as peripheral territories can be included Slovenia, Vojvodina, Hungary, Moldova, Cyprus and the Greek Aegean and Ionian islands as well).

In order to be able to better understand the history of the Baptist movement on the Balkan Peninsula we have to consider the history of this peninsula itself.

There are a few main points:

The first missionary - Apostle Paul around 49-52 A.D (during his second missionary trip) went to Macedonia and the cities of Philippi, Thessaloniki, Athens, Corinth and others (2).

Paul states that he preached the gospel “*even to Illirivum*” and that Titus left him to go to Dalmatia (3). Salona in Dalmatia, Sardica in Dacia, Sirmium (modern Srbska Mitrovica) in Pannonia Secunda soon become important centers of missionary activity in the Roman Danubian provinces. The fact that three councils of the fourth century are held in these regions



Missionary trips of ap. Paul

i.e. Sardica (343-44) and the Arian councils of Sirium (358) and of Singidunum (modern Belgrade) (366), bears witness to the strength and importance of this area (4). The Emperors Constantine the Great, Jovian, Gratian, and the Valentinians are natives of the Danubian provinces (5).

Balkan Christianity at that time is not destined to enjoy a peaceful development. The ruin of the Greek culture to the east and Roman culture to the west of the Balkan Peninsula begins with the invasion of the West Goths who in 376 settle south of the Danube with the permission of Emperor Valens. They overrun the peninsula as far south as Achaia, pillaging the cities and murdering the inhabitants. In 497 the East Goths lead by Theodoric conquer the Dalmatian littoral and then hold it for forty years. In 535 the Emperor Justinian begins a twenty-year campaign against the East Goths who are Arian Christians (6).

Slavic people begin to flee into Balkan Peninsula under the pressure of the Huns and Avars. The original home of the Slavs is the territory

north of the Carpathian Mountains limited by the rivers Bug and Dniester, to the east by the rivers Dnieper and Desna (7). By 548 the Slavs have penetrated into the Roman provinces of Illyricum and Dalmatia. The following year they invade Thrace. By the first half of the seventh century the territory south of the Danube to the Gulf of Corinth and from the Aegean and Black Seas to the Adriatic, as well as north of the Sava River to the boundaries of the present-day Austria, is settled predominantly by Slavs.

The Bulgarian tribe arrives for the first time south of the Danube in 493 and continues to invade the peninsula in 502, 513, 535, 540 and 552 (8). They come from the Central Asia region north of Pamir and Tian Shan. Together with the Avars they take part in the siege of Constantinople in 626. As a result of the war with Byzantium in 680 they are recognized by the Emperor and in 681 form their own state on the peninsula (9).

The South Slavic tribes and the Bulgarians put an end to the Balkan Graeco-Roman civilization, both secular and religious, which they have entered. They are influenced, however, in the following centuries by Christianity coming from Rome and Constantinople. As a consequence of the historical struggle between Roman Catholicism in the West and the Greek Orthodox Church in the East, the Bulgarians, the Serb Slavs and the Macedonian Slavs are converted to Orthodoxy and the Croats and Slovenes in the west become Roman Catholics (10).

Origin of the Balkan Countries

Byzantium - this is the name Constantine gives to the Roman Empire in 330 A.D. when he moves the capital from Rome to Constantinople (Byzantium). The first emperor of the Eastern Empire is Theodosius in 380 A.D.

Bulgaria is established in 681 by khan Asparouh, with Capital City - Pliska (11).

Serbia is established in 1159 by Stefan Nemanja, with Capital City - Pristina.

Adoption of Christianity outside the Byzantine Empire

The Bulgarian Kingdom is christianized in the time of Prince Boris I. In 864 the King is secretly baptized by messengers of the Byzantine Patriarchate. In 866 the whole Bulgarian population is massively christianized. This is a political act rather than the result of some missionary activity. This massive christianization is greatly opposed by the aristocracy since it held

to the old pagan religion. In order to restore peace the Bulgarian King orders the death of 52 nobles and their families. Thus, the adoption of Christianity on the Balkan Peninsula outside the Byzantine Empire starts in blood. People accept the new religion out of fear and not based of conviction. At the same time from the very beginning some of the new rituals are mixed with pagan rituals and this metamorphosis has long lasting effects (12).

In 866 to 870 the Balkan Peninsula is the land of rivalry for influence between Rome and Constantinople and both use missionaries for their purposes. In 870 a Church Council takes place in Constantinople, which decides to proclaim the Bulgarian church independent (autocephaly), connected to the Constantinople Patriarchate (13). As a result of this fight comes the final schism between the Eastern and Western churches. After this period they adopt the names Eastern-Orthodox and Western-Catholic churches. Later on Rome succeeds to establish its influence in Moravia.

The conversion to Christianity is related to the work of the brothers **Cyril and Methodius**. The Byzantine Emperor Michael III often sends them on educational or theological missions to the neighbouring nations (14).



Cyril and Methodius

In 855 the two brothers from Thessaloniki create the first Slavic alphabet. In 863 the Moravian Prince Rostislav asks the Emperor to send him some teachers in the Slavic language. The brothers spend two and a half years in the capital of Moravia, Velehrad during which time they translate portions of the Bible and other clerical books into the Slavic language and prepare about 200 disciples. Cyril dies in 869 in Rome and Methodius continues his work until 885. Due to severe opposition on behalf of the Catholic clergy after the death of Methodius his disciples run away. Three of them - Kliment, Nahum and Angelarius ar-

rive in the Bulgarian capital Pliska. They are warmly welcomed. Later Kliment moves to Macedonia. There he creates a new version of the alphabet, which is later called Cyrillic and is taken to other Slavic languages reaching Russia later on. Nahum and Kliment prepare over 3.500 disciples most of whom priests and teachers who continue working on Christian literature for the church. This is the beginning of the Slavic enlightenment and education (15).

Conquest of the Balkan Peninsula by the Ottoman Turks

Let me mention some of the most significant dates from this so important historic change.

