

The Development and Activities of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb

Iva Đaković

ORCID: 0009-0006-6632-2506

Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek

idjakovic@bizg.hr

UDK: 279.228(497.521.2)

Category: Original scientific article

<https://doi.org/10.32862/k.19.2.4>

Abstract

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, from its founding in 1946 until the early 1970s, was one of the largest and most active communities in Croatia. Located in the very center, near the main square of Zagreb, at Gajeva 9a, it had approximately a hundred members. The members of the church were actively involved in evangelization, primarily through distributing tracts, sharing personal testimony, and visiting surrounding areas, despite the restrictions imposed by the communist regime. Conferences were held twice a year, bringing together all the Brethren communities from the former Yugoslavia. The church was visited by famous foreign preachers such as Bakht Singh and Roger T. Foster. Visits by various foreign missionaries, especially from Switzerland and England, and later also from Germany, opened up new opportunities, especially for young people, to participate in Christian events outside the country. In addition to trips and conferences, trips for young people and camps in Gorski Kotar, near Lake Lokvar, were regularly organized, as well as trips to England, all of which left a great mark on the lives of young people. Publishing occupied an important place in evangelization and encouragement, discipleship, and the upbringing of believers. Dr. Branko Đaković, one of the elders of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, left behind a significant number of translations of Christian literature. His most notable translation work is a complete translation of the entire Holy Scripture. Also, his Bible Dictionary is the first Protestant Bible dictionary in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and his Bible translations are the first standard Protestant

translations in Croatia. The first part provides an overview of the emergence of Brethren churches in Europe, their spread to the former Yugoslavia, and the development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb. The second part discusses the organizational structure of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, and the third part examines its work, activities, and publishing. In terms of publishing, it discusses the magazine Bratski vjesnik, Bible translations, and the emergence of the Bible Dictionary in more detail. It also provides biographies of Elder Branko Đaković and other important figures in the community's life.

Keywords: Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, Brethren movement, Brethren Herald, Bible, Branko Đaković

Introduction

Christ's Church of Brethren¹ was one of the most active and largest evangelical communities in mid-20th-century Zagreb. The history and activities of the Church of Christ in Zagreb have not been extensively researched and recorded so far, except for a few entries in the following publications: *Vjerske zajednice u Jugoslaviji* (Religious Communities in Yugoslavia), Frid, Zlatko, ed. (1970), *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj* (Churches of the Reformation Heritage in Croatia), S. Jambrek (2003), *Ekumenska trilogija* (The Ecumenical Trilogy), J. Kolarić (2005), and *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj* (Religious Communities in Croatia), Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov, eds. (2008). Additionally, regarding publishing, Ruben Knežević wrote extensively about Branko Đaković's Bible translations in his book *Hrvatski bezimprimaturni biblijski prijevodi* (Croatian non-imprimatur Bible translations) (2019), touching on denominational characteristics, but not the entire scope of the church's publishing and activities.

This article aims to introduce the public to the activities and development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb and to explore the course of the creation of some of its significant book publications. The key figure in its publishing is Branko

- 1 Editor's note: According to Daniel Lukić, originally, the churches that are part of this movement in English were called "Assemblies of Brethren," and some used the title "Brethren Christian Church." Those churches never used the label "Christ," but they could exceptionally use the label "Christian." Hence, the challenge of translating this article from Croatian to English was to use terminology that reflects a specific Yugoslavian or Croatian context while remaining meaningful in the English language. Two options were taken into consideration: a) Christ's Church of Brethren; b) Brethren Church of Christ. The dilemma was to use terminology that would avoid identifying the *Brethren Church* in Zagreb and the *Brethren movement* with the *Churches of Christ* (in Croatian: *Kristova crkva*), a denomination that operates in the USA and the European (Croatian) context. The decision was to use the label "Christ's Church of Brethren." Hence, in the Croatian context, this article refers to "Kristova crkva braće" (Christ's Church of Brethren), which differs from "Kristova crkva" (Church(es) of Christ).

Đaković, and among its notable publications are the translation of the Bible, one of the first complete translations into the Croatian language, and the *Bible Dictionary*, one of the first dictionaries of its kind published in Croatian. The fact is that there are no concrete records, and no systematic research has been done on the activities and publishing of this community. However, most of the community's publications have been preserved, and there are still living witnesses, especially community members, who participated in its events from the very beginning.

