Zdenko Širka[1]

UDK: 274.5(497.113)
342.731(=162.4)(497.113)
Original research paper
Submitted: 21.08.2025.
Accepted: 20.09.2025.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18485/rit.2025.23.44.1

ECUMENISM, RELIGION AND HUMAN FREEDOM IN THE ORTHODOX CONTEXT: SLOVAK LUTHERANS IN VOJVODINA[2]

Abstract: *This text focuses on the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the largest Protestant church in Serbia, which functions as both a religious and ethnic minority within a predominantly Orthodox environment. It highlights the wide network of relations and interactions surrounding this church, emphasizing that the church cannot be understood in isolation from them. The analysis approaches the church's context on both micro and macro levels. On the micro level, it offers theological reflections on practices and rituals within the church, including diaconia and social work, interconfessional marriages, religious education, and ecumenical cooperation. On the macro level, it examines the church's legal position and the laws regulating religious communities, the ecumenical orientation within Orthodoxy, and the ecumenical dialogues of the Serbian Orthodox Church.*

Key words: *Lutheranism; Orthodoxy; ecumenism; Slovak Lutheran Church; religious freedom; diaconia; inter-religious marriages; discrimination*

ЕКУМЕНИЗАМ, РЕЛИГИЈА И ЉУДСКЕ СЛОБОДЕ У ПРАВОСЛАВНОМ КОНТЕКСТУ: СЛОВАЧКИ ЛУТЕРАНИ У ВОЈВОДИНИ

Сажетак: *Овај текст се усредсређује на Словачку евангеличку цркву аугсбуршке вероисповести, највећу протестантску цркву у Србији, која функционише као верска и етничка мањина у претежно православном окружењу. Истиче се широка мрежа односа и интеракција која окружује ову цркву, наглашавајући да се она не може разумети изоловано од тих односа. Анализа приступа контексту постојања цркве на микро и макро нивоу. На микро нивоу нуде се теолошке рефлексије о праксама и обредима унутар цркве, укључујући диаконију и социјални рад, међуконфесионалне бракове, верско образовање и екуменску сарадњу. На макро нивоу разматра се правни положај цркве и закони који регулишу верске заједнице, екуменска оријентација унутар православља и екуменски дијалози Српске православне цркве.*

Кључне речи: *Лутеранство; Православље; екуменизам; Словачка евангеличка црква аугсбуршке вероисповести; верска слобода; диаконија; међуконфесионални бракови; дискриминација.*

---

1 Research Fellow in the Ecumenical Institute, Charles University Prague Protestant Theological Faculty, sirka@etf.cuni.cz, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1573-3800.

2 This work has been supported by Charles University Research Centre program No. UNCE/24/SSH/019.

1. Background

This text is based on the results of the research project *Evangelical Identity in the Orthodox Context*, conducted by the study group of the *Center of Protestant Theology in Eastern Europe* (ZETO) in Sibiu/Hermannstadt (Romania). The goal of ZETO is to enhance the visibility of Protestant churches in the region and to connect Protestant organisations across Eastern Europe within an active and collaborative international network. This objective is grounded in the conviction that the voice of Protestant churches in Eastern Europe is insufficiently represented within the international and ecumenical context (www.zeto-sibiu.net/).

This project ran from 2021 to 2023 and aimed to analyse and reflect on Protestant Lutheran identity in countries with an Orthodox majority. The study group focused on the problem of interconfessional marriages, on education in the Protestant churches, and on Evangelical *diaconia* (Christian social work) in an Orthodox context. Some of the members of the study group were prof. Andreas Pöder from Finland, Bishop Markus Schoch from Georgia, Dr. Bruno Fröhlich from Romania, Dr. Anton Tikhomirow from Russia, Dr. Timea Benkö from Hungary, Dr. Daniel Topalski from Bulgaria, and other representatives from Greece, Poland, Estonia, Ukraine and Macedonia. Representatives of the *Slovak Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Serbia* (SEAVC) were superintendent Igor Feldy, the liason with the Church, and the author of these lines, ecumenical theologian and teacher from the Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic), author of the books on modern Orthodoxy (2020) and on Serbian theologian Justin Popović (2023), and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Nikolajeve Studije*.

The central focus of this study are the Slovak Lutherans in Vojvodina and their Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession. The research pursues two interconnected aims. The first is to examine selected practices within the Church, highlighting some of the everyday challenges, and consequently offering theological reflections. In this regard, attention is given to social service, mixed marriages, legal status, and experiences of discrimination. The second aim is to situate the Church within the broader context in which this religious and ethnic community exists, with particular emphasis on areas of interaction such as religious education and humanitarian social work. Together, these perspectives reveal a complex network of theological and non-theological factors – ecclesial, political, national, social, and demographic – which continually interact to shape the *modus vivendi* of Slovak Lutherans in Vojvodina. Special attention is devoted to describing and analysing the SEAVC's ecumenical engagements. Most arguments are supported by relevant academic literature; in some instances, particularly regarding examples of ecumenical cooperation,

reliance has been placed on reports published online. The internal perspective about their daily experiences is gathered in interviews conducted with several pastors. Except for a few cases, these contributors are not named individually, yet their insights have been invaluable in providing a comprehensive picture of the SEAVC's situation. The theological reflections – whether affirming or critically engaged – are my own and are intended to support the identity and legacy of the Slovak Lutherans in Vojvodina.

The scientific–theoretical frame of reference for the ZETO Study Group and for our approach is provided by the ecumenical "collusion theory" of Peter Lengsfeld (1930–2009), a Roman Catholic theologian of the Catholic Ecumenical Institute in Münster. This framework, published in his *Ökumenische Theologie* (1980), is particularly well suited for discussion with, and about, Orthodoxy.

The "collusion theory" (from the Latin *colludere*, "to play together") assumes that ecumenical encounters are not one-dimensional, but rather that a complex of factors mutually influence one another (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 47–48). Such encounters are never solely about the formal, predetermined content of the conversation; they also involve the so-called non-theological factors (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 45; Širka, 2021). Lengsfeld reduces the interdependent factors to three key dimensions: the question of truth, the question of social form, and the question of identity (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 51). The goal of Lengsfeld's collusion theory is not merely to draw attention to the "previously unrecognized but nevertheless effective factors" (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 45), it is also, and especially, to assist the ecumenical movement through a more realistic diagnosis of the problems it faces, "so as to help in overcoming [them] with all available methods" (Lengsfeld, 1980a: 34; Hollander, 2021: 174). In Eastern and Southeastern Europe, identities are also shaped by cultural and, in part, linguistic factors – elements that cannot be disregarded (Cosoroaba 2021; Lengsfeld, 1980b: 62). Furthermore, a distinction must be drawn between macro and micro levels, since – particularly in pluralistic societies – the doctrinal positions and institutional identity of the churches do not necessarily correspond to the personal attitudes of individual Christians (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 62–63).

Lengsfeld advances the empirical hypothesis that, for Orthodox churches, ecumenical encounters are largely perceived as external relations, having little effect on their internal life (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 63). The importance of context is demonstrated by the differences in practice between Orthodox diaspora churches and their counterparts. The expectation underlying this theoretical framework is that, by addressing the questions of social form and identity, more practical results can be achieved than through the one-sided consideration of doctrinal statements (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 64). Moreover, if ecumenics is understood as a science of action, the process begins with seeing, then analyzing, and finally acting (Lengsfeld, 1980b: 64–65). For this reason, the Study Group intends, in the first instance, to

devote itself to "seeing," in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of ecumenical contacts at both the macro and micro levels (Cosoroaba 2021).

2. Identity and legacy

Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, called also Lutheran, is the largest Protestant church in Serbia, located in Vojvodina, an autonomous province in the Republic of Serbia north of the Sava and Danube. SEAVC represents a unique Lutheran presence within the Vojvodina region of Serbia. Established in the early twentieth century amidst geopolitical shifts following the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, the SEAVC has evolved into a vital ecclesial body, preserving Slovak faith and culture in a minority context. The SEAVC is part of the large family of Protestant Lutheran churches of Western Christianity, whose spirituality is based on the teachings of the 16th-century reformer Dr. Martin Luther (Černy, 2017: 325; Bjelajac, 2002: 169; Kuburić, 2010: 104). The Augsburg Confession – so called because doctrinally it affirms the Augsburg Confession (1530) as central to its identity (Peťkovský, 1980: 3–16).

Headquartered in Novi Sad, SEAVC is led by Bishop Dr. Jaroslav Javorník and organized under an episcopal (seniorát) structure. The Church is grouped into three dioceses: Bačka, Banat, Syrmium, each headed and administered by a superindentent (Senior Dean). The Church is organized into 27 communities and led by 20 pastors. The congregation's governing body is the church general assembly and its executive body is the board of the congregation consisting of the pastor and elders. The entire Church is governed by a synod, the highest administrative and legislative authority, and the bishop is the spiritual head, thus reflecting democratic ecclesial principles deeply rooted in its tradition (World Council of Churches, 2025). Its membership is estimated 50,000, according to the Lutheran World Federation, indicating both steady continuity and the importance of conservative estimations in ecclesial demographics (World Council of Churches, 2025). The SEAVC regularly publishes the monthly *Evanjelický Hlásnik* in 1500 copies and issues the annual *Ročenka*, which provides information on the Church's yearly activities along with religious content, they also print a wall calendar. The SEAVC is an active member of major global Lutheran and ecumenical bodies, including the Lutheran World Federation (1952), the World Council of Churches (joining in 1963), the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Fellowship), and the Conference of European Churches.

SEAVC's historical trajectory aligns closely with broader Lutheran movements in Eastern Europe. Originally part of the broader Lutheran Church in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Church was founded in 1921 by the secession from the Lutheran Church in Hungary (Todorović, 2011: 284; Černi, 2017: 330; Bjelajac, 2002: 173) as *Slovak Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in the*

Kingdom of Yugoslavia and gained autonomy as new nation-states formed after World War I (Vereš, 1930: 7–12), responding to a Slovak-speaking population concentrated in Vojvodina's rural landscape. In 1929, at the Synod in Stara Pazova, Adam Vereš, then a pastor in Ilok (Croatia), was elected as the first bishop (Feldy, 2010: 11–29), and the town of Ilok thus became the episcopal center of the Slovak Lutherans (Milinović, 2011: 319; Branković, 2006: 42). In the new social and political circumstances after WW2, Slovak Lutherans became the leading Evangelical force (Todorović, 2011: 285; Bjelajac, 2002: 171, 174), because the German Evangelical Church was accused of collaboration (Branković, 2006: 53). The clergy and faithful of the Slovak Lutheran Church were not involved in supporting the occupation authorities, and thus the new Yugoslav government viewed the Slovak national minority and Church favorably. There are almost no postwar records indicating religious or national discrimination against Vojvodina Slovaks (Milinović, 2011: 322; Bjelajac, 2003: 62–64).

Culturally, SEAVC has played an enduring role in preserving Slovak language, tradition, and community cohesion among the diaspora. A 2017 publication, *The Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia in Words and Pictures*, provides a richly documented portrayal of the SEAVC's historical impact, from its physical infrastructure and congregational life to its role in education and cultural preservation (Vojnićová-Feldyová 2011). Through its congregations, often the spiritual and social centers of Slovak enclaves, SEAVC has fostered a collective identity that remains vital despite the pressures of assimilation.

Thematically, the SEAVC faces the challenge of maintaining a distinct denominational and national identity within a predominantly Serbian and Orthodox religious landscape. It continues bridging tradition and adaptation – rooted in its Lutheran confession, yet responsive to multiethnic and multilingual realities. As such, SEAVC exemplifies the dynamics of a minority church sustaining ecclesial vitality through strong institutional structures, ongoing theological formation, and enduring commitment to its cultural heritage. Despite having liturgical books only in Slovak language, bishop Jaroslav Javorník underlines: "we can have Serbian services at the request of individual families, mixed marriages, and urban church congregations" (Lutheran World, 2021).