The end of the 13th century marks a change on the political scene of Asia Minor - the appearance of a new state formation, called Ottoman beglik, which becomes the new power in that region and also in Southeastern Europe. In its essence it is a colorful mosaic made of nomadic and semi nomadic tribes and of Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in the northwestern part of Asia Minor. The name of the first leader of the tribe is Ertogrul and his son Osman gives the name of this state formation. It turns out that the third Ottoman leader Orkhan possesses the necessary power and strength to conquer the neighbouring Byzantine fortresses. In the 30s of the same century he is a well-accepted and recognized leader in the war against the Byzantine Empire and declares that war a holy one, i.e. war against the non-Muslims, so that Muslim religion should triumph. He is the author of some reforms that stabilize the internal life of the state formation. Up to the middle of the century the Ottoman Turks fight mainly with their neighbors - Muslim emirates in Asia Minor (16).

In the 40s of the 14th century the Byzantine Emperor John Cantacuzemus invites the Turks to a military collaboration in his war with his inner enemies (with whose help he had been pronounced an Emperor). This opens the way for the Ottoman Turks to invade the Balkan Peninsula. In the years 1346, 1347, and 1349 they invade Thracia and enter the Bulgarian State. In 1354 they conquer the fortress of Cimpe and in 1354 they settle in the Gallipoli (or Gelibolu) Fortress which they do not leave in spite of all orders by the Emperor John Cantacuzemus. In the 60s they conquer Edirne (or Adrianople) along with a number of Bulgarian cities: Aitos, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv. In 1365 the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander becomes a vassal to the Turks. Syar Uglesha and the king of Prilep, Vulkashine, fight fiercely against the Turks. With a huge army they start for Edirne. On September 17th, 1371 near Chernomen their army is totally defeated by the

Turks. Uglesha and Vulkashine are killed. (In the months following that battle a historian, a monk by the name of Issai writes that it is a time in which the living envy the dead because there is no ruler who can help the Balkan people against the Turks). Sofia is conquered in 1382. The conquest then continues towards Nis, Serbia and Macedonia. After a long battle in 1387 the second largest city on the Balkan Peninsula - Thessaloniki is conquered. In 1387 near Plochnik the joined forces of Serbia and Bosnia win a great victory over the Ottoman Turks. In 1388 Ali Pasha with a 30.000 army behind him conquers a number of fortresses in Dobrudja and northern Bulgaria. In the summer of 1389 Sultan Murad I with his enormous army head towards Serbia and on June 28 one of the largest and most unclear battles of this age takes place at Kossovo Polje. Sultan Murad I is killed as well as the Serb Prince Lazar. Murad's son, Bayazid starts undertaking continuous military actions. He reaches Dubrovnik and continues to Walachia to the North.

The capital of Bulgaria, Turnovo falls on July 17, 1393. The Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Shishman shuts in the fortress of Nikopol on the Danube River but in 1395 the fortress is conquered and the Bulgarian Tsar is beheaded at the orders of Sultan Bayazid.

In 1402 the Ottoman Turks are defeated near Ankara by the Mongolian ruler Tamerlane. Sultan Bayazid dies and his empire is separated between his sons who start internal wars with each other. At this time Edirne (or Adrianople) becomes the capital of the Turkish Empire. From 1404 on the Hungarian king Sigismund becomes leader in the war of the Middle European Christian countries against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. In the 40s of the 15th century there are two crusades lead by the Polish-Hungarian king Wladyslaw III Jagiello and the ruler of Transylvania Hunyadi. They cross the Danube River and reach Varna hoping to reach Constantinople as well. In 1444 near Varna a very important battle takes place in which the crusade army is defeated, the young Polish king dies and Hunyadi together with a small group of soldiers goes back to Transylvania. The Ottoman Empire reaches its military climax and in 1453 Sultan Mehmed II conquers Constantinople. This puts an end to the existence of the Byzantine Empire. The Sultan orders the crown of the Patriarch to be given to Eugenius Scholaris and he and all his descendants are declared patriarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the rights to rule the spiritual and some civil matters of their orthodox dioceses (17).

An abrupt change in the ottoman-Christian conflict takes place after the battle of Lepanto in 1571 in which the joined forces of the Spanish

king, the Pope, the knights of Malta and some Italian kings defeat the Ottoman Turks in this most famous marine battle of its time. In the 17th century most dangerous enemy of the Ottoman Empire becomes the Habsburg Monarchy. The Habsburg Monarchy is also supported by the Pope, German and Italian Kings and rulers from Transylvania and Walachia. The war of the Ottoman Turks with the allies, which call themselves “The Holy League”, continues from 1593 to 1606. In the beginning Austria has some success however later in the battles near Tissa and Erlau the Ottoman Turks achieve victories.

In the end of the 17th century a new “Holy League” is formed, lead by the Habsburg Monarchy. The war with Turkey continues from 1683 to 1699. It starts with a raid of the Turks to Vienna. Jan Sobieski, king of Poland comes to help the Austrian capital and defeats the Turkish armies on September 12th 1683. In 1686 Russia also joins the Christian coalition. In 1689 the Austrian army conquers Nis and Pristina. Thus, in 1699 in Karlovitz the Christian coalition wins peace and permanently stops the Ottoman expansion to the West (18).

What is the cause for this drastic change in the life of the Balkans? For the population of this Peninsula it is a tragedy which changes the direction of their development and uproots them from their natural historic and geographic environment i.e. the European world. Many historians consider this a catastrophe and a collapse of identity of the people in that region, which results not only in the death of all Balkan countries but also becomes a drama influencing the development of the Balkan people even today.