The first part provides an overview of the emergence of Brethren churches in Europe, their spread to former Yugoslavia, and the development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb. The second part discusses the organizational structure of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, and the third part examines its work, activities, and publishing. In terms of publishing, *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*), biblical translations, and the creation of the *Bible Dictionary* will be briefly mentioned. It also provides biographies of elder Branko Đaković and other important figures in the community's life. The conclusion provides a review of the research conducted, including some of the obstacles, challenges, and insights that arose, and the overall influence and legacy that Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb had and left behind in this area.

1. Historical Overview of Christ's Church of Brethren

1.1. *The Beginnings and Spread of the Movement in Ireland and England*

In the 19th century, a new wave of revival and reform of the church began in Great Britain.² After a period of religious cooling within formal communities, the idea of the Church as the "body of Christ," led by the Holy Spirit, reappeared. Between 1812 and 1825, several books were published on the subject of the restoration of the land to Israel and the second coming of Christ, which were widely read in Christian circles. This raised the issue of the need for the Church to be prepared as "His bride," pure and undefiled by the world. Regular meetings began to be organized on the subject of the millennial kingdom and the second coming of Christ, at which the question began to be increasingly considered: "What does man call

2 The main source of information on the historical development of the Brethren movement was the book: Andrew Miller, *The Brethren: Commonly so-called, a brief sketch*. A. Miller (1810–1883) was a recognized member of the Brethren movement who wrote several valuable works on the subject of Church history. He also collaborated with C. H. Machinist, encouraging his work, and wrote the introduction to his famous series of Bible commentaries, *Notes on Genesis, Exodus, etc.* Before joining the Brethren movement, Miller volunteered as a pastor in a Baptist church in London. After responding to an invitation to one of the Bible reading evenings, he continued to attend these readings every week, delighted by the truths he discovered in God's word at these gatherings. Thus, he soon joined the Brethren, becoming one of God's ardent evangelists.

the Church and what should it actually look like according to the New Testament writings?” Such meetings were also attended by the brethren, although they did not yet exist as a group at that time. According to A. Miller, it all began in Dublin, where, after much contemplation of the Scriptures and prayer, in 1827–1828, four brothers started gathering to “break bread” on Sunday mornings, believing that the Lord was with them. They were: John Nelson Darby, Edward Cronin, John Gifford Bellett, and Francis Hutchinson (My Brethren s.a.). After careful consideration and comparison of the Scriptures, they decided to separate themselves from the existing church system, which, in their opinion, did not align with the New Testament example. Thus, they began to meet only in the name of the Lord Jesus, calling upon the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Miller 1992, 11-12).

They were soon joined by a growing number of believers who were thirsty for the Holy Spirit and Christian fellowship, which they did not find in their denominations. They gathered together and asked the Lord to enlighten and direct them. Soon, in 1828, they published their first tract entitled *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*, written by Darby (Miller 1992, 17). This tract contained the foundations of their belief and action, based on the Word of God, and was informative in nature, rather than a creed.³ The brothers still adhere to these principles today. The aforementioned tract had a great impact, and many, dissatisfied with the “dry” state, left their churches to join the brothers. More tracts and books soon followed, and the gospel was preached fervently in all its power. Many thought that, due to the lack of any organized structure or visible unity, the movement would quickly die down, but it continued to spread more and more.

Initially, the movement met in homes, and in 1830, they rented a public space for their Sunday bread-breaking meetings for the first time. In this space, without any church trappings, many experienced for the first time the power and freshness of God’s word. Other meetings for studying the Word were held in smaller groups at the homes of believers. From their early beginnings to the present day, they continued to practice the so-called *reading meetings*, which were their basic method of teaching, characteristic of the Brethren movement. At that time, such meetings were known for their simplicity, dedication, and unity of believers gathered around Christ as the central focus, and the Holy Spirit as the sole teacher (Miller 1992, 63).

In the town of Plymouth, in the county of Devon in southwest England, believers who had separated from their formal denominations began to gather in homes. They were known for their fervent preaching in public places. Since they did not belong to any formal denomination, they were called Plymouth Brethren (Miller 1992, 62). They were characterized by simplicity and modesty in appearance and dress, and these Brethren sold their possessions, furniture, and jewelry to give the

3 Credo (Latin: *credo*: ‘I believe’), belief, principle; in Christianity (*Hrvatska enciklopedija* 2021).

proceeds to the needy or to deacons. They separated themselves from everything they considered worldly to await the Lord's return (Miller 1992, 65).

In Bristol, an English town located in the southwest of England, a group of believers formed in a church chapel called Bethesda. The Baptist community was already gathering in that chapel, and a few years before 1848, the entire congregation switched to the side of the Brethren movement (Miller 1992, 83). Some of the Brethren viewed this as incorrect, including C. H. Mackintosh, who argued that there was no "corporate conscience," but only the individual decision of each person before God (Miller 1992, 84).