The designation "Slovak" in the SEAVC's name signifies that Slovak is its primary liturgical and communicative language, and that the overwhelming majority of its members are of Slovak ethnicity. This is unsurprising, given that the history of Lutheranism in the region dates to the first half of the eighteenth century, when Evangelical Slovaks from the territory of former Upper Hungary left their homeland and settled along the southern frontier of the Habsburg Empire. Their mass migration was prompted largely by the severe measures of the Counter-Reformation and the re-Catholicization policies of the period (Todorović, 2011: 273, 283; Zlatanović i Marušiak, 2017: 656), mostly coming from

the regions below the Tatras, primarily from the southern parts of what is today central Slovakia. They arrived in these newly depopulated lands seeking better living conditions for their families as well as greater freedom of religion (Černi, 2017: 326, 327). Here, over the course of the past several turbulent centuries, this group of Evangelical Slovak settlers – who today live in several dozen villages and towns – has developed into a distinct and homogeneous community.

In the territory of present-day Vojvodina, Empress Maria Theresa settled many peoples (Bjelajac, 2003: 37; Bjelajac, 2002: 171). The migration of Slovaks took place in three periods: 1690–1710, 1711–1740, and 1740–1790 (Černi, 2017: 329, 333). However, migrations continued throughout the nineteenth century as well. Finally, in 1781, Emperor Joseph II issued a decree known as the *Edict of Toleration*, which abolished serfdom, guaranteed freedom of movement for peasants, and granted them the right to own land. This decree prompted large migrations of Slovaks, Hungarians, Czechs, and Germans to Vojvodina, among whom were also Lutherans and Calvinists (Barišić, 2005: 123). In their new environment, the Slovaks mostly established their own villages, but they also settled in already existing communities inhabited by Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, and other peoples.

An integral part of spiritual life at that time was the preservation of the mother tongue, family and church traditions, and the entire cultural heritage of the Slovak community. Therefore, for the Slovaks in Serbia, alongside the Bible, an important place was held by the well-known collection of church hymns and prayers *Tranoscius*, compiled by Juraj Tranovský, as well as Dr. Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*. For many years, these three books were used to nurture family spirituality and to educate the younger generations within the family circle. Slovaks in Serbia thus occupy a dual minority status – both national (as Slovaks) and confessional (as Evangelical Lutherans) – a position that has played a significant role in shaping their collective identity. However, as sociologist Đorđević observes, although the solidarity between the nation, the minorities, and the church was once very strong, it has recently been undermined, as more and more Slovaks are leaving the Old Protestant faith and joining New Protestant religious communities. This "receptiveness to missionaries of all kinds and the ease of moving from one community to another," which researchers have not yet studied, will not pass without consequences for their cultural identity (Đorđević, 2005: 203–204).

Currently there are 20 pastors in the church. In order to become ordained in the SEAVC and become ordained, a candidate must hold a master's degree in Evangelical theology. Due to the traditional confessional closeness between the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in *Serbia* and Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in *Slovakia* (Klátik 2017), most pastors have undertaken their theological training at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological

Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava. The principal reasons for studying there – beyond historical and theological affinity – include the shared Slovak language, geographical proximity, and the availability of scholarships. The Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty in Bratislava is a secular institution organized under the Bologna system, forming part of Slovakia's largest and highly ranked Comenius university. In earlier decades, applicants were required to present a letter of recommendation from the local bishop; today, admission to the faculty depends solely on passing the entrance interview. During their studies, students frequently participate in research semesters abroad, supported by organizations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Gustav-Adolf-Werk, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, and the Diakonisches Werk. These exchanges provide valuable opportunities for networking and language acquisition.

Ordained ministry begins with a vicariate, during which vicars are assigned to the supervision of an experienced parish pastor who offers guidance and oversight. Two models of vicariate exist: in the first, the vicar is entrusted with a small congregation and operates largely independently with external supervision; in the second, the vicar serves alongside the supervisor in the same parish. The latter model is generally regarded as more effective, as it offers richer learning experiences and better preparation for independent ministry. A vicariate lasts at least one year (no maximum is stipulated) and concludes with pastoral examinations. Candidates are tested orally before a commission composed of the bishop, dean, and synodal secretary. Requirements include mastery of church law, church history, the history of the parish of future service, and the Church's relations with Orthodoxy, as well as the submission of five sermons. Upon passing, the vicar becomes a pastor, eligible for election by a congregation or for application to a vacant pastoral position.

From the early twentieth century, each academic year at the faculty in Bratislava typically enrolled one to three students from Vojvodina, in recent years however, numbers have declined, due to factors such as the limited attractiveness of the pastoral profession (despite high social status in rural settings), low salaries in small congregations, waning youth interest in religion (Kuburić 2005), and the insufficient cultivation of successors by current pastors. This shortage of theology students has translated into a shortage of pastors. The Church has begun to address this trend, but additional benefits could include providing sabbaticals, vehicles for pastors with extensive travel, retirement housing, recognition of non-pastoral contributions (e.g., community work, fundraising, building maintenance), sermon resources, and practical handbooks.

Several questions remain open for discussion: How can the pastoral profession become more attractive? Should the Church rely solely on inner vocation and the call of the Holy Spirit? Will pastors even be needed in the future decades? Should the Church establish its own theological seminary? Should vicariate requirements

be reduced? Is a master's degree in theology essential? Another ongoing debate concerns continuing education. Some argue that pastoral effectiveness depends more on knowing one's parish and its people than on formal study, while others recognize the need for ongoing engagement with topics such as ecumenism, Orthodoxy, media, youth work, systematic theology, ecclesiology, management, practical ministry skills, innovations in homiletics, and liturgical reform. However, limited time and resources constrain such opportunities. Without deliberate investment in seminars, training programs, and workshops, there is a risk that the Church's conservative orientation will deepen, with increasing emphasis on local customs and adiaphora.

3. Legal position

The legal status of religious communities in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes before the Vidovdan Constitution (1921) differed in each of the states that formed the Kingdom of SCS. The religious law of Serbia, which applied to religious communities in Vojvodina, followed the state church system. This means that the Serbian Orthodox Church held the status of a state church, while the Roman Catholic, Evangelical (Lutheran and Calvinist), Jewish, and Islamic communities were recognized (Timotijević, 2022: 86–87; Branković, 2006: 37; Novaković, 2015: 73–74; Milosavljević, 2002: 314). The so-called Vidovdan Constitution (1921) of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes declared all religions were formally equal, but the Serbian Orthodox Church, together with the Roman Catholic Church, held a special privileged position. Only later the state enacted special laws regulated the legal status of other religious communities (April 16, 1930 for Evangelical Churches) (Ilić, 2004: 52).

Under Tito's leadership after the WW2, the Marxist-Leninist ideology promoted the legal separation of religious communities from the state by declaring religion a private matter for each citizen, thereby excluding it from public life. The Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities in the FNRJ (1953) was enacted, followed later by the Constitutional provisions of 1963, which placed members of all religious communities on an equal footing, but with a significantly reduced scope of activity and diminished privileges (Černi, 2017: 331; Samardžić 1984; Božić 2019).

Today, legally and formally, the Slovak Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Serbia enjoys a special position in society, because in the *Law on Churches and Religious Communities of the Republic of Serbia* (2006) it is named among five churches considered to be "traditional churches":

> The status of traditional Church is recognized to Churches with centuries-long historic continuity in Serbia, having acquired legal subjectivity pursuant to separate legislation, those being: the Serbian Orthodox Church,

the Roman Catholic Church, Slovakian Evangelist Church a.v., Christian Reformist Church and the Evangelist Christian Church a.v.

The status of traditional religious communities with centuries-long historic continuity, having acquired legal subjectivity pursuant to separate legislation, those being: the Islamic Religious Community and the Jewish Religious Community. (Law on Churches and Religious Communities 2006: art. 10. Službeni glasnik RS, broj 36/2006)

The Law on Churches and Religious Communities was not passed without controversies (Šljivić and Cvetićanin, 2021: 220). The law introduced a framework that is akin to what Kirsten Ghodsee called "symphonic secularism," characterized by the coexistence of modern secular principles with traditional religious elements rooted in the Orthodox past. In the sphere of church–state–nation relations, this framework effectively extends a *symphonia*-type arrangement even to non-Orthodox religious communities (Ghodsee, 2009: 234, 241–243; Šljivić and Cvetićanin, 2021: 220–221).

The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is guaranteed by Article 43 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Ustav Republike Srbije, 2006: art. 43), it ensures the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to retain one's belief or religion or to change it according to one's own choice. Article 44 of the current Constitution, titled "Churches and Religious Communities," stipulates in Paragraph 1 that all churches and religious communities are equal and separate from the state. Paragraph 2 affirms their rights to self-governance in matters of religious affairs, including the freedom to conduct public worship, establish religious schools, and found social or charitable institutions, managing them in accordance with the law. Paragraph 3 authorizes the Constitutional Court to ban the activities of a religious community only if such activities threaten the right to life, mental or physical health, the rights of children, personal and family integrity, property rights, public safety, or public order, or if they incite or promote religious, national, or racial intolerance. Regarding Articles 43 and 44 of the Constitution Velibor Džomić notes evident imprecision and the bias of the constitution-maker, as a result of which the Constitution is "additionally burdened without justified reason" (Džomić, 2016: 38; Novaković, 2015: 78–79).

As Šljivić and Cvetićanin observe, both the Constitution of Serbia (2006) and the Law on Churches and Religious Communities (2006) draw a linguistic distinction between "churches" and "religious communities," and also a legal distinction between "traditional" and "non-traditional" groups. The former is purely nominal, without legal effect, but indicates that legislators likely had Christian-type organizations in mind – those that conventionally use the designation "church." The latter, however, has substantial legal consequences, as it accords "traditional" status to churches and religious communities recognized

before 1945. This designation entitles them to representation in various state-established bodies and enables formal cooperation with public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and the armed forces (Šljivić and Cvetićanin, 2021: 220–221). Still, the Serbian Orthodox Church is privileged, as is recognized its "historical, state-creating and civilizational role in shaping, preserving and developing the identity of the Serbian people" (Zakon o crkvama i verskim zajednicama 2006: art. 11). Although SOC no longer holds the status of a state religion, its role as the essential national church has, de facto, not been taken away. Šljivić and Cvetićanin would say that Church–state relationship is Serbia demonstrates many traits that can be traced to the Byzantine *symphonia* tradition (Šljivić and Cvetićanin, 2021: 210).

That not everything is ideal is evident also from the *Report on Serbia* by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2007), which states that "religious minorities are currently facing a negative climate" and their members are often attacked and their places of worship damaged (Evropska komisija protiv rasizma i netolerancije, 2007: art. 45, 52). The Commission therefore calls on the Serbian authorities to amend the Law on Churches and Religious Communities in order to bring it fully into line with international and European standards on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

Angela Ilić lists several incidents that happened, and many leaders of some minority religious communities in the interviews her with acknowledge that discrimination on religious grounds in Serbian society exists (Ilić, 2004: 69–71). She mentions also *International Religious Freedom Report 1999* of the U.S. State Department that found that in Serbia "in practice, both the government and the legal system provide very little protection of the religious rights of minority groups."

Rights for religious freedom and mutual respect are often absent also on the local level, since local Orthodox priests and believers consider the Evangelical church to be a sect. Why is that? The first answer is – education, as there is an obvious limited knowledge of other religious communities; the suggestion is that such accusations more often represents their national and political attitudes than their Christian convictions. One must note that Vojvodina is the only multi-national and multi-confessional part of Serbia, traditionally respectful toward pluralism, and this has been troubled in the nineties when many immigrants arrived from former Yugoslav republics as a result of Balkan civil wars and settled in Vojvodina, unaware of local situation, bringing more radical retorics.