The main reason is that the Balkan states are divided and in constant wars with each other. In the time when the Ottoman Turks appear on the Balkan Peninsula the Byzantine Empire is only a shadow of its past with rulers constantly fighting for its throne. In the 40s of the 14th century there is a severe civil war in the Byzantine Empire and the opponents constantly turn to Turkish rulers of Asia Minor for help. The Bulgarian Kingdom is also weak and the distance between the rise and fall of the state becomes bigger and bigger. At the same time the Serb kingdom is separated into approximately 40 little kingdoms and countries which are often times just one fortress city with its neighbourhood. For more than a century each of the opponents in the Balkan countries fighting for a throne or power relies on the Ottoman Turks for help against the rest. Very often the Turkish armies are invited to participate in the internal Balkan wars. This helps immensely the Turkish expansion. At one time even the king of the Magyars

Ludovik I d'Anjou joins the Turkish armies against the Bulgarians. The year 1351 is the year of the first serious attempt to create a coalition against the conquerors but it fails. The Balkan rulers deep in their small cares and great ambitions show extreme political shortsightedness. Such is the beginning of this period in the history of the Balkans which leaves long lasting impact on the political, national and cultural identity and lives of all states and peoples on the Balkans even to this day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Glenny, M. (2000). The Balkans. London: Granta Publications, p.xxi.
2. Book of Acts, chapters 16 to 19, NIV.
3. 2 Timothy 4:10.
4. Spinka, M. (1933). A History of Christianity in the Balkans. Chicago: American Society of Church History, p. 2.
5. Hopper, J. D. (1977). A History of the Baptists in Yugoslavia 1862-1962. Dissertation, p. 1.
6. Ibid. p.2.
7. Vasmer, M. (1923). Untersuchungen über die ältesten Wohnsitze der Slaven. Leipzig.
8. Bozhilov, I., Mutafchieva, V., Kosev, K., Pantev, A., & Grancharov, St. (1993). A History of Bulgaria. Sofia: Christo Botev Publication House, pp. 21-25.
9. Ibid. p. 30.
10. Mutafchiev, P. (1992). A History of Bulgarian People. Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Science, pp.64-75.
11. Ibid. pp. 81-86.
12. Bozhilov, I., Mutafchieva, V., Kosev, K., Pantev, A., & Grancharov, St. (1993). A History of Bulgaria. Sofia: Christo Botev Publication House, pp. 41-48.
13. Mutafchiev, P. (1992). A History of Bulgarian People. Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Science, pp. 145-151.
14. Ibid. p. 155.

15. **Ibid. p. 158.**
16. **Lazarov, I., Pavlov, Pl., Tjutjundjiev, I., & Palangurski, M. (1993). A Short History of the Bulgarian People. Sofia: Prosveta, p. 104.**
17. **Ibid. pp. 105-109.**
18. **Ibid. pp. 114-116.**

Part II: BAPTISTS IN YUGOSLAVIA

Serbian Uprisings in the Ottoman Empire, 1804 - 1829

Slaughter of the Knezes

On a freezing morning in late January 1804, Mehmed-aga Focic saddled one of his Arabian horses and headed southwest of Belgrade in the direction of Valjevo. With him were 200 janissaries, nominally members of the Sultan's elite guard. In Ljubenovo Polje he arrested Alexander Nenadovic, the knez or local Serb chieftain. The janissaries had received the news that he and his family were smuggling weaponry from the Habsburg Empire, and were preparing for rebellion. They seized another man, Ilija Bircanin, and clapped the two men in irons. Valjevo was the center of conspiracy among the Serb peasantry. The two men were hauled in front of a large crowd of onlookers, Christian and Muslim. "These men conspired with the Germans (Habsburgs), cried Focic. It would be a sin to leave their heads upon their shoulders. Cut them off!" After the decapitation panic seized the Muslim and Christian population of Valjevo. The Serbian men grabbed their weapons and took to the forest. Many more heads rolled in the next few days. A priest, Hadzi-Ruvim, escaped Focic's squadron of executioners and sought refuge with the Greek bishop of Belgrade, Leontius. Under pressure the bishop handed him over to the Focic people. In an attempt to extract the details of the rebellion, they stripped the flesh from Ruvim's body with a pair of pliers. When the priest still refused to talk, his head was cut off in a public ceremony at the city gate. This is the beginning of "the slaughter of the knezes (seca knezova)". The rebellion marked the beginning of modern history on the Balkan Peninsula. (1).

The end of the Turkish rule over the Balkan Peninsula

In the 19th century the Turkish Empire on the Balkans is shaken by many national revolutions: in Serbia – 1804; Greece – 1821; Romania – 1866; Bosnia and Herzegovina – 1975; Bulgaria – 1876. There are three Russian-Turkish wars: in 1828-29, 1853-56 and 1877-78. Greece receives its independence in 1929, Serbia – the same year (the Edirne-peace), Walachia and Moldova – 1856; the northern part of Bulgaria– 1878, the south part – Roumelia remains a Turkish protectorate till 1885 (2).

Beginning of the Baptist movement in Yugoslavia – 1862-1924

The Baptist witness first enters Yugoslavia through the German Baptist movement. In 1847 Johan Gerhard Oncken baptizes Karl and Theresia Wisotzky in Vienna (3). He is a carpenter who moves with his family to Bucharest, the capital of the Romanian province of Walachia, at that time under Turkish occupation and begins work among the German families in the city. In 1962 the first group of believers is baptized. In 1865 the Baptist congregation is officially recognized by the authorities as a church (4).



Map of contemporary Yugoslavia

The pioneer Baptist in the early history of Baptist life in Yugoslavia is Heinrich Meyer, born in Germany, who moves to work as Bible colporteur in Zagreb. In the winter of 1872 he begins regular worship services in his Zagreb home. Later he moves to Pest, where he continues to conduct Baptist worship services. There he meets another colporteur from Novi Sad, Adolf Hempt. He awakes Meyer's interest in mission work. Meyer leaves the British Bible Society and devotes himself to evangelization among the Germans in Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia. So from Vienna, Bucharest and Pest the Baptist mission work continues into Yugoslavia (5).

Beginning of Baptist movement in Bosnia

Franz Tabory from Novi Sad, at that time part of the Austrian Empire, together with his wife are baptized in 1862 in Bucharest. Shortly thereafter they move to Sarajevo, the principal city of Bosnia, and like Bucharest also under Turkish occupation. He begins to work there as a colporteur and soon several other Baptists join him and his wife. From the group in Bucharest the Baptist movement reaches Lukovac, about one hundred kilometers north from Sarajevo. In 1878, when Bosnia comes under the administration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Baptist congregation in Sarajevo has thirty to thirty five members and they organize a Sunday school for children (6).

