

Mladen Jovanović

**And the Word Became the Church**

Zagreb, Bible Institute, 2012, 127 pages.

The book *And the Word Became the Church* is the last book published by Mladen Jovanović, reputable preacher of the Churches of Christ in Zagreb. The book was published in 2012 by the Bible Institute (2000 copies) in cooperation with Eastern European Mission. The author was a lecturer for many years in the area of basic communications and homiletics at several theological colleges in Croatia and abroad, including the Bible Institute in Zagreb and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek. For many years, he worked as secretary of the Protestant Evangelical Alliance, advocating for the unity of the universal church. It is important to mention that this book is the result of a long-standing work with students and church workers.

The book is divided into 22 chapters and contains a bibliography and notes. The author begins with the idea of the renewal of the church. Since the topic of the renewal of the church is not something particularly new to Protestant Evangelical believers, the part of the book on the Reformation can be easily skipped. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to note that it is stated in the first chapter that Mladen Jovanović comes from a church which is a part of the “renewal movement” because this aspect is found throughout the book, and I will emphasize this further in the text.

The Bible takes a central place in the author’s thought, thus most of the conclusions are drawn directly from the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is God’s message and a book of guidelines for humans, teaching them how to live for God’s glory and for the benefit of their neighbors. Jovanović argues that sound reason, faith, the inspiration of God’s Word, honesty and diligence in studying and reading, as well as a desire for learning and an appreciation of the truth are essential to an adequate understanding of the Word of God.

His thoughts on the kingdom of God take a great part of the book. For the author, the kingdom of God is the creation of one nation. He argues that all who consider themselves to be Christians should deny their own feelings of nationality in order to be able to become true citizens of the kingdom of God. This thought is very strong, and many will disagree with this statement, however, the reader comes to understand the reason the author says this as they get deeper into the book. The author states that God’s kingdom is not a worldly institution, but a reality which goes beyond this world. It must be effective in every age, in every nation and in every social settlement. It is not enough to be a member of the “Christian” nation in order to become a Christian, but rather it is necessary to experience the kingdom through new birth, and prove it through honorable living.

The author explains that a person can become a Christian by hearing the Gospel, believing in Jesus, repenting and getting baptized. "The conversion of the sinful human should involve all these elements. Leaving out any of these elements or voluntarily changing their order brings under a question the integrity of the conversion" (p. 55). In the conclusion, the author follows traditional Evangelical theology where one can find teachings on the movement for the renewal of the church clearly indicated, especially the Churches of Christ. The author divides church ministries into elders (overseers) and assistants (deacons): "Since terms such as 'bishop', 'presbyter' and 'pastor' in now days assume meanings which are no more consistent to the terms as found in the New Testament, in the Church of Christ we restrict ourselves to calling our overseers of local churches simply – elders" (p. 72).

The pneumatological part will be also very interesting to those who are not very familiar with the teachings of the Churches of Christ. In the chapter on the Holy Spirit, the author states that passing over the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands was effective until the end of the writing of the Bible. Faith, thus, was generated through the Word, that is, faith in a human's heart was created through the declared Word of God; therefore Christians today do not find answers to their questions through the Holy Spirit, but in the Bible which is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

It is also worthwhile to mention the Lord's Supper which, according to the author, takes a special place in the worship service. It is the reason for the Christian gathering on Sundays; the Lord's Supper is a confirmation of fellowship, a remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice, a proclamation of Christ's atoning death for the sins of people, an introspection, a show of gratitude for the Christian life, and a confirmation of belonging to the church and of perseverance. The author absolutely denies the Holy Communion as a repetition of Christ's sacrifice, and he rejects it as a means for forgiveness of sins, especially noticing that personal worthiness is not required to partake of the Holy Communion.

In the book, the reader will also be able to find answers to questions about prayer, worship music, salvation through Jesus Christ and the proclamation of God's Word. This book will serve as an excellent resource for theologians who deal with comparative theology as well as for students of Christian theology. It also occupies a special place in the theological accounts of the Churches of Christ, thus it should be a desirable read for every member of the Churches of Christ.

The book *And the Word Became the Church* does not leave the reader indifferent. It challenges the reader to think about the mentioned themes; they will agree with some of the conclusions, and they will discuss some of them. As a foundation to the discussions, the author points to the source – the Holy Scriptures, which should be the foundation of any teaching on the church. The book is

well thought out and clearly articulated; the text is readable and understandable to all believers, regardless of their theological education.

This book will undoubtedly serve as a foundation for an introduction to the theology of the Churches of Christ for a long time. New converts will learn the basics of the faith, and it can serve as a good catechism for those who are as yet undecided about joining the fellowship of the Churches of Christ.

*Almir Pehlić*

*Translated from Croatian by Ljubinka Jambrek*