In both academic discourse and media coverage, insufficient attention is devoted to the accurate designation of certain religious communities, denominations, and churches. For example, Biljana Đurđević-Stojković in her book *Verske sekte i pokreti: lovci na duše* (2000) considers Slovak Evangelical Church to be a sect. The book *Religious Sects and Orthodoxy*, written by Zoran Luković, a former police captain who until recently served in the Belgrade Ministry of the

Interior with responsibility for sects and is a member of the European Federation for Research and Information on Sectarianism, is also frequently cited as a "proof" that Slovak Lutherans constitute a sect (Luković 2003). Terminology is frequently applied in an inconsistent and unprofessional manner, with interchangeable use of synonyms, abbreviations, colloquial expressions, slang. Such inconsistency fosters confusion, redundancy, and misrepresentation of reality. At the same time, Protestant communities themselves have shown little initiative in addressing what may seem a minor concern. Invoking the principle of religious and organizational autonomy, few have undertaken a systematic effort to resolve these discrepancies (Barišić, 2005: 124–125).

4. Orthodoxy and Ecumenism

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) formally entered the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1965 during the patriarchate of German (Jović, 2017: 14; Simić, 2020: 6), who subsequently served as one of WCC presidents from 1968 to 1975, a role that underscored the SOC's early dedication to fostering inter-Christian dialogue. Since that time, the SOC has maintained an active presence within the WCC, regularly delegating representatives to its assemblies and theological consultations, as well as participating in various bilateral dialogues. One of the first people who participated in bilateral dialogues on behalf of SOC was Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956), later Bishop of Ohrid. In 1915, together with a group of Serbian theologians who left the country during the First World War, Velimirović participated in dialogue with representatives of the Anglican Church (Rouse and Neill, 1954: 651). In exile after 1946, he again intersected with organized ecumenism, for example he attended the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Evanston (1954) as an accredited visitor (Velimirović, 1986: 42–46).

Rastko Jović strongly underlines how political situation always directly affected the ecemenical involvement (Jović, 2017: 15–16). For example, the communist régime in Yugoslavia and strong relation with the Russian Orthodox Church prevented SOC entering the WCC already at its founding meeting in 1948. Later on, during the Yugoslav civil wars (1991–1995), the political situation significantly reshaped the World Council of Churches' policy toward the Serbian Orthodox Church. The international community identified Serbia as solely responsible for all crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which consequently fostered anti-Western sentiment within Serbia and further strained relations with the WCC (Vukašinović, 2005: 369–379). Certain WCC member churches also pressed for the SOC's expulsion from membership because of the situation in Yugoslavia (Jović, 2017: 15; Avramov, 2000: 199).

Given these factors, the SOC's engagement with the WCC has been largely subdued, consisting mainly of intermittently dispatching delegations to selected ecumenical forums. The disintegration of both Yugoslavia and Serbia fostered a broader disillusionment with projects of unity at any level, revealing the limited traction of theology when confronted by deep-rooted political interests. This, in turn, helps explain the SOC's present reticence – its relative passivity in contemporary WCC dialogue (Jović, 2014: 359).

Further problems for the Orthodoxy began with the withdrawal of the Georgian and Bulgarian Churches from the WCC in 1997 and 1998 (Jović, 2014: 358; Simić, 2020: 6). On the eve of these developments, the Holy Synod of the SOC sought to help resolve the issue. At the joint initiative of the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches, an inter-Orthodox consultation was convened in Thessaloniki in 1998 to consider the future prospects of the Orthodox Church within the ecumenical movement. In the final report, the necessity of further participation in the ecumenical dialogue is particularly emphasized (Basdekis, 2006: 723–727).

As a member of the WCC since 1965, the SOC has walked a fine line between ecumenical engagement and safeguarding Orthodox integrity, as its hierarchy has often emphasized the imperative of Christian unity. In this patriarchs Irinej (2010–2020) and the current patriarch Porfirije (2021 to the present) must be appraised for their optimism in the dialogue with other confessions and accentuated necessity for their ecumenical dialogue (Jović, 2014: 362).

Ecumenical milestone in this sense was the biannual consultation of *Societas Oecumenica* in 2010 that was held on the premises and at the invitation of the Serbian Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade (Ilić, 2020: 418; de Mey 2012). Even more significant public ecumenical milestone occurred in 2018, when Vojvodina co-hosted the 5th General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Novi Sad, it was the first time a CEC assembly met in the Balkans. For the first time, the Serbian Orthodox Church entered into partnership with traditional Protestant churches, as there were four Serbian member churches of CEC that formally hosted the Assembly alongside the Serbian Orthodox Church, Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia, the Reformed Christian Church, and the United Methodist Church. The event involved local congregations, clergy, and laity from various denominations, and grounded European ecumenical dialogue in a multi-confessional Serbian context (Ilić, 2020: 416–417).

On the other hand, Serbian church leaders have periodically voiced concerns when ecumenical activities seemed to compromise Orthodox principles. For the last twenty years, Artemije Radosavljević has been the major representative of anti-ecumenism, his aim is to to stop the dialogue (Radosavljević 2004; Jović, 2014: 362). In his view, the contemporary ecumenical movement is an attempt to re-establish Christian unity on the basis of a "compromise between

truth and falsehood," one that "confuses moral and spiritual values" (Radosavljević, 2005: 317; Nikolić, 2008: 109–110), it is a "a fabrication of the primordial serpent [based on] lies and hypocrisy" (Radosavljević, 2005: 317). Proceeding from these spiritual and theoretical premises, Bishop Artemije argues that today's "practical ecumenism" among many Protestants and Orthodox – which entails joint prayers and, in some contexts, even intercommunion – has not produced the unification of all "churches," but rather has deepened divisions within the One Church of Christ. This, he contends, means that different faiths must not be mingled, nor should points of contact be sought among them for the sake of achieving a "false, worldly goal" (Radosavljević, 2005: 318). Therefore, the Orthodox should not share common religious rites or prayer fellowships with those of other confessions; "and all together, or each individually, following its inner call, should withdraw from the World Council of Churches, cease liturgical and practical participation in the heresy of ecumenism, and thus bear witness before the whole world that the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church was, is, and will be the Orthodox Church; that outside her there is no Church, and that without the Church and unity with the Church there is no salvation" (Radosavljević, 2004: 45–46).

In a similar vein – though in less radical terms – speaks Atanasije Jevtić about what he methodologically defines as "Orthodox ecumenism" (Jevtić, 2005: 181). It rests upon a "rightly understood and lived Christology," upon which a "right ecclesiology" is then founded. Such a methodological conception implies that a "faulty Western ecclesiology" stems from a "faulty understanding and experience of the Mystery of Christ" (Jevtić, 2005: 182). According to Bishop Atanasije, in Orthodoxy all unity is grounded in Christ and is the work of the Holy Spirit – namely, of His "power, activity, and grace" (ibid.). A conception of unity that, methodologically speaking, is based on compromise is, in his view, a "product of contemporary Western ecumenism," which is indeed a "thirst for lost Christian unity," but also "evidence of the tragedy of the schism of Western Christianity, which has no unity with the Church" (Jevtić, 2005: 185). It is an indirect product of Papism, "for it was born of Protestantism separated from Roman Catholicism," which seeks renewal "upon the ruined edifice of the Church, on a faulty ecclesiology and a distorted Christology," and is therefore "un-evangelical and un-ecclesial," "without repentance and love of humility, and often without faith, without grace, and without the Holy Spirit" (ibid.; Nikolić, 2008: 106–107).

Both these authors represent an anti-ecumenical stance in certain circles of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which stems in part from their interpretations of the theological legacy of Dr. Justin Popović (1894–1979).

Those who refer in this and similar ways to Justin's anti-ecumenical ideas usually cite his book *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* from 1974. However, as Jevtić, one of the editors of this book, points out, that we must not forget that

this work is a compilation of interwar texts hastily gathered together, because at the time of its publication Justin was working on the third volume of his *Dogmatics* (Jevtić, 2010: 2). The book *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* shows that Justin was critical of the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism because, in his view, they placed man at the center of their faith and expelled the God-Man (Popović, 2001: 136–139).

Nevertheless, the new impulse for this discussion has been brought by the recent publication of notes newly discovered in Justin's handwritten legacy, which appeared in 2010 as *Notes on Ecumenism* (Jevtić 2010). These notes date from the same period when Justin was preparing the above-mentioned book on the Orthodox Church and ecumenism, but were not included in it. The discovery of these notes confirmed the assumption that Justin *was* an ecumenical theologian, although this is not very evident from his original book (1974). Notes show that his position on ecumenism was not as negative (Vidović, 2014: 265), but above all they indicate that Justin's discussion of ecumenism concerned primarily the doctrine of the Church.

At this point, it is particularly important to recognize that Father Justin's views on ecumenism were a response to the post-war developments in the ecumenical movement. Justin was familiar with the events in the ecumenical movement from its very beginnings, even though he never personally attended any meetings. He was informed about the first World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in Lausanne in 1927 by several direct participants whom he personally knew (e.g. Metropolitan Dositej of Warsaw, Bishop Irinej of Bačka, and Professor Nikolaj Glubokovskij). At the second World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in Edinburgh in 1937, no one from the Serbian Orthodox Church was present. However, his friend Georges Florovsky did attend and was elected the only Orthodox member of the fourteen-member council tasked with initiating the formation of the World Council of Churches (Cvetković, 2015: 245-246; Širka, 2022: 73). At the second assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston (1954), Justin's teacher Nikolaj Velimirović was present. This assembly was evaluated very positively by the Orthodox participants, as they were able to contribute by sharing their Orthodox perspective. Justin was informed about all these events, as well as about the meeting between Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI in 1964 (Širka, 2024: 202).

These historical contexts help explain Justin's distinction between ecumenism (= Orthodox ecumenism or God-Man ecumenism) and the ecumenical movement (= Roman–Genevan ecumenism). According to Justin, Orthodox ecumenism is based on the close connection between Christology and ecclesiology, with ecclesiology derived from Christology, because the whole Truth lies in the Incarnation, and the body of this Truth is the body of the Church. For Justin, the ecumenism and catholicity (in his words: *sobornost*) of the Church can be true

and correct only when they maintain this God-Man perspective. Justin does not criticize ecumenism as such, but rather the style and manner of ecumenical dialogue in his time. He disagrees with the Geneva-style ecumenical dialogue and rejects the so-called *branch theory*. The branch theory is very widespread; its basic idea is that Christian churches represent individual branches of one Christian tree and are thus parts of the same body. Justin considers this notion to be a Western innovation from the sixteenth century and sees no organic connection between ecumenical councils and the early Church or the teachings of the Church Fathers (Širka, 2024: 204–205).

Hence, the attitudes of Justin that critically deal with ecumenism mainly address the wrong tendencies in the ecumenical movement; he is not principally against the idea of dialogue with non-Orthodox churches. For Justin, dialogue with the non-Orthodox is not a heresy; he rather criticizes its method and themes, and criticizes the ideology of ecumenism as a sort of new Christianity. Justin understands himself as European, part of Europe, *nolens volens*, so the critique is not coming from outside, but it is a critique of self-alienation from its own roots – a concern that shows how Justin cares about Europe (Širka, 2018: 343). This has been confirmed also in 2019 at the international conference *Thought and Mission of St. Justin Popović*, organized in Belgrade on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his birth and the 40th anniversary of his death (Širka 2019a). Among other points, it was emphasized that a critical approach cannot be excluded, nor can Popović be portrayed as an ecumenically open theologian, as he was not; yet, at the same time, his thought system was not hermetically closed to any dialogue, and Justin's theology is much broader than it appears (Bremer 2019), it was also pointed out that Justin's relationship with Lutheran theology is more diverse and closer than has been understood so far (Širka 2019; Širka 2021a).