Beginning of Baptist movement in Voivodina

The situation in this part of the Balkans is closely related to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria and Hungary are in reality two states ruled by one sovereign, defended by one common military force, but separated administratively into two governments. Austria includes the traditional Habsburg holdings in Austria, sections of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and from Yugoslavia, Dalmatia and Slovenia. Besides all the Magyar lands, Hungary embraces parts of Rumania and Poland, and northeastern Yugoslavia. Till the end of World War 1, the area of northeastern Yugoslavia that is north of the Sava River to Belgrade, north of the Danube and east to Rumania is under Hungarian administration. By 1878 the Empire has occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina and makes the province a protectorate, and in 1908 formally annexes it (7).

The Baptist work in Novi Sad is a result of the ministry of the same man- Heinrich Meyer. In 1875 he writes in a private letter to a friend: "The Lord poured out his grace on us in November in Novi Sad on the Danube... In a short time 20 persons received baptism." (8).

Meyer baptizes David Solt and his wife in 1878 and the couple moves to Brezovo Polje, Bosnia, where later a Baptist congregation develops.

By 1890, statistics indicate the success of the work in these regions (9):

In Northeastern Yugoslavia		In Bosnia	
Congregation	Membership	Congregation	Membership
Novi Sad	17	Sarajevo	2
Belgrade	4	Bijelina	5
Krcecin	7	Brezovo Polje	10
Kumane	1	Franz Josefsfeld	2
Slankamen	2		
Novi Becej	3		
Feketic	10		
Torza	5		
Sekic	1		

By 1909 work has solidified in northeastern Yugoslavia, and new mission stations are being formed. During the early 1920's local leadership develops among the Yugoslavian churches.

In February 1923 Nikola Dulic, a Yugoslav from Backa, who returns from the United States under the auspices of Southern Baptists in the US to serve the churches in this part of Yugoslavia, holds a two-week course in Novi Sad to train Sunday School teachers (10). Following this course, another training period of four weeks is carried out for lay pastors and mission workers from the various language groups in the Baptist churches. Between sixty and seventy teachers attend the first course. Dulic is a good teacher, speaking Hungarian, Serbian, German and English and works among the various nationalities.

It is reported that on one Sunday service in 1923 German and Slovak Baptists celebrate a baptismal service in the Bega River, the first

preacher speaks to the mixed crowd in Slovak, and the second one preaches in Serbian, Hungarian and German (11)!

Beginning of the Baptist movement in Slavonija

The work in Slavonija, section of northern Croatia, begins about 1870, when colporteurs of the British and Foreign Bible Society carry the Holy Scriptures throughout the country in German, Croatian, Czech, Hungarian and Serbian languages. Although the work around Daruvar has its roots in the German Baptist movement and many of the first converts are German-speaking, this center of Baptist movement quickly develops into a Croat and Czech ministry. Daruvar remains the center of the Czech population in Yugoslavia (12).

Beginning of the Baptist movement in Belgrade

The first Baptist work in Belgrade begins with an eighteen-year old Serbian soldier named Svetozar Barbulovic who loses his eyesight in battle against the Turks. He goes to Vienna for an eye operation, which is unsuccessful. He is considering suicide when he comes into contact with Julius Peter, pastor of the Baptist Church in Vienna. Here he is converted and becomes a zealous Christian. He returns from Vienna with a desire to spread the Gospel among his own people. He begins to work and baptizes a well-educated lady - the first Serb convert in Belgrade. The earliest development of the work in Belgrade is as a German-speaking church (13).

Baptist work among the Slovaks in Yugoslavia

The Slovak people migrate to the southern part of the Austrian Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus a large number of Slovaks settle step by step east of the Danube and west of Tisa. In Backi Petrovac in Voivodina the Slovaks make up some 95 percent of the population.

Baptist work among Slovak begins with a man called Josip Turoci, who is baptized in Budapest in 1898. He is a shoemaker and moves to his town Backi Petrovac where he begins his missionary activities. In 1901 they purchase an old building and convert it into a prayer house. Two other churches are established in Glozan (1904) and Belo Blato (1903). The leader of the small congregation in Belo Blato Jan Sjanta is put in gaol by the police, encouraged by the local priest, and his home is set on fire (14).

Around 1904 some **Hungarian families** establish a Baptist church in Svilojevo. Baptists in Svilojevo experience opposition from the Catholic

clergy and the police. Between 1910 and 1918 police officials often interrupt the church services in that town (15).

Rumanian Baptist Origins in Yugoslavia

Rumanians first come down from the Balkan and Carpathian Mountains into Banat in 1200. Some settlers are driven there by the Turks. After World War 1, Banat is divided into two parts. Eastern Banat is incorporated into Rumania while the western area becomes part of Yugoslavia. By 1923, the Baptist movement in Rumania is well developed by the early German settlers who have worked actively among the Rumanian population. At that time there are 800 German, 6.000 Hungarian, a few Russian, and 17.000 Rumanian Baptists in Rumania. From Rumania the Baptist movement spreads to the Rumanians in Banat in the years 1922-24 (16).

The beginning of the Baptist movement in Croatia

As was mentioned earlier the first penetration of the Baptist message in Croatia takes place in and around Darovar before the turn of the century. At that time several small Baptist groups are formed around Zagreb and Osijek. After World War 1 a number of Yugoslavs that have been to America return to their home land as Baptists. The work in Croatia and other parts of Yugoslavia between the two World Wars is influenced by a man called Vinko Vacek. His family immigrates in the States and he becomes a Christian in Detroit in 1913. In 1920 he becomes a pastor of the Serbo-Croatian Baptist congregation in Detroit. Shortly after that the call comes for him to return to his native land. Soon after that the first Croatian conference takes place on March 27-29 in Darovar. About 15 representatives attend from all over Croatia. The fellowship of Serbo-Croatian churches is formed and the first leadership is elected. Vinko Vacek comes back to Zagreb towards the end of 1922. At that time in Croatia there are approximately 150 Serb and Croat Baptists, 199 Germans, 283 Slovaks, and 117 Hungarian fellow believers.

In January 1923 the second Serbo-Croatian conference is held in Zagreb. Plans are completed for Sunday school leadership training course and preparatory steps toward the establishment of a magazine are taken.

Glas Evandjelija (Voice of the Gospels) first appears in July 1923. This Baptist magazine contains sermons, evangelistic messages, Baptist world news, Christian history, reports from churches, Bible studies, etc. (17).