5. Dialogues with Roman Catholics and Protestant Lutherans

The most intensive ecumenical engagement of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) has been with the Roman Catholic Church. Over the past two decades, relations have undergone a notable evolution: initial, tentative contacts – long overshadowed by historical mistrust – have gradually yielded to regular meetings, reciprocal visits, and concrete joint initiatives. A significant early marker was the 2004 memorandum between the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade and the Catholic Theological Faculty in Zagreb, signaling that both institutions were willing to move beyond a negative political climate in order to cultivate a more credible theological – and, indeed, Christian – witness of cooperation and understanding (Jović, 2014: 361; Kopilović, 2008: 394).

At the pan-church level, in 2005 the Catholic and Orthodox Churches agreed to restart their long-stalled *Joint International Commission for the Theological*

Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The SOC played a prominent role by hosting the Commission's ninth plenary session in Belgrade (18–25 September 2006), where Patriarch Pavle personally welcomed the 30 Catholic and 30 Orthodox delegates in the Patriarchal Chapel and prayed for their "dialogue of love and truth" (Kopilović, 2008: 394; Ninth Plenary Session 2006).

The reciprocal tone was visible at moments of mourning and transition. Upon Patriarch Pavle's death in November 2009, Pope Benedict XVI praised his "witness of faith" amid hardship and his dedication to "the great cause of reconciliation and peace," urging that his memory inspire perseverance along the path of dialogue toward full communion (Benedict XVI 2009). Likewise, when Patriarch Irinej (1930-2020) – a moderate voice, known for proposing a papal visit to Serbia in connection with the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan (Catholic World News, 2012) died of COVID-19, the Vatican hailed him as "an example of faith and dialogue, humble and joyful," who fostered a genuine "spirit of communion" (Vatican News, 2020).

The SOC participates also in *The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue* between the Lutherans (via the Lutheran World Federation) and Orthodox. This Commission started in 1981 in Espoo, Finland, and has met regularly since then. The primary representative for SOC in key sessions (2017, 2023, 2024) has been Prof. Dr. Rade Kisić from the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, who continues to serve as a regular Orthodox voice in this dialogue. But this dialogue does not happen on the local ground, and not with SEAVC representatives.

The early 2000s marked a new chapter in church relations between SEAVC and SOC. Reintroduced religious education in public schools (2021) signaled a willingness of SOC and minority churches to work together on issues of common concern – in this case, educating the next generation. Concrete steps toward cooperation also took place in the public sphere. In 2011, the Serbian government and religious leaders instituted military chaplaincy for the armed forces – a project requiring joint agreement of the SOC and other traditional churches. That year, Defense Minister Dragan Šutanovac signed formal protocols with the SOC Patriarch and with the heads of six other recognized faiths (including the Slovak Evangelical bishop) to establish religious services in the Army of Serbia (Radio-televizija Vojvodine 2012). Patriarch Irinej co-signed the agreement on the Orthodox side, and the SEAVC's bishop (then Bishop Samuel Vrbovský) signed on behalf of the Lutheran community. This was a symbolic milestone: it showed the SOC's willingness to collaborate with the SEAVC in an official capacity.

Despite these positive steps, mutual perceptions in the early 2000s were often fraught with suspicion. The 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia (perceived by some as an assault led by Western Protestant nations) had strained Orthodox-Protestant

relations (Yoder 2000). In the early post-war period, extremist media and self-styled "sectologists" fueled public distrust of all non-Orthodox groups. For over two decades, tabloid and even state media portrayed Protestants and evangelicals in a negative light (Bjelajac 2014). During 2000–2005, dozens of incidents of vandalism and hate speech targeted Protestant churches annually, reflecting lingering distrust at the local level (Bjelajac 2014). However, even in this tense climate there were early signs of dialogue.

Regarding ecumenical dialogue at the highest church leadership level, direct bilateral dialogues between the SOC and the local Lutheran Church have been occasional but symbolically important. In September 2005, the SOC hosted a high-level delegation from the Church of Sweden (Lutheran) – reportedly the first official visit of Swedish Lutheran leaders to the Serbian Patriarchate. During this trip (September 9–15, 2005), Swedish bishops met with Patriarch Pavle and SOC hierarchs, marking a historic ecumenical encounter. The Serbian Orthodox Church's news service noted this as a milestone visit, coming at a time when Serbia was reopening to international church contacts after the Milosevic era (News, 2005). Although details of the discussions were not widely publicized, the very fact of Lutheran bishops being received at the Patriarchate signaled a growing openness. Around the same time, Serbian government officials publicly lauded inter-church harmony. In November 2005, Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica praised "the present state of the relationship between religious communities in Serbia," emphasizing dialogue and tolerance as keys to democratization (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2005).

Interactions between the Serbian Orthodox Church and Protestant (especially Lutheran) communities became more frequent in broader ecumenical gatherings and inter-church dialogue forums. A highlight was already mentioned Serbia's hosting of the Conference of European Churches General Assembly in Novi Sad, 31 May–6 June 2018. The event Conference of European Churches was co-hosted by all four Serbian member churches of CEC: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Church in Serbia, and the Methodist Church (Conference of European Churches, 2018). Patriarch Irinej and Slovak Bishop Vrbovský both welcomed hundreds of delegates from across Europe. The biblical theme was "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), explored through the lenses of witness, justice, and hospitality. The opening worship in Novi Sad's city square featured contributions from multiple traditions—including a combined choir that sang Orthodox liturgical music – symbolizing the unity of purpose (Conference of European Churches, 2018). During the Assembly's Sunday program, international delegates fanned out to attend local services of each host church, from the Orthodox liturgy at St. George's in Novi Sad to worship at the Slovak Evangelical congregation. This marked the first time the SOC and SEAVC jointly hosted a major pan-European church gathering, and it required close

cooperation and mutual hospitality. Observers noted that Vojvodina's multi-ethnic, multi-faith character provided a fitting backdrop for such ecumenical encounter (Conference of European Churches, 2018). The success of the 2018 CEC Assembly demonstrated a maturing relationship – the SOC publicly affirmed the Slovak Church as a respected partner in Serbia's Christin witness.

Another remarkable development was the Serbian state's recognition of Protestant contributions during the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. In October 2017, a series of high-profile events in Belgrade commemorated Martin Luther's Reformation – a striking gesture in a predominantly Orthodox country. The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, personally sponsored a conference on October 25, 2017 at the Palace of Serbia, inviting representatives of all Protestant churches. His envoy formally welcomed Protestant church leaders and international guests, including foreign ambassadors (Bjelajac 2017). Speakers (Protestant and others) highlighted the global impact of the Reformation and also its influence on the Balkans. A few days later, on October 29, a large public celebration was held in Belgrade's Kolarac Hall, drawing a packed audience to mark the occasion. These events were notable for the inclusive atmosphere – attendees included not only Lutherans, Reformed, Baptists, Adventists and other Protestants, but also observers from the Serbian Orthodox and other communities (Bjelajac 2017). Such gatherings provided a rare opportunity for Orthodox and Protestant clergy to appear together in a positive context.

In the early 2020s, the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Slovak Evangelical Church reached perhaps its warmest level in recent history. Church leaders regularly exchanged formal visits and messages of goodwill. After the enthronement of His Holiness Porfirije as the new Serbian Patriarch in February 2021, Bishop Jaroslav Javorník of the SEAVC publicly congratulated Porfirije and affirmed the Lutherans' prayerful support for his patriarchate (Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central & South America, 2021).

A landmark moment for the Slovak Church came in June 2022, when it celebrated the 100th anniversary of its autonomy. On 22 June 2022 a festive centennial worship service was held at the Lutheran church in Novi Sad, marking a century since the SEAVC's founding as an independent body in 1921 (Drobena 2022). The celebration drew a broad ecumenical and international turnout. Bishops and clergy from numerous churches attended – including delegates from the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Serbia, alongside Lutheran leaders from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, and beyond. The presence of Orthodox bishops as "ecumenical guests" was especially noted. They joined in offering congratulations and even participated in the subsequent fellowship events. State dignitaries also attended, underlining that the Slovak Church is regarded as an integral part of Serbia's religious heritage. Bishop Jaroslav Javorník presided over the jubilee service and welcomed the Orthodox guests, emphasizing

Christian unity in his remarks. The centennial events thus became a celebration *not only* of the Lutheran community, but of inter-church friendship in Serbia.

Interfaith and national events have similarly featured both churches side by side. On 17 September 2024, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Belgrade held a solemn Mass for its own 100th anniversary, officiated by Vatican Cardinal Pietro Parolin. At this state-level celebration in Belgrade's Catholic cathedral, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić sat in the front row *along with* Patriarch Porfirije of the SOC, the Reis-ul-ulema of the Islamic community, Bishop Javorník of the Slovak Evangelical Church, and other leaders (Dnevni list Danas, 2024). In a true portrait of Serbia's religious coexistence, the Slovak Lutheran bishop extended official congratulations on behalf of his church and "*highlighted the importance of mutual cooperation between denominations"* in his address (Legíňová, 2024). The mere fact that the Patriarch and the Lutheran Bishop attended this jubilee together – each in full clerical attire – and exchanged greetings around the event, demonstrates how far the relationship has progressed. Both churches now publicly acknowledge each other's role in promoting spiritual and social values in Serbia.

The SOC continued to extend public courtesies to the Slovak Lutheran community. For instance, the Serbian Patriarch regularly included the Slovak Evangelical bishop in holiday greetings. On Christmas 2024 (Western calendar), Patriarch Irinej sent formal blessings not only to the Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury but also "bishop of the Slovak Evangelical Church, Rev. Jaroslav Javornik" (Radio Glas, 2024). These gestures of recognition underscored the SOC leadership's respect for the SEAVC's presence and its festivities.

Perhaps more important than formal doctrinal debate has been a growing pragmatic understanding between the SOC and the SEAVC about each other's roles. The SEAVC has explicitly defined its mission in terms that respect Orthodox sensibilities. Bishop Jaroslav Javorník, who was installed as head of the Slovak Lutheran Church on Reformation Day 2020, stated that "The SEAVC does not engage in missionary activities. We live amid an Orthodox society and see our church's only calling and task to provide spiritual care for Slovak Lutheran Christians. This is what our constitution…and the name 'Slovak Lutheran Church' obliges us to do" (Lutheran World, 2021). In other words, the Lutheran Church in Serbia focuses on ministering to its own ethnic community and purposefully avoids proselytizing among Orthodox Serbs. This stance is crucial for maintaining harmony: it assures the SOC that the Lutherans are not competing for the souls of Orthodox faithful. It also reflects a theological live-and-let-live approach – the Lutherans recognize Serbia as Orthodox heartland and seek simply to preserve their own heritage within it. This is also why the Synodal Presbytery decided to award Alexander Vučić, the President of Serbia, for all his outstanding merits, the highest Golden Order, 1st Class, of SEAVC "for all your help and commitment, that the Slovak Evangelical people in Serbia enjoy the highest possible support" (Javorník, 2024).

The story of the last two decades is ultimately one of gradual rapprochement. The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Lutheran communities have learned to cooperate in practical ways, to acknowledge each other's contributions, and to engage in dialogue about the nation's moral and spiritual direction. The minority Lutheran presence is now largely seen by the SOC as a partner in serving society and a fellow witness to Christianity in a changing world.

6. Religious education

The best example of ecumenical cooperation between different confessions in Serbia has been the initiative to introduce *religious education* into Serbian schools in 2001 (Jović, 2011: 78–89; Kuburić and Vukomanović, 2006: 107; Kuburić and Zuković, 2010: 32). Namely, in 2001, Serbia opted for a confessional, segregated, multi-denominational model of religious education that may be conducted in public schools by seven "traditional" religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Islamic Community, the Jewish Community, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Christian Reformed Church and the Evangelical Christian Church in Serbia-Vojvodina.