Unification: the Baptist groups organize

It is clear that from the very beginning there are separate Baptist ethnic movements in Yugoslavia. These exist side by side in the spirit of cooperation. The German preachers particularly help the struggling Hungarian congregations and preach often to groups of Serbs. The idea of establishing a single union, which will encompass all Baptist associations, comes as a vision from several local Baptist leaders and from missionaries working outside Yugoslavia. The first Union Conference is held in the Hungarian Language Church in Svilojevo, Backa on January 16th to 17th, 1924. Vinko Vacek from Darovar is elected President, Josef Kalar, Hungarian language pastor from Sombor, Vice President, and Mathias Wolf, German language pastor from Titel, recording secretary. Reports from the German, Hungarian, Slovak and Croatian churches are given (18).

Between 1929 and 1935 the membership among the Slovaks double from 364 to 734 members and between 1948 and 1959 the membership grows from 911 to 1400.

The first Baptist church in Macedonia is formed in the beginning of the 1930s in Radoc (American Congregationalist missionaries have developed a rather successful work between 1810 and 1912 in Macedonia. After the Balkan wars they are unable to continue their efforts in that part of Macedonia, which is then integrated into Yugoslavia. Many of their churches then join the Methodist movement, which is strong in Macedonia.) In 1936 Baptist work in Macedonia becomes a part of the Belgrade congregation (19).

Slavic churches after 1945

During World War 2 northern Serbia (Vojvodina) is occupied by the Hungarians, Belgrade and southern Serbia by the Germans, Slovenia by the Italians, Macedonia by the Bulgarians. Croatia becomes an independent state under German control. The establishment of these new borders cuts off communications between the various Baptist conferences. While Baptist church meetings in Croatia and Slovenia are outlawed, the Hungarian Government allows limited freedom for churches in Vojvodina to continue their worship. In Croatia and Slovenia several Baptist leaders are arrested but the churches continue to meet secretly.

With the death of Vinko Vacek in 1939 and the trauma of war the Baptist union ceases to exist. Glas Evandjelja stops publications in 1941. Its functions are renewed only in 1959 when Franjo Klem begins the publication of Glasnik (Herald) from Rijeka.

Baptist leaders meet in Novi Sad in October 1945 to evaluate the situation of the churches and constitute the union. Samuel Spevak is chosen President and Vaclav Sboril, secretary of the Union. The Romanian and Macedonian churches are integrated into the Serbian conference. In 1947 Adolf Lehotsky is elected Union Secretary. John Allen Moore begins the Baptist seminary in Belgrade in 1940 but it closes at the opening of the war. Josip Horak, Franjo Klem and Adolf Lehotsky take the initiative to reopen the Seminary in March 1954 in the Zagreb chapel. The first ten students sleep in a room at the home of Tomo Vincetic and eat at a local cafeteria. Horac serves as President and Klem as Secretary of the school. In 1955 the school moves to Darovar chapel and Adolf Lehotsky succeeds Horak as President of the school. In 1957 the seminary is moved again to Novi Sad. At that time Alexander Birvis, Ruth Lehotsky and Stjepan Orcic join the faculty. Foreign guest professors John Watt and John Allen Moore from the Baptist Seminary in Rushlikon, Switzerland also lecture in Novi Sad (20).

The women's work begins in the Belgrade church in 1933 with the Russian Lydia Kalnikova. Pauline Moore establishes Sestrinski List, which furthers the women's cause.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Glenny, M. (2000). The Balkans. London: Granta Publications, p. 1.
2. Ibid. p. 22
3. Lehmann. Geschichte. Archives. Mollardgasse Baptist Church, Vienna, Austria.
4. Donat. (1869). Werk. Church Membership Record. Archives. Mollardgasse Baptist Church. Vienna, Austria, p. 429.
5. Hopper, J. D. (1977). A History of the Baptists in Yugoslavia 1862-1962. Dissertation, p. 11.
6. Ibid. p. 13.
7. Ibid. p. 17.
8. Donat. (1869). Werk. Church Membership Record. Archives. Mollardgasse Baptist Church. Vienna, Austria, p. 435.

9. Lehotsky. Baptism. Membership Records A/10, pp. 1,7,11.
10. Evangeliumsbote. (1923, July-August), p. 6.
11. Ibid. (1923, September), pp. 7-8.
12. Gustav Lotz to Franjo Klem. (1960, December 15th). Document 11/f, Baptist Seminary Archives. Novi Sad, Yugoslavia.
13. Hopper, J. D. (1977). A History of the Baptists in Yugoslavia 1862-1962. Dissertation, pp. 32-33.
14. Klem, F. (1962). Historija Baptista. Rijeka, Yugoslavia, p. 105.
15. Habijanec, J. (1976). Baptisticke Crkve Madjarskog Okruzja. Document 8/2, Baptist Seminary Library Archives, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, pp. 1-3.
16. Surca, J. (1976). Historija Baptista Rumunske Nacionalnosti u SERJ. Document 16/1, Baptist Seminary Library Archives, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, p. 1.
17. Hopper, J. D. (1977). A History of the Baptists in Yugoslavia 1862-1962. Dissertation, pp. 63-75.
18. Ibid. p. 81.
19. Ibid. p. 149.
20. Ibid. pp. 155-164.

Part III: THE HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA

We can identify 5 basic factors for the appearance of the Baptist movement in Bulgaria. First of all, an important role play the German refugees and immigrants from south Russia persecuted for their faith. Second, very important is the literature work of the British and Foreign Bible society in the Ottoman Empire. Third, we should not underestimate the role of Bulgarians who after being abroad for some time come back home as Baptists. Fourth, we have to mention the foreign Baptist missionaries working

in Bulgaria at that time. Last, we cannot neglect the fact that some groups of people spontaneously start studying the Bible and that leads them to Baptist faith without any outside interference (1).

Background information (1857-1880)

The first Protestant Christians in Bulgaria are Methodists and members of the Congregational church. The Methodists work independently around 1857 in Western Bulgaria and the members of the Congregational church work on the other side of the Balkan - in Eastern Roumelia.

Around 1866 the first Baptists arrive in the country as distributors of literature belonging to the British and Foreign Bible society. The Bible society does not allow them to hold meetings however the literature distributors work among the people and prepare them.