The legal regulation defines religious education as an elective subject and places it alongside another alternative subject of an ethical-humanistic nature, which may be chosen instead of religious education. Religious education or the alternative subject is taught for one class period per week. For primary school students, parents or guardians decide whether the child will attend religious education or the alternative subject (Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, 46–2001; Ilić, 2005: 279; Ilić, 2004: 61). However, in 2002–2003, a new regulation made the choice of one of the two subjects compulsory. The decision was argued as a result of the unexpectedly low interest of school students in both subjects, and especially in religious education (Kuburić and Vukomanović, 2006: 111). Religious education in Serbia is implemented by some 1500 teachers, divided as follows by confession: 1200 Orthodox; over 200 Catholic; 50 Slovak Evangelical; 40 Muslim; 19 Reformed; 5 from the Evangelical Christian Church of Augsburg Confession; and one Jewish (Aleksov, 2004: 345).

Although the SOC was the chief proponent of the initiative to introduce religious education into state schools (Aleksov, 2004: 341), it is argued that all denominations should have their own religious education, respecting diversity and multiculturalism in Serbia (Jović, 2014: 360). This development has represented a significant step toward fostering mutual understanding among the diverse religious communities in Serbia. In this context, religious education – though confessional in nature – engages with and explores the Christian heritage shared by numerous Protestant communities residing in the country.

It should be mentioned that the selection of only seven religious communities authorized to provide religious education in state schools sets a significant precedent, as the previous legislation did not differentiate between religious communities (Aleksov, 2004: 343). Smaller religious groups were particularly disadvantaged by this new definition, which was introduced at a time when an intense public campaign against their practices was underway, leading to numerous physical attacks on their facilities and members. Furthermore, one traditional church – the Romanian Orthodox Church, which operates officially in the Banat region – was excluded from the list of seven recognized religious communities. This omission takes on added significance given that its members belong to the Romanian ethnic minority, whose children are legally entitled to instruction in their mother tongue and, accordingly, to religious education within the framework of the state school system (Aleksov, 2004: 343).

As in other post-socialist countries, the dominant argument in favour of religious education was the assertion that it had been undemocratically abolished by the communist authorities following the Second World War. Other reasons for the introduction of religious education in Serbia are grounded in a range of rights guaranteed by international agreements: the right to education, the right to adopt one's own worldview, the right to practise religion, and the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religious convictions (Aleksov, 2004: 341–342), in order to develop tolerance, and avoid religious fundamentalism. (Trajković, 2020: 213). Kuburić and Zuković note that a considerable number of students who have opted for religious education emphasize the positive impact it has had on their personal development, specifically stating that "49.4% of them point out that attending this subject thus far has had a significant influence on the development of their personality and on changes in their behavior" (Kuburić and Zuković, 2010: 172; Trajković, 2020: 213).

Various authors warn that the introduction of religious education is a sign that there has been a shift from secularization toward desecularization in Serbia, likely as a consequence of the crisis and the collapse of the system of values in society. This change is reflected in the fact that religion is gradually becoming increasingly important for the social and cultural life of society as a whole (Kuburić and Zuković, 2010: 22; Blagojević, 2006; Vukomanović, 2008).

7. Humanitarian work and diaconia

Concerning ecumenical cooperation on the practical level, the Christian social work (diaconia) is a good example. There is the *Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization* (EHO), one of the largest NGOs in Serbia, with its seat in Novi Sad and active in Vojvodina since 1993. EHO has been found on the initiative of the

World Council of Churches, and developed a wide network, providing significant assistance to refugees during the Yugoslav wars (Milinović, 2011: 323).

Its current members are the Slovak Evangelical [Lutheran] Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia, the Reformed Christian Church in Serbia, the Methodist Church in Serbia, the Greek Catholic Church in Vojvodina, and the Evangelical Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession in Vojvodina-Serbia. Notably, the Serbian Orthodox Church initially participated in EHO's founding, but later withdrew and established its own charity (Philanthropy/Čovekoljublje) (Ilić, 2020: 418). This left EHO as a unique ecumenical alliance primarily of Protestant and Catholic minority churches – a rarity in Serbia.

> The organization's founding was prompted by a specific reason, by:
> "the desire to respond in an organized and efficient way to the needs of the vulnerable population of Vojvodina, regardless of religious or national affiliation, and to provide them with appropriate humanitarian assistance (primarily in the form of medicines, hygiene products and firewood)." (https://ehons.org/en/portrait)

Over the years, the organisation has adjusted its mission to address the evolving needs of society, gradually shifting its focus toward development-oriented programmes and projects. In this process, EHO transformed from an organisation primarily engaged in the distribution of humanitarian aid into one that provides comprehensive support to diverse vulnerable groups within society (Parnická, 2010). Its geographical reach has also expanded, moving from activities concentrated in Vojvodina to operations spanning the entire territory of Serbia. This progression reflects a transition from serving primarily the church to serving society as a whole.

Though rooted in Christian principles, EHO functions as a broad humanitarian and development organization addressing a wide spectrum of social needs, employing dozens of staff members and mobilising hundreds of volunteers in the implementation of its humanitarian initiatives, its work is multifaceted, ranging from emergency relief to long-term community development. Their activities are project-based, so are neither systematic nor structured. However, EHO possesses valuable expertise, skills and capabilities, which are often utilized by the government to meet its demands. For instance, one such project is Children on the Streets in Novi Sad, where the municipality commissioned and compensated EHO for their services.

Key areas of EHO's activity include: area of civil society (migration, empowerment of marginalized groups, integration), area of social welfare protection (home assistance, developmentally challenged children, daily care, youth with disabilities), in the area of diakonia (cancer patients, people with disabilities, support to seniors, second hand clothing), in the area of interfaith and interethnic work

(ecumenical women's work, reconciliation education), in the area of humanitarian work (floods response, humanitarian assistance, empowerment of refugee women and children). A significant portion of EHO's activities involves Roma people, including education, support and integration.

EHO receives funding for their activities primarily from international donors. These include funding from European secular institutions, but mostly from Protestant organizations such as: Hoffnung für Osteuropa, Swiss Church Aid (HEKS), Diakonie Württemberg, Brot für die Welt, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Amt für Mission, Gustav Adolf Werk, and many others.

EHO's theological orientation is explicitly ecumenical and inclusive. It operates on the principle that Christians of different confessions can work together for the common good. The organization's very structure, comprising multiple denominations, embodies a commitment to unity in diversity. EHO, however, represents the open, dialogical face of Serbian Christianity, emphasizing that serving others and witnessing Christian love transcends doctrinal boundaries. It maintains a diaconal, reconciling approach rather than engaging in theological polemics. EHO's work can be described as truly ecumenical humanitarian service, grounded in values of justice, compassion, and reconciliation shared across the member churches.

SEAVC is a very important member. Not only as one of the founders of the organisation, but the majority of international donors are Protestant organisations. Still, this does not mean EHO formally or more intensive collaborate with SEAVC. Most of Lutheran pastors do not cooperate with EHO at all, and believers are mostly not even familiar with EHO or its association with SEAVC. The clients of EHO (including Orthodox believers and non-believers/atheists) are often unaware that the aid and support they receive is provided by Protestant organisations. This does not imply that Lutheran believers are overlooked or excluded in EHO activities: if there is a need, if there is an idea, if there is funding available, the EHO will provide their expertise *also* for needs in Lutheran parishes. One illustration of such collaboration is in caregiving at the parish Pivnice, where a group of women provides care for the elderly. Despite this project being funded by the Württemberg Lutheran Church, the funding goes through EHO who does all administration and accounting, including caregiver selection and training, while the local pastor handles only logistics.

One of EHO's flagship projects in inter-church dialogue was the *School of Ecumenism*, an educational project aimed at building tolerance and sustainable peace in the Western Balkans. The School was launched in 2007 as a funded project (2007–2012), in 2009 renamed to *Regional School of Ecumenism*. The follow up project 2013–2016 was not so effective. In practice, the School functioned as a series of workshops, courses, and conferences bringing together theology students, clergy, lay leaders, and civil society activists from different faith backgrounds.

The core goal of the School was to equip participants with knowledge and relationships to become peacemakers and bridge-builders among religious communities. School provideed a forum to learn about each other's traditions and to address shared social concerns through a faith perspective. Overall, between 2007 and the mid-2010s, more than 200 participants completed the School's courses. From 2006 to 2013 the School published four collections of texts (Ecumenical Proceedings), where authors from various confessions contributed with their articles, essays, reports, as such these proceedings are a rare source of insight into the situation.

The curriculum was broadened in 2014 with an "extensive approach" to reach more students and enable more interreligious meetings. A pinnacle event in this period was the international conference held in November 2015 in Belgrade, titled "Political Theology: Theological Reflection on Contemporary Politics," this conference was co-organized by EHO's School of Ecumenism in partnership with several ecumenical networks and institutes. This conference's proceedings were later published as an edited volume, *Theology and the Political: Theo-political Reflections on Contemporary Politics in Ecumenical Conversation* (Brill, 2020), highlighting the scholarly contribution of the School. The book is "the fruit of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant conversations from East and West" and explores how different Christian traditions can critique both society and themselves in the pursuit of peace and justice.

The School of Ecumenism thus served as a formative ecumenical training ground for the next generation of church and NGO leaders in the region. Unfortunately, no explicit updates or references to the School's activities after 2015 appear on EHO's website or in later reports. Their 25-Year Report (2015) stands that School of Ecumenism in 2013–2016 is expanding in scope and method (Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, 2019), but it seems that the mentioned international conference in November 2015 was its only (and last) activity.

8. Congregational social work

One of the possible reasons for less frequent cooperation between EHO and local parishes in the field of diakonia (Christian social wok) might be the fact that the diaconal work on the local level is carried out by the *Women's Altar Guilds* (WAG), that are locally responsible for congregational diaconal and social work. These Guilds exist in almost every parish, the oldest was has been found in 1924, but the others are much younger (SEAVC, 2024). They are typically comprised of women who identify elderly persons requiring aid, collect funds amongst themselves, and distribute relief – mainly in the form of medicine and groceries – to said persons. Their diaconal work is associated with pastoral visits, involving regular visits to elderly community members. They provide material assistance,

as well as prayer, Bible reading, and singing hymns. For instance, in Stará Pazova, there exist three women's altar circles. WAGs, which vary in activities across parishes, organize events such as second-hand bazaars, Christmas markets, orphan support, and ecumenical concerts. WAG leaders are generally not trained in diaconal work, therefore, their assistance is limited. It should be noted that their support is generally limited to active members of their church, who are primarily elderly and unwell, exclusive to members of the church and not available to those outside. One cannot assert that refugees, orphans or people with disabilities are not a primary target, but these groups are not currently present in the parishes. The ageing of the population has significantly impacted parishes, so the majority of individuals who require assistance and support are elderly people, neglected by their offspring. Generally, what they require is more a compassionate attention than food provisions (Kolárovská, 2010).

One viewpoint suggests that the current arrangement is satisfactory as all the parish's needy individuals are being well-cared for, leaving no requirement for significant alterations. The opposing perspective maintains that there is potential for more to be accomplished and that the efforts of the WAGs are insufficient. Additionally, this approach acknowledges a long-standing stagnation or decline in the number of female members in guilds. Consequently, they strive to establish an organized congregational diaconia. For instance, Rev. Jan Zahorec observes a significant requirement for aid in numerous domains, like domestic support, in-home care, and daily support. Thus, in his parish, they built a "Ján Beláni Diaconal House," which allows them to offer day care services to all those in need from the entire village, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Regrettably, this is a unique occurrence, as the ambition to establish diaconal ministry and social work is absent in most church congregations. But earlier it was different.

Prior to WW2, the Slovak Evangelical Church was highly involved in diaconal activities, which included managing different retirement homes and orphanages (Farkaš, 1950; Marko, 2000). Following WW2, the Communist state seized all of their property, land, and buildings. This resulted in several areas. (1) The church has had to discontinue its organized diaconical work. (2) Diaconia has been greatly reduced and became carried out by newly established volunteer women's altar guilds. (3) The Church lost a conviction that one of the functions of the church is to *serve the world*. (4) The complete takeover of social assistance by the state has resulted in a passive attitude among citizens towards the social needs of others. It is widely assumed that it is the role of the state to take care of the poor and the needy, leaving no room for other entities such as the church to intervene in this area of responsibility. (5) The Slovak Evangelical Church has adopted a defensive stance towards the state and society, prioritizing its own interests. Believers appear unwilling to contribute to society, feeling that the state has deprived them of everything they had. (6) Within the Slovak Protestant church, this

sentiment is compounded by the belief that the state has stripped them of their possessions and assets. It is difficult to determine whether the younger generation of pastors shares this viewpoint. However, the older generation of pastors has personally experienced the effects of the state's interference in the church's affairs. They vividly recall a time when the state was solely taking rather than giving back. Therefore, it is understandable that it is hard to again endorse diaconia as a ministry of the church to the world.

However, in recent years, some parishes have managed to receive property refunds through church restitutions, albeit not all of them. The question that arises is whether the time is ripe to revisit the interwar period and use restituted assets to renew charity and diaconia, such as building and running an elderly people's home. Currently, there is no affirmative answer to this question, as it appears that no one has even posed it yet. The reality is that pastors are overburdened with their liturgical and pastoral responsibilities, lack sufficient legal and economical knowledge, and are deficient in managerial and other necessary skills to create a plan. Diaconal work is not the obligation of the clergy, as pastors are meant to educate, encourage and motivate the laity about the importance of serving and assisting the world. How to strengthen self-awareness of the laity? How to increase social awareness of the laity?

In many parishes, pastors are responsible even for matters beyond their priestly and pastoral authority. Hence, it is crucial to empower laymen and laywomen to take on a more significant role in decision-making processes. Yes, it is hard to find capable and educated individuals in rural areas who can assist with financial, management, architectural, and legal matters, as they often lack a sense of responsibility for their parish. This mentality parallels that of Serbia, wherein due to the lack of civil society the expectation is that the person in charge will handle everything. Therefore, a critical task is to enhance the role of lay people. How can this be achieved? How to find socially sensitive and responsible laypeople? How to become sensitive to the social issues of others? Unfortunately, the social care system in Serbia is heavily corrupted and, to a great extent, ineffective. Therefore, the time is ripe start serving the world.

9. Inter-confessional marriages

Mixed marriages, where one of the partners is Lutheran and the other one is Orthodox, are very common in Vojvodina. Still, this shows how ecumenical dialogue and mutual confessional respect does not work all the time. There is no agreement between SEAVC and SOC on this issue, not even a discussion. But there are agreements and guidelines in Germany and Finland, that can inspire.

The joint guidelines *Ehen zwischen Evangelischen und Orthodoxen* (2011) issued by the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Orthodox Bishops' Conference

in Germany, provides a pastoral framework for marriages between Evangelical (Lutheran) and Orthodox Christians. They emphasize the importance of avoiding so-called "double weddings," instead encouraging a single, jointly prepared service in which ministers from both traditions can participate. The guidelines stress thorough joint pastoral preparation for the couple, aiming to address theological differences while fostering mutual respect and Christian unity. Flexibility in liturgical planning is encouraged, provided that each tradition's integrity is maintained, thereby allowing the marriage celebration to witness visibly to the shared faith in Christ despite confessional differences.

In Finland, the Finnish Ecumenical Council adopted national *Guidelines for Ecumenical Marriages* (1996), which are used by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland (Nassif and Metso, 2013). These guidelines require couples to contact the parishes of both churches early in the preparation process, ensuring that pastoral care and planning respect each tradition's theology of marriage – whether understood sacramentally in the Orthodox Church or in the covenantal framework of Lutheran teaching. The guidelines provide for ceremonies that can include the participation of ministers from both traditions, with arrangements adapted to the couple's affiliations and the pastoral agreements reached between the churches.

How is it in Serbia? There are no ecumenical marriages, so the engaged partners must decide whether to marry in the Orthodox church, or to marry in the Lutheran Church.

If partners decide to marry in the *Lutheran church*, the only condition is that the Orthodox partner has been already baptized (thus, no re-baptism is required). The wedding is not conditioned with the promise to raise the children in a Lutheran faith. If parents decide to baptize children or send them for confirmation to the Lutheran church, their decision is accepted, it is accepted as well if they decide to do otherwise. Lutheran priests try to avoid aggressive persuasion of Lutheran party to retain the faith of his/her ancestors; even if one or another partner decides to integrate into Orthodox faith, they are not excommunicated nor punished in any way (e.g. expulsion from communion). Lutheran pastors act in Christian love, propose solidarity and respect toward all confessions. Partners in mixed marriages often deal with difficult family situations and for Lutheran priests this is a signal for increased and continual pastoral care. This approach is in the Lutheran circles promoted as *pastoral ecumenism*, a pastoral sensitivity and compassionate response to the lived realities of mixed-denomination couples (The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches, 2018: 29).

The official rules of the *Serbian Orthodox Church* for mixed marriages can be summarized as the following:

> "The Serbian Orthodox Church had its own rules: marriage between Orthodox and non-Orthodox should be blessed in the Orthodox Church. The

> non-Orthodox person must sign a statement before the priest that they are not going to work against the Orthodox faith of the spouse. Also, the non-Orthodox person needs to declare that their children will be raised in the Orthodox faith. From the other side, the Orthodox person needs to promise that they will work constantly "in a cordial manner" to convert their spouse to Orthodoxy. After these statements are signed, the priest will send the request to the bishop, who decides whether such a marriage can take place." (Jović, 2020: 415–416).

This procedure is described in the *Matrimonial Rules of the Serbian Orthodox Church* (Belgrade, 1994), articles 115–123. If the Orthodox partner decides to marry in the Lutheran church, from the Orthodox perspective this marriage is not valid and is not accepted, and the child begotten from such family is "not legal" – this is the phrase that would appear on the baptismal certificate of the children if their parents were not married in the Orthodox church.

This approach will probably not change soon, as *The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church* on the island of Crete in 2016 issued document (Jović, 2020: 409–410) entitled "The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments" (www.holycouncil.org/-/marriage), where it says following concerning mixed marriages of Orthodox Christians with non-Orthodox Christians or non-Christians (section II, paragraph 5): "Marriage between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians is forbidden according to canonical *akribeia.*"

The rules in Serbia are clear: *it is* possible to marry Orthodox and non-Orthodox partners in the Orthodox Church under the Orthodox rite, if the non-Orthodox partner promises to baptize and raise their children in the Orthodox faith. The Orthodox priest is obliged to send these written statements (signed in front of two witnesses) to the bishop, and after the wedding he is obliged to follow the life of spouses to ascertain if they follow their obligations (Perić, 1997: 276). It is hard to evaluate if Orthodox priests know this procedure and if they follow it, it is also hard to know how many requests for mixed marriages are sent to the local bishop. The bishop can decide arbitrary, but generally he should approve the request (but he doesnot have to). Although this procedure is degrading for non-Orthodox, it still does not include re-baptism, i.e. the baptism of the non-Orthodox believer in their own church is accepted as sufficient. If a non-Orthodox believer does not agree to raise and baptize their children in the Orthodox way, the marriage in the Orthodox church is not possible.

The experience in the parishes shows other practice than the official matrimonial rules say. The usual practice is the following: (1) Orthodox priests very often require a re-baptism of a Lutheran partner, although the re-baptism denies the idea of mixed marriage (if there is a re-baptism, then there is no mixed marriage). (2) Orthodox priests do not require the Orthodox upbringing of children,

sometimes not even their baptism. (3) Orthodox priests do not protest if children attend Sunday school classes in the Lutheran church. (4) Children very often receive ritual of confirmation (age 12) in the Lutheran church and Orthodox priests do not protest. There is a repeated experience in various parishes that children who are baptized in the Orthodox church later are confirmed in the Evangelical church. Therefore, it happens very often that the Slovak Evangelical partner (be it bride or groom) agrees with the Orthodox wedding, sometimes even with the Orthodox baptism of children, but afterwards the children attend youth meetings in the Lutheran church. It must be said that Lutheran priests do not put obstacles in giving confirmation to children coming from interdenominational families and baptized in the Orthodox church. Parents often believe that after confirmation in the Evangelical church their child becomes and remains Evangelical.

It is not possible to say what percentage of mixed marriages happen in the Evangelical church and how many in the Orthodox church, simply because each church keeps evidence of their own marriages, but an estimated proportion would be 70% in Orthodox, 30% in the Lutheran church. Still, numbers would change from parish to parish, from eparchy to eparchy.

Obviously, there are several denominational, national, and social conditions that influence the lives of interdenominational marriages and families. First of all, one must distinguish between the dioceses Banat, Bačka, Syrmium, because the situation varies. Namely, the Serbian Orthodox Church is divided into 40 eparchies, and three of them cover the region Vojvodina: Bačka, headed by Irinej Bulović, Syrmium headed by Vasilije Vadić, and Banat headed by Nikanor Bogunović. Especially the last bishop is a known opponent of ecumenism and hence Orthodox-Lutheran encounters are here more difficult, whereas in the other two eparchies the situation is more pleasant. Thus, the Orthodox priests in Bačka would rarely require a re-baptism for a Lutheran partner, but in Banat this would be very strictly required.

Further on, one of the conditions that influences this issue is the *gender* of the partners. Very often it happens that a bride follows the groom, and they marry in *his* church. This combination of gender and sociological factors points to a much stronger role of men in Serbian society. If the bride is a Slovak Lutheran, in most of the cases she will convert to Orthodoxy (i.e., new baptism and Orthodox marriage). In the opposite situation (the bride is a Serbian Orthodox), women will sometimes integrate and sometimes not, as the language and cultural differences might be hard to overcome. The experience of the priests shows that if a Slovak bride would agree to an Orthodox marriage, it is much more probable that she would disappear from the Evangelical church (leave the church, baptize children in the Orthodox church) than is the case with the Slovak groom, who in 80-90% of cases remains a member of the Slovak Lutheran church (though re-baptized to Orthodoxy).

Thus, the experience of the priests, is that very often the evangelical Lutheran partner is the one who makes an accommodating and friendly step. One possible interpretation is the lack of national awareness, as Slovaks very easily and without complaint agree to all conditions requested by the Orthodox church. This is certainly connected to the fact that Slovaks have lived as a minority in Serbia for three centuries, and this affects how they perceive their position in its society and their civil rights. A Serbian partner, as a member of the dominant nation and dominant church obviously has a much stronger position in decision making.

Although it has been claimed that national, gender and sociological factors play their role, on certain occasions a faith plays the primary role. It is about *religious awareness* and *religious indifference*. Said very plainly: the one who is more religiously aware will attract the other partner. Possible limitations are when both partners are religiously identified in their own confession (which is really problematic), or when the national awareness of one partner is unduly strong in a negative way, overcritical and destructive. If one partner is religiously indifferent, then it is almost certain that he/she would agree with everything that the other side requires. If both partners are religiously dispirited, then they would probably even skip the wedding in a church and complete only the civil ceremony. If they still decide to marry in a church as well, then only due to their families wishes or because it is something one does in their environment. Thus, we see how religious indifference is combined with national and gender issues. This indifference toward the wedding in a church ia given also by the declining importance of marriage in Serbian society (Devrnja, 2009: 350–351), caused by aggressive secularization, and tabloidism of the public space which both result in an increasing rate of divorces. In this situation, marriage is no longer considered to be a lifelong commitment.