At the same time 37 families of German origin arrive in Bulgaria from South Russia seeking refuge from the severe persecution. They plead with the Turkish Government and are allowed in 1866 to settle in Tulcha, close to the village of Katulaj near the Danube River. The names of some of them are Kristian Polt, August Fisher, Martin Herringer and Jacob Klundt. Thus, in Bulgaria, in **Katulaj**, the first Baptist church within the Ottoman Empire is established. The new church appoints Jacob Klundt as literature distributor and later he is ordained. When these men settle in Katulaj they start traveling around Bulgaria from Danube to Tsarigrad and from Macedonia to the Black Sea, taking the Good News (2).

Kazanluk and Russe

The first Baptist church on the territory of present day Bulgaria is established in **Kazanluk**. In 1867 Stephan Kurdov hears the Good News from Armenians in Tsarigrad. He starts studying this new teaching and as a result takes the decision to follow Christ. When his fellow citizens hear about that they call him in the monastery of the Orthodox church and threaten him to make him stop following this new teaching. The threats are useless (3). Not only that, a man by the name of Grigor Drumnikov who at the beginning tries to convince Kurdov to stop with the new teaching, accepts Christ as a Saviour as a result of his contacts with Kurdov. Stephan Kurdov becomes literature distributor of the Bible Society and visits and takes books to the towns of Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Sliven, Yambol and others. At that time some of the citizens of Kazanluk start criticizing the new teaching and persecuting its followers. In the orthodox churches the priests read protests against the Baptists. In spite of all that, new people

continue to come to Christ. Some of them are I. Kurdova and M. Ivancheva. When I. Kurdova dies in 1881 the orthodox priests do not allow for her to be buried in an orthodox graveside. After many discussions she is buried in the field outside the town.

The group of Christians there decides to find money to buy a church building. They collect some money and manage to buy a small church building. At the end of 1874 the church decides it needs its own pastor. They hear about some Baptist missionaries on the other side of the Balkan and decide to meet with them. One of the Christians from Kazanluk meets a Baptist book distributor in Eastern Roumelia and tells him about the interest of the small congregation for a pastor. The book distributor starts visiting the church and holds serious discussions about baptism. He is forbidden to hold such meetings, however he continues to preach. More and more people come to the meetings and soon they are convinced about the issue of baptism by faith. Thus, he ends his mission and leaves Kazanluk.

In 1879 in Hamburg is held the XI union conference of the Baptists in Germany. A. Libich, president of the Russian-Romanian association shares some ideas about mission work in Bulgaria. At that point Jochan Kargel feels called to go to Bulgaria for mission work. Later on, he reads a letter from the congregation in Kazanluk (22 people at that time) asking for a pastor. Urged by all that Jochan Kargel leaves for Bulgaria. In the beginning of September 1880 he arrives in Rouschuk.

Jochan Kargel first meets the Kazanluk congregation on 05.09.1880. The people there express their desire to be baptized. After long discussions about baptism, a baptismal service is finally held. The names of the first five people baptized in Kazanluk are Toshka Pateva, Marijka Belcheva, Nikola Patev, Grigor Drumnikov and Petko Kurkelanov. The first minutes taken at a church meeting are dated 07.09.1880. This date is considered the foundation date of the church.

According to the available information, on his way to Kazanluk Kargel spends some time in **Ruse** (4). At that time there are three German families there one working with the British Foreign Bible Society and the other two working as literature distributors. At the beginning Kargel preaches to the three German-Russian families. Since he does not speak Bulgarian well, he preaches in Russian.

Meanwhile in Pazardjik a few people show great interest towards faith and are called by the local authorities to give explanations.

To the West, near the Danube there seems to be a revival too. In 1882 there are seven baptisms in Ruschuk.

In 1883 Kargel sends V. Marchev to the seminary for preachers in Hamburg. The information about the same year speaks of 14 baptized people, 10 of whom Bulgarians, 2 Jews and 2 Germans. The baptismal services take place on 26.08 and 07.09.1883. The population of the town is hostile towards Baptists and their services. The newspapers are full of ironic articles and the local bishop is outraged that Baptists do not respect the baptism of the orthodox church. When the citizens hear about he baptismal services they become extremely hostile and some of the newly baptized are even beaten up by fanatic opponents of the faith.

In 1884 Kargel has to go back to Peterburg. Thus, the churches in Kazanluk and Ruschuk go through some hard time without a pastor, confronted by the other denominations because of doctrinal differences, etc. On 26.08.1887 Marchev comes back form Hamburg and continues the work. Soon the church has two Sunday schools and an open kindergarten with missionary purpose for children of non-Christian parents.

Lompalanka

In 1886 a merchant arrives in **Lompalanka** where he meets the family of Regina and Jacob Klundt. Jacob Klundt works as a book distributor. The three of them start meeting the Klundts' home. In 1887 some neighbors join in the meetings and the merchant starts preaching in Bulgarian. In 1888 Lompalanka becomes a branch church to the Ruschuk church. At this time Jochan Kargel comes back as well. The whole church is involved in various missionary activities and new people join in every day.

The first daughter church of the Lompalanka church is the church in **Ferdinand**, established as a result of the active work of Jacob Klundt.

Romanian-Bulgarian Alliance

On 09.10.1888 in Tulcha is established a Romanian-Bulgarian Alliance. The first conference of the Alliance is held on 20.05.1889 in Katulaj near Tulcha. The meetings treat administrative as well as spiritual issues. Unfortunately in 1890 the Alliance breaks down due to the language and national differences of the involved parties as well as the difficult financial situation of the alliance.

New churches

In 1889 as a result of Klundt's work a new church is established in **Razgrad** neighborhood as a branch church to the Lompalanka church.

Next in chronological order is the church in **Sofia**. Its establishment is a result of the work of the church in Ruschuk. As a result of Marchev's sermons in 1893 a few people become Christians and are baptized. Meanwhile to the East of Sofia in the big village of **Kostenets** appears yet another church. The first Protestants at that place belong to the Congregational church. In 1893 there are 6 Christians there that want to be baptized. That is why Marchev visits them.