Our research shows that mixed inter-denominational and inter-national marriages are generally not suppressed, disadvantaged or ostracized, quite a huge awareness of the pluralism can be stated. This is probably thanks to a centuries-long coexistence between Slovaks and Serbs. Neither the Slovak Lutheran nor Serbian Orthodox side (partner, parents, wider family) see it as a problem if their spouse is of different nationality and religion; the problems that appear are predominantly practical and solved pragmatically.

However, as the SEAVC is closely related to the Lutheran Church in Slovakia (the dominant confession is Roman Catholicism), there is a tendency to tackle these situations in a similar way as is done in Slovakia with Lutheran-Catholic interdenominational marriages. The procedure is similar. Catholic ecclesiastical law requires that the wedding take place in a Catholic church, with the presence of a Catholic priest. If a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic want to marry (= mixed marriage), they must do it in the Catholic Church, but they must receive consent from the bishop. They will receive consent if the Catholic party declares

his/her intention to continue practice of the Catholic faith and to promise to do all in his/her power to share his/her faith with the children born of the marriage by having them baptized and raised in the Catholic faith (Eternal Word Television Network, 2014). Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic in a Lutheran church is fundamentally illegal, but under certain pastoral reasons there is an exception, that even the marriage that took place in an Evangelical church can receive a dispensation (*Sanatio in radice*) and a bishop can accept it as valid and legal, the Catholic partner is not considered a sinner and can receive sacraments in the Catholic church (Adam, 2006: 39–52).

10. Final comments

In this text we have shown the wide network of relations within which the existence and practice of the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (SEAVC) takes place. We considered both the practices within the church and the wider ecclesial, legal, and historical context outside of it—that is, the micro and the macro levels. The very moment we begin to discuss networks, connections, and webs of interaction—the relational aspect of the church—we automatically exclude the possibility of conceiving of the church as an isolated subject existing without interaction with its environment. Such isolation is a tendency often found among minority groups, perhaps due to the perceived formula: interaction → integration → loss of identity → denationalization → dissolution of the group.

In this respect, we follow the methodology of the German hermeneutical tradition, especially Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who introduced the concept of *Mitsein* ("being-with") in *Sein und Zeit* as an essential and irreducible structure of human existence. Heidegger insists that *Dasein* is never an isolated, self-sufficient subject but is always already constituted in relation to others, even in moments of physical solitude. This "with-ness" is not an external addition to existence but belongs to the very way *Dasein* is. For Heidegger, the presence of others is intrinsic to the meaning of existence itself, shaping how the world is disclosed and experienced. The notion of *Mitsein* thus functions as a crucial dimension of his broader analysis of *Being-in-the-world* (*In-der-Welt-sein*), where existence is always embedded in a shared world of practices, language, and meaning (Heidegger 2008, 149–150, §26–27).

Applied to our theme, one cannot discuss Slovak Lutherans in Vojvodina without at the same time considering the Serbian Orthodox Church, the political situation, ecclesiology, language and symbols, collective myths and narratives, religious freedom, and ecumenical dialogue, since none of these realities exist in an isolated sub-world. The practices at the micro level are always rooted in the historical, geographical, political, and linguistic macro-context. The context of

Slovak Lutherans in Vojvodina is not limited to the migrations of Slovaks at the end of the 18th and during the 19th century into this area, but also includes the much broader and more complex present-day circumstances.

References

Adam, Miroslav. 2006. "Pastoračno-právne aspekty miešaných katolícko-evanjelických manželstiev z pohľadu Katolíckej cirkvi." *Studia Theologica* 8 (3): 39–52.

Aleksov, Bojan. 2004. "Religious education in Serbia." *Religion, State and Society* 32/4: 341–363.

Avramov, Smilja. 2000. *Opus Dei: Novi krstaški pohod Vatikana*. Veternik: Ldij.

Barišić, Srđan. 2005. "Prilog upoznavanju protestantskih verskih zajednica." *Religija i tolerancija* 7: 121–134.

Basdekis, Athanasios. 2006. *Orthodoxe Kirche und Ökumenische Bewegung: Dokumente, Erklärungen – Berichte 1900–2006*. Frankfurt am Main; Paderborn: Otto Lembeck; Bonifatius.

Benedict XVI. "Message of Condolence of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the Death of Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle." *Pontifical Messages*, November 16, 2009. Accessed August 13, 2025. *Vatican*. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091116_pavle.html.

Bjelajac, Branko. 2017. "Reformation Events Take Centre Stage in Serbia." *tedNEWS Network*, November 11, 2017. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://ted.adventist.org/news/reformation-events-take-centre-stage-in-serbia/.

Bjelajac, Branko. 2014. "Serbia: The Challenges and Opportunities of Diverse Backgrounds in the Evangelical Churches." *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue*, Fuller Studio, Spring 2014 issue. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/serbia-the-challenges-and-opportunities-of-diverse-backgrounds-in-the-evangelical-churches/.

Bjelajac, Branko. 2003. *Protestantizam u Srbiji*. Beograd: Alfa i Omega.

Bjelajac, Branko. 2002. "Protestantism in Serbia." *Religion, State & Society* 30/3: 169–218.

Branković, Tomislav. 2006. *Protestantske zajednice u Jugoslaviji*. Niš: Junir.

Blagojević, Mirko. 2006. "Current Religious Changes in Serbia and Desecularization." *Filozofija i društvo* 31: 239–253.

Bodrov, Alexei, and Stephen M. Garrett, eds. 2020. *Theology and the Political: Theo-political Reflections on Contemporary Politics in Ecumenical Conversation.* Leiden: Brill.

Božić, Marko. 2019. "Neither Secular State nor Laical Republic? The Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in Communist Yugoslavia – legal Framework Analysis." *Pravni zapisi* 10/1: 40–64.

Bremer, Thomas. 2019. "Justin Popović, čitan očima rimokatolika." In *Misao i misija svetog Justina Popovića*. eds. Vladimir Cvetković and Bogdan Lubardić, 53–64. Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet.

Catholic World News. "Pope to Visit Serbia for Orthodox Celebrations in 2013?" *Catholic World News*, April 20, 2012. Accessed August 13, 2025. *CatholicCulture.org*. https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=14074&repos=4&subrepos=2&searchid=2556426

Cosoroaba, Stefan. 2021. *Scientific-theoretical frame of reference of the ZETO Study Group*. Sibiu: Zentrum für Evangelische Theologie Ost. [manuscript]

Conference of European Churches. 2018. "Meeting Where Lives and Faiths Intertwine: Serbian Churches Welcome CEC in Novi Sad." *Conference of European Churches*, June 1, 2018. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://ceceurope.org/meeting-where-lives-and-faiths-intertwine-serbian-churches-welcome-cec-in-novi-sad.

Cvetković, Vladimir. 2015. "Četiri pisma svetog Justina Novog Ćelijskog o ekumenizmu." *Crkvene studije / Church Studies* 12: 243–262.

Černi, Janko. 2017. "*Slovačka evangelička augsburške veroispovesti crkva u Srbiji sa osvrtom na seniorat u Bačkoj*." *Izvornik: Godišnjak Vukove Zadužbine* 13: 325–356.

Devrnja, Zoran. 2010. "Bračna pravila – kritički osvrt i komentari." In *Srpska teologija danas*, 350–359. Beograd: ITI-PBF.

Dnevni list Danas. 2024. "Obeleženo 100 godina Beogradske nadbiskupije, Parolin preneo pozdrave i blagoslov pape Franje." *Danas*, Beta Press, September 17, 2024. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/obelezavanje-stogodisnjice-beogradske-nadbiskupije-medju-zvanicama-patrijarh-porfirije-i-drzavni-vrh/

Drobena, Joshua. 2022. "Slovak Lutheran Church in Serbia Observes Centennial." *News Releases*, Slovak Zion Synod (ELCA), July 24, 2022. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://slovakzionsynod.org/2022/07/24/slovak-lutheran-church-in-serbia-observes-centennial/.

Đorđević, Dragoljub. 2005. "Religije i veroispovesti nacionalnih manjina u Srbiji." *Sociologija* 47/3: 193–212.

Đurđević-Stojković, Biljana. 2000. *Verske sekte i pokreti: lovci na duše*. 3rd ed. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

Džomić, Velibor. 2017. "Sloboda veroispovesti i položaj crkava i verskih zajednica u Ustavu Republike Srbije od 2006. godine." In *Srpska teologija danas 2016*, ed. Bogoljub Šijaković, 37–48. Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu.

Evangelical Church in Germany and Orthodox Bishops' Conference in Germany. 2011. *Ehen zwischen Evangelischen und Orthodoxen: Revision*. Dortmund: EKD/OBKD.

Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation. *25 Years with People, by People, for People: Annual Report 2018*. Novi Sad: Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, 2019. [PDF file]

Evropska komisija protiv rasizma i netolerancije. 2007. *Izveštaj o Srbiji (peti monitoring ciklus)*. Strazbur: Savet Evrope.

Eternal Word Television Network. 2014. "The Requirements for a Mixed Marriage." Accessed August 14, 2025. https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/requirements-for-a-mixed-marriage-11250.

Farkaš, Pavel. 1950. *Úryvky z histórie nášho sirotinca*. Kovačica: Evanjelický a. v. cirkevný zbor.

Feldy, Igor, ed. 2010. *Dni Adama Vereša: Zborník prác zo sympózia, ktoré sa konalo 11.–13. septembra 2009 v Starej Pazove pri príležitosti 80. výročia inštalácie Adama Vereša, prvého biskupa Slovenskej evanjelickej cirkvi a. v. v. Srbsku.* Stará Pazova: Slovenský evanjelický a. v. cirkevný zbor.

Finnish Ecumenical Council. 1996. *Guidelines for Ecumenical Marriages*. Helsinki: Finnish Ecumenical Council.

Ghodsee, Kristen R. 2009. "Symphonic Secularism: Eastern Orthodoxy, Ethnic Identity, and Religious Freedoms in Contemporary Bulgaria." *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27/2: 227–252.

Government of the Republic of Serbia. 2005. "Full Cooperation between Churches and Religious Communities in Serbia." *Government of the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade, November 30, 2005. *srbija.gov.rs*. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.srbija.