In 1894 in the Lompalanka church comes a new pastor - V. Kjosev. He has studied in a school for preachers in London. God blesses his work and the congregation grows. However, with it grows the opposition of the citizens towards the Baptists. There are some very hostile acts e.g. on 03.03.1895 a group of people attack and destroy the Baptist church. This happens only one year after the new Government has declared religious freedom. V. Kjosev goes to Sofia to defend the rights of the church and soon after that the local authorities build the church again and supply the finances for the necessary equipment.

On 24.04.1895 Lompalanka witnesses the largest baptism in Bulgaria until that point. Five sisters and 7 brothers are baptized. Three hundred people are present at the ceremony.

On Easter day of 1896 the church in Lompalanka celebrates its establishment. There are many guests at the ceremony including foreign guests and Turkish population. On the second day of Easter Kjosev is ordained and becomes the preacher of the congregation.

The problems with the Orthodox continue. In spite of that the church growing and is active in mission. Later on one of the members of the congregation moves to **Berkovitsa**. During his time of service Berkovitsa becomes a branch church to the church in Lompalanka.

The Baptist Church in **Varna** is established in 1926 -1927 (5).

Building of Churches and the first dedication of a Baptist church in Bulgaria

The first dedicated church in Bulgaria is the church in Ruschuk. From 1880 to 1884 the congregation meets in the home of the Kargels'. Later on they buy a small house with 5 very small rooms for all the meetings



Baptist churches in Kazanluk,
Russe and Varna



of the congregation and the two Sunday school classes and the meetings of the German speaking group. Within a few years they manage to collect some money and start building a church. It takes them about 10 years to finish it and on 21.11.1898 the church building is dedicated.

Work with minority population

We already mentioned a few basic factors for the appearance of the Baptist movement in Bulgaria. One of them is the spontaneous Bible study by groups of people without any evangelical influences from the outside.

There is one interesting story from the end of the 19th c. about a Gypsy person who worked in the house of a Bulgarian peasant. One day he noticed a beautiful book with golden ornaments on the cover. He liked the cover so much that he stole the book and took it home. It was the New Testament in Bulgarian. He showed the book to a friend of his and they started reading it together every night, slowly since they could not read well. Gradually, they understood the message of the Book and realized they were sinners. Soon other Gypsy people started meeting with them reading the Bible, coming to know Christ. The result of the work of this person is the church in Golyanci, the first Gypsy Baptist church with a Gypsy pastor (6).

Establishment of the Bulgarian Evangelical Baptist Union

The Bulgarian Baptist Union is established on 15.05.1905 in Ruschuk at a conference with delegates from Ruschuk, Sofia, Kazanluk, Chirpan and Lompalanka. The leadership of the Union is a commission that is elected every year by the conference.

Time of Persecution

In Bulgaria the time of communism began in September 1944. The Red Army under the commandment of Marshal Tolbuchin reached the eastern border of Bulgaria and entered the country. There was no resistance. They immediately established a communist Government in Bulgaria. In a short time several thousands of people belonging to the former governmental or state's institutions disappeared; they were simply murdered. Many others, including some famous professors and upper class people were put in prisons and concentration camps. For a few months silence fell over the country - the silence of a totalitarian system.

The time of communism was a time of persecution for the churches. A new ideology began the greatest attempt to build a new order, a new social system with a new religion - atheism. The Marxist philosophy was adopted as official ideology with the features of a public religion. It was proclaimed and preached in schools, universities, even in prisons (7).

Some of the main features of this communist system were:

1. Full control over the political, social, economical, cultural life; control over the church life especially.
2. Control over people's personal lives.
3. People are dependent on the authorities of the village, city, of the factory, hospital, school etc. (their place of work).
4. Restriction of the right to move, even within the area of your own country. Human rights exist only on paper.
5. Mass media and system of education are subject to special control.
6. The new ideology has priority in all areas of social life.
7. Strong measures against any kind of opposition or different kind of thinking. Special power of the State Security Forces.
8. Prisons and concentration camps as a part of the system of re-educating of the enemies

The power of the state was turned especially against the churches and the believers. The goal was to restrict the church activities and to suppress faith as a main human need and replace it with the new ideology. There were the following results of this politics towards the churches:

1. Interference in church-life. Approving and appointment of pastors by the authorities.
2. No theological education, no Christian literature was available.
3. Restriction of all church activities; no youth and children work, no Bible studies, no conferences, etc.

4. Confiscation and demolition of church buildings.
5. Sending of believers to prisons.



1



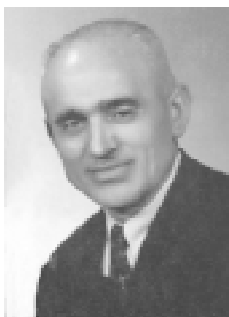
2



3



4



5



6



7

Pastors sentenced in 1949:

1 - Georgi Vassov - 15 years

2 - Hristo Neichev - 7 years

3 - Ivan Igov - 3 years in a concentration camp

4 - Nikola Mihailov - 15 years

5 - Ivan Angelov - 10 years

6 - Milan Kostov - 8 years

7 - Atanas Georgiev - 1 year

Bulgaria witnessed two pastors' trials in the beginning of 1949. All together 23 pastors, representatives of the main evangelical denominations, were sentenced as spies of America to imprisonment up to 15 years. The way they were treated in prison and before they were sentenced was horrible, done in the good Stalin's way, the way he used to crush his enemies. Later on other 35 pastors and church leaders were sent to prison and concentration camps. A small country like Bulgaria had over 50 concentration camps some of them small but some of them were huge with terrible conditions. Many people lost their lives there.

The result of this massive campaign against the churches and the believers for so many years was the fear that all people started to feel and especially the believers. This immediately resulted in rapid decline in church membership and church attendance. As if this was not enough. Some of the church properties and church buildings were confiscated; the special security services were monitoring the activities of every single church or even every single group of believers. In the focus of their attention were church leaders and especially young people.

We are happy that this time is over. We are happy now that Bulgaria and all other Eastern European countries have the chance to develop in a new and democratic way. The churches now have great possibilities to grow, to disciple, and to spread the good news.

What have we learned from this very difficult time of persecution? We can say that there were several consequences.