gov.rs/vest/en/18489/full-cooperation-between-churches-and-religious-communities-in-serbia.php
Heidegger, Martin. 2008. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought.
Hollander, Aaron T. 2021. "Fundamental Ecumenics Revisited: A Near-Forgotten Intellectual Framework as a Toolkit for the Mid-Twenty-First Century." *Journal of ecumenical studies* 56 (2): 161–199.
Ilić, Angela. 2020."Looking Through a Veil: *Challenges and Perspectives of Interreligious Dialogue in Serbia*." *Interdisciplinary journal for Religion and transformation in contemporary society* 6: 413–428.
Ilić, Angela. 2005. "On the Road towards Religious Pluralism? Church and State in Serbia." *Religion, State & Society* 33/4: 273–313.
Ilić, Angela. 2004. "Odnos religije i društva u današnjoj Srbiji." *Religija i tolerancija* 3: 47–78.
Javorník, Jaroslav. 2024. "Medaila prezidentovi." *Evanjelický hlásnik* 2024/1: 3.
Jevtić, Atanasije, ed. 2010. *Sveti Ava Justin: Zapisi o ekumenizmu*. Manastir Tvrdoš.
Jevtić, Atanasije. 2005. "Pravoslavni ikumenizam / O ekumenizmu." In *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam: zbornik tekstova*, ed. Aleksandar Đakovac, 181–205. Belgrade: Hrišćanski kulturni centar, 2005.
Jović, Rastko. 2020. "The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage in the Ecumenical Context." *The Ecumenical Review* 72/3: 409–421.
Jović, Rastko. 2017. "Ekumenizam nedohodnici vremena." In *Srpska teologija danas*, 11–18. Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu.
Jović, Rastko. 2014. "Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Serbian Orthodox Church." In *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, et al., 343–348. Oxford: Regnum Books International.
Jović, Rastko. 2011. "Istorijat verske nastave u Srbiji." In *Verska nastava u beogradskim školama*, 78–89. Beograd: PBF-PKI, 2011.
Klátik, Miloš. 2017. *Evangelisch in der Slowakei: Profile, Positionen, Perspektiven*. Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag.
Kolárovská, Zuzana. 2010. "Diakonia a zborová diaconia." In *Dni Adama Vereša,* ed. Igor Feldy, 59–65. Stará Pazova: Slovenský evanjelický a. v. cirkevný zbor.
Kopilović, Andrija. 2008. "Die Katolische Kirche in Serbien. Ökumene und staattliche Zusammenarbeit." In *Politik und Theologie in Europa*, ed. Ingeborg Gabriel, 393-400. Ostfildern: Matthias Grunevald Verlag.
Kuburić, Zorica. 2010. *Verske zajednice u Srbiji i verska distanca*. Novi Sad: CEIR – Centar za empirijska istraživanja religije.
Kuburić, Zorica. 2005. "Verske zajednice i socijalna distanca u Srbiji." *Religija i tolerancija* 6: 37–50.
Kuburić, Zorica, and Milan Vukomanović. 2006. "Religious Education: The Case of Serbia." *Sociologija* 47/3: 229–255.
Kuburić, Zorica and Sladjana Zuković. 2010. *Verska nastava u školi*. Novi Sad: CEIR.
"Law on Churches and Religious Communities." 2006. *Službeni glasnik RS", broj 36/2006* Accessed August 12, 2025. https://licodu.cois.it/?p=1448&lang=en.
Legíňová, Anna. 2024. "SECAV aj na zaznamenávaní vzácneho jubilea." *Slovenská evanjelická a. v. cirkev v Srbsku*, September 17, 2024. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://seavc.rs/2024/09/secav-aj-na-zaznamenavani-vzacneho-jubilea/
Lengsfeld, Peter, ed. 1980. *Ökumenische Theologie: Ein Arbeitsbuch* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Lengsfeld, Peter. 1980a. "Die Situation als Herausforderung." In *Ökumenische Theologie: Ein Arbeitsbuch*, ed. Peter Lengsfeld, 23–35. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980.

Lengsfeld, Peter. 1980b. "Ökumenische Theologie als Theorie ökumenischer Prozesse – Die Kollusionstheorie." In *Ökumenische Theologie: Ein Arbeitsbuch*, ed. Peter Lengsfeld, 36–68. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980.

Luković, Zoran D. 2003. *Verske sekte i pravoslavlje: priručnik za samoodbranu od verskih sekti*. Četvrto dopunjeno izdanje. Beograd: Izdavački fond arhiepiskopije beogradsko-karlovačke.

Lutheran World. [2025] *Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia*, *The Lutheran World Federation: Member Churches*. Accessed August 12, 2025. https://lutheranworld.org/member-churches/search?field_n_country=RS

Lutheran World. 2021. *Serbia: Passing on the Slovak Language and the Message of Faith," The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) News.* Accessed August 12, 2025. https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/serbia-passing-slovak-language-and-message-faith.

The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches. 2018. *Commitments on the Ecumenical Way to Ecclesial Communion*. Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation.

Marko, Ján. 2000. *Dečji dom u Kovačici*. Novi Sad: Matica srpska.

de Mey, Peter, Andrew Pierce, and Oliver Schuegraf, eds. 2012. *Mission und Einheit / Mission and Unity: Gemeinsames Zeugnis getrennter Kirchen? / Common Witness of Separated Churches?* Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau, no. 91. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.

Milinović, Nemanja. 2011. "Protestantizam u Vojvodini posle prvog svetskog rata." *Religija i tolerancija* 16: 317–331.

Milosavljević, Boris. 2002. "Relations Between the State and Religious Communities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2: 311–340.

Nassif, Bassam and Pekka Metso. 2013. "The Issue of Mixed Marriages: Canonical and Pastoral Perspectives." In *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education,* ed. Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al., 794–808. Geneva: WCC Publications/Volos, Greece: Volos Academy.

News. 2005. "This Is the First Official Visit of the Swedish Lutheran Church to the Serbian Orthodox Church. From September 9–15 the High Delegation Will Be…" *News*, Serbian Orthodox Church Official Website, September 13, 2005. Accessed July 13, 2024. https://arhiva.spc.rs/old/Vesti-2005/09/13-9-05-e.html

Nikolić, Marko. 2008. "Ekumenizam, ekumenski pokret i Srpska pravoslavna crkva." *Religija i tolerancija* 6/10: 84–88.

Novaković, Dragan. 2015. "Crkva i verske zajednice u ustavima Srbije." *Srpska teologija u dvadesetom veku* 18: 64–86.

"Ninth Plenary Session, Belgrade, Serbia, 18–25 September 2006." In *Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*, *Ecumenical Relations, Eastern Section*, Vatican News. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/sessioni-plenarie/2006-Sessione-Plenaria/testo-in-inglese.html

Parnická, Mária. 2010. "Diakonia v Ekumenickej humanitnej organizácii v Srbsku." In *Dni Adama Vereša,* ed. Igor Feldy, 77. Stará Pazova: Slovenský evanjelický a. v. cirkevný zbor.

Perić, Dragan. 1997. *Crkveno pravo.* Pravni fakultet univerziteta u Beogradu: Dosije.
Peťkovský, Ondrej. 1980. *Slovenská evanjelická Augsburského vyznania cirkev v SFR Juhoslávii*. Novi Sad: Biskupský úrad SEAVC v SFRJ.
Popović, Justin. 2001. *Pravoslavna crkva i ekumenizam – Svetosavlje kao filozofija života.* Sabrana dela sv. 4, Beograd: Naslednici oca Justina i manastir Ćelije kod Valjeva 2001.
Radio-televizija Vojvodine. 2012. "Uskoro prvi vojni sveštenici." *JMU Radio-televizija Vojvodine*, March 10, 2012. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.rtv.rs/sr_ci/drustvo/uskoro-prvi-vojni-svestenici_305475.html.
Radio Glas. 2024."Proslava Rođenja Hristovog po gregorijanskom kalendaru." *Radio Glas (Radio-televizija Vojvodine)*, December 27, 2024. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.radioglas.rs/Newsview.asp?ID=17819.
Radosavljević, Artemije. 2005. "Ekumenizam." In *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, ed. Aleksandar Đakovac, 317-320. Belgrade: Hrišćanski kulturni centar.
Radosavljević, Artemije. 2004. "Srpska crkva protiv ekumenizma". *Sveti knez Lazar 12/3 (47): 29–46.*
Rouse, Ruth and Stephen Charles Neill. 1954. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948.* London: S.P.C.K.
Samardžić, Radovan. *Religija i položaj vjerskih zajednica u SFRJ: socijalističko samoupravljanje u Jugoslaviji*. Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1984.
Slovenská evanjelická a. v. cirkev v Srbsku. 2024. "Najstarší oltárny krúžok žien." *Aktuality*, September 2024. Accessed August 15, 2025. https://seavc.rs/2024/09/najstarsi-oltarny-kruzok-zien/
Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central & South America. 2021. "The Orthodox and the Entire Christian World Congratulated Patriarch Porfirije," *News*, Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central & South America, February 19, 2021, accessed August 13, 2025, https://www.serborth.org/news_210222_1
Simić, Radivoje. 2020. "The Serbian Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: An Overview." *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40/10: 51–57.
Sveti arhijerejski sinod. 1994. *Bračna pravila Srpske pravoslavne crkve*, II dopunjeno i ispravljeno izdanje. Beograd: Sveti arhijerejski sinod.
Širka, Zdenko. 2024. "Východ proti Západu: Justin Nový Ćelijský o humanismu a ekumenismu." In S*aint Justin the New of Ćelije and the Orthodox World*, eds. Vladimir Cvetković and Dragiša Bojović, 189-213. Niš: Centre of Church Studies; International Centre for Orthodox Studies.
Širka, Zdenko, ed. 2022. *Člověk, bohočlověk a církev: výběr ze spisů Justina Popoviće*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2022.
Širka, Zdenko. 2021. "Ecumenism and Tradition: Hermeneutics of Theological and Non-Theological Factors." *Testimonia Theologica*, vol. 15/2: 34-48.
Širka, Zdenko. 2021a. "Orthodox Reading of Martin Luther: Protestantism as a Pan-heresy according to St Justin Popović." *Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly* 81/3, 583-596.
Širka, Zdenko. 2019. "Justin Popović o Luteru i protestantizmu." In *Misao i misija svetog Justina Popovića*. eds. Vladimir Cvetković and Bogdan Lubardić, 65–84. Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet.
Širka, Zdenko. 2019a. "Rehabilitacija Justina Popovića na Beogradskom Univerzitetu." *Pravoslavlje* 1255: 12–13.
Širka, Zdenko. 2018. "Transformation in the Theology of Tradition: A Study of Justin Popović and His Hermeneutical Presuppositions." *Ostkirchliche Studien* 67: 325–344.

Šljivić, Dragan and Neven Cvetićanin. 2021. "On Laws and Their Spirit: Do Orthodox Concepts of *Symphonia* and *Oikonomia* Have an Impact on the Contemporary Legal Situation in Serbia?" *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 7: 209–233.

Timotijević, Đorđe M. 2022. "Legal Standing of Churches and Religious Communities in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia." *Herald of Legal History (Vesnik pravne istorije)* 3/2: 82–105.

Trajković, Marko. 2020. "Verska nastava i tolerancija u savremenom društvu." *Religija i tolerancija* 34: 205–217.

Todorović, Dragan. 2011. "Protestantizam na Balkanu i u Srbiji." *Sociološki pregled* 45/3: 265-294.

"Ustav republike Srbije." 2006. *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije* 98/2006. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/ustav/2006/98/1/reg

Vatican News. 2020. "Serbian Patriarch Irinej Was a Model of Faith and Dialogue." *Vatican News*, November 21, 2020. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-11/serbian-orthodox-patriarch-irinej-a-model-of-faith-and-dialogue.html

Velimirović, Nikolaj. 1986. *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13. Düsseldorf: Srpska pravoslavna eparhija zapadnoevropska.

Vereš, Adam. 1930. *Slovenská evanjelická kresťanská cirkev augšburského vyznania v král. Juhoslovanskom v slove a v obrazoch.* Petrovac: Knihtlačiarna Uč. Spol.

Vidović, Julia. 2014. "Fr. Justin Popovic on Ecumenism." In *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas Fitzgerald, Cyril Hovorun, et al., 263–272. Oxford: Regnum Books.

Vojnićová-Feldyová, Svetlana. 2011. *The Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia in Words and Pictures*. Novi Sad: Slovenská evanjelická cirkev a. v. v Srbsku.

Vukašinović, Vladimir. 2005. "Ka novom ekumenizmu." In *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, ed. Alexandar Đakovac, 369–379. Beograd: Hrišćanski kulturni centar.

Vukomanović, Milan. 2008. "The Serbian Orthodox Church as a Political Actor in the Aftermath of October 5, 2000.". *Politics and Religion* 1/2: 237–269.

Yoder, Bill. 2000. "Yugoslavia: The Case for Compassion." *Christianity Today*, March 6, 2000. Accessed August 13, 2025. https://www.christianitytoday.com/2000/03/yugoslavia-case-for-compassion/

"Zakon o crkvama i verskim zajednicama." 2006. Accessed August 12, 2025. https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_crkvama_i_verskim_zajednicama.html.

Zlatanović, Sanja i Marušiak, Juraj. 2017. "Return Migration of the Slovak Community of Vojvodina: Issue of Belonging." *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU* 65/3: 653–668.

World Council of Churches. [2025] *"Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia & Montenegro."* World Council of Churches. Accessed August 12, 2025. https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/slovak-evangelical-church-of-the-augsburg-confession-in-serbia-montenegro