The first consequence is that we learned and experienced that we have a great Lord. A Lord who is good to us in times of freedom but also a Lord who works with his people in the most difficult times. He works even in times of prison and concentration camps. This was demonstrated in a powerful way through the real miracle of the survival of the small Christian churches and congregations spread all over the country. Under such massive pressure and persecution those churches survived. We can boldly witness that this is the biggest miracle of our time - the survival of the church the survival of faith in the hearts of people. When communist authorities decided to put most of the evangelical pastors to prison they did it with the great expectation that in this way they would behead the church. And of course they succeeded in a way but at the end of their rule even the biggest communist leaders were surprised to find out that the church had survived. This was a mighty proof that the Church of Christ indeed has a Head, Jesus Christ, who is in heaven - so high that no authority, power or dominion

could reach him as Apostle Paul says in his epistle (8). So the survival of the church is a miracle and the biggest testimony that the Church has a Head, Jesus Christ, who takes care and looks after his people.

All churches suffered. The Orthodox Church, which was the main church, also had priests put to prison. The Catholic Church, which is a minority in Bulgaria, also had members put to prison and one of their bishops was sentenced to death and killed. But the Orthodox Church was easily conquered after a while because the communist Government succeeded to put to leadership positions people serving the communist party with its goals rather than their church. But the Baptists created a huge problem to the communist Government.

Another consequence of this time is that we saw the role of endurance in Christian life. The pastors, the deacons, the leaders, the young people all endured persecution and most of them remained faithful to their Lord till the end of their lives. Many of them did not see the changes that we saw. Many of the leaders and pastors of the Baptist churches did not survive to see the new democracy but they served their Lord faithfully to the end of their lives. So we saw how suffering can bring new seeds and hope for new blessings.

And now we have a new growth among the Baptist churches in Bulgaria, which is also true for all other evangelical denominations. With the new democracy after the political changes of 1989 all evangelical churches began to grow. And here we could see very special signs of the power of our Lord. I will give you a small example. In 1973 one of the oldest Baptist churches in Bulgaria, the Baptist church in the town of Russe, was confiscated by the communist Government. Other churches had been confiscated as well, some of them were simply destroyed. But to that church which building is more than 100 years old and which was one of the first Baptist churches in the country the communists decided to do something special. They decided to turn the church building into an atheistic club, a club in which to teach the communist Marxist and materialistic philosophy. Furthermore, they used to invite the members of the church to go to their own church building and listen to some good atheistic lessons. The leaders of the Baptist Union during communism, in the 70s and 80s tried to get the church building back by sending letters and petitions to the Government but in vain. Even in a special letter of the Ministry of Religious Affairs it was said that this building should never be given back to be used as a church. And what a joy it was in 1992 when after the change the Baptists in that town received the church property back. I had the privilege to go there

and on behalf of the Baptist Union sign all the documents for receiving the property back and get the key of our own church building at the end of the procedure. With a small group of believers of the same town we entered the church building. It was empty, all the benches, songbooks, Bibles were taken away and the windows were broken. And we entered this big empty hall with broken windows and made a circle and prayed and praised the Lord for what our eyes were seeing. Then I asked one of the deacons to say something for this special occasion. And he could not speak, he cried and then he said, "I have never believed that I would ever see this with my own eyes!" Then I turned to an old lady, a member of the church and with tears in her eyes she said, "How I wish my mother and father were still alive to see with their own eyes what I see now!" Her father used to be the pastor of the church for a long time. Then he was put to prison as well and he died before the political change in 1989.

At that moment we clearly felt that there is a mighty hand governing even state politics, people and authorities. And at the end this hand protected the small congregations! Many of the church buildings were given back. After we took a look at the empty church building in that town we realized that the baptistery in front of the pulpit was cemented - they wanted to make sure that this building would never again be used as a church. After a good renovation what a joy it was for all the leaders in our country to reopen and rededicate this old Baptist church. Representatives from all over Bulgaria, guests from abroad came to be part of this wonderful rededication. Later on the cemented baptistery was opened again and what a joy it was to see the first new believers baptized there!

For us this is a mighty proof that the power of our Lord is much bigger than the power of all the authorities, even those authorities that think they would rule forever. And all this helped us understand the resurrection in a different way. We saw a real resurrection of a church building, a resurrection of a congregation and new life coming from the same place, which we considered lost forever for faith and worship.

The same thing happened in many places in Eastern Europe where confiscated church buildings were given back and now are full of new believers.

At the end, what can we learn from the history of the Baptist movement on the Balkan Peninsula? Such a difficult area with so many different ethnic groups representing different cultures and different religions. We can learn that the work of the first missionaries, of the first

believers that planted the first Baptist churches, has been a great heritage for all coming generations. The small seeds planted in the beginning produced good fruit and still the Baptist churches on the Balkans continue to develop and grow. They are still minorities surrounded by the main churches - the Orthodox Church and as it is in Croatia the Catholic Church. However, the Baptists are a very important sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in this most difficult area. There have been so many conflicts, so many wars in that area conquered for 500 years by the Muslims and still an area that is open for new mission, for evangelization and for a new success in the Baptist work. A difficult region with a very difficult historical background - Muslim times, fascist times, communist times but at the end a new possibility for a new development appeared. And for all these new possibilities and for the great heritage from our predecessors we can only be thankful to our Lord.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Dadder, D. (1997, May-June). **History of Baptism in Bulgaria.** Bethany, 4, pp. 4-5.
2. Dadder, D. (1997, Aug.). **History of Baptism in Bulgaria.** Bethany, 5, p. 14.
3. Kulichev, Hr. (1994). Heralds of the Truth. Sofia: Bulgarian Bible Society Ltd., pp. 328-345.
4. Syarov, I. (1998). **One Century for the Prayer House in Russe.** Bethany, 8-9, p. 13.
5. Gospodinov, J. (1998). **70th anniversary of the Varna Baptist Church.** Bethany, 8-9, pp. 10-12.
6. **Baptist Herald** (1982, July-Aug.). A People with a Mission, Expanding, pp. 12-14.
7. Wardin, A. (1963). **Baptists in Bulgaria.** Baptist Herald, 14, pp. 10-12.
8. **Ephesians 1:21-22.**