Soon, the problems plaguing the Plymouth community began to affect the Bethesda community, ultimately resulting in a split within the movement. It all began when a group of Plymouth Brethren broke away, led by a certain Mr. Newton, who, among other things, began to teach some heretical teachings. Tracts containing his teachings quickly spread throughout the region, provoking a variety of reactions. It was around 1848 that the question arose among the Bethesda Brethren: "How should we treat the other Brethren who had accepted the heretical teachings in question, and is it acceptable to receive them into the fellowship of 'breaking bread'?" On this issue, the church split, and soon a division emerged into two groups: the Neutral Brethren (Open Brethren) and the Exclusive Brethren (or later simply referred to as Brethren) (Miller 1992, 79-81). The question that arose was ecclesiological: Were the Brethren gathered based on the unity of the church, or were they just an independent congregation? (Miller 1992, 86). Bethesda accepted the principle of "independence," and those who accepted the principle of "one body" became their opposition. Soon, following the example of Bethesda, other fraternities in the country held similar meetings and took sides. Eventually, the Exclusive Brethren accepted the Plymouth Brethren, who had false teachings, into the meeting, but did not accept the very devout brethren from Bethesda (Miller 1992, 90-91).

The new motto of the Neutral Brethren was "The blood of the Lamb is the union of the saints," and discipline should come later. Therefore, they received everyone who believed that they were a child of God and washed by the blood of Christ into their fellowship of "breaking bread," while the other, more closed brothers believed: Blood is the foundation of peace, not unity, and there are many who are washed by the blood of Christ, but because of their evil deeds they are not worthy to sit at God's table. The Neutral Brethren were also called Open Brethren because of their openness to receive people to the "Lord's table" (Miller 1992, 97). Later, the Open Brethren usually entered into brotherhoods with other denominations, while the other brothers were often attacked by other denominations, especially because they were losing their "members" and, as A. Miller believes, usually the most spiritual and intellectual ones (Miller 1992, 98). Both new branches of the Brethren movement continued to be known for their fervent evangelism, writing

books on specific biblical topics, and distributing tracts. Many Christians who felt spiritually dead in their churches reached for their literature and left their communities to join the Brethren (Miller 1992, 98-99).

1.2. The Spread of the Brethren Movement in the Former Yugoslavia

Englishman F. A. Tatford (1901–1986), a member of the so-called of the Plymouth Brethren, wrote more than seventy books (mostly biblical commentaries) (Rainey s.a.), and one chapter of his book *Red Glow over Eastern Europe* published in 1986 he devotes to an overview of the spread of the Brethren movement among the South Slavs, primarily writing about the activity of missionaries in that area through the spread of the gospel and humanitarian work (Tatford 1986, 240-254). Tatford himself visited many countries, often including those difficult to reach, where he taught the Bible and also visited the brothers in Yugoslavia. According to his records, the first assembly of brothers (Tatford mentions only *an assembly*) in Yugoslavia was founded in 1900 in Bački Petrovac, Serbia, in an area with a majority of Slovaks. This was preceded by the work of missionaries (Tatford 1986, 245), who were Jan (or John) Siracky and the Butcher couple (Kate and Frederick). There were over 50,000 Slovaks in the area around Petrovac, which had a population of about 12,000. The gospel had been preached to them, and believers had been baptized since 1875. Jan Siracky worked among them for several years and was joined by the Butcher missionary couple at the turn of the century. This resulted in the founding of the first Yugoslav congregation, according to Tatford. Brother J. Siracky worked to spread the gospel and translated Christian tracts into Slovak, as there was very little Christian literature available in that area at the time, until he left for America in 1923, where in 1927 he received recognition for his work in Eastern Europe (Tatford 1986, 245). “Before World War II, the community had about 15 church communities in Vojvodina, northern Serbia, and smaller groups of believers in Croatia” (Kolarić 2005, 630).

The next missionaries Tatford lists as continuing to visit the area were James Lees, Franz J. Kresina, and Michael Sadlon, brothers from Bohemia, and many Britons such as Martin W. Baker, Jacob Schneidrook, H. J. Humphries, S. R. Hopkins, and William E. Grünbaum. After Bački Petrovac, another community or “assembly” was founded in the nearby town of Kisač, which was assisted by Franz Kresina, who also visited Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zagreb. The community in Bački Petrovac grew in the 1980s to three hundred believers under the leadership of Samuel Ribar, and later his son Samuel Junior (Tatford 1986, 249).

Englishman James W. Wiles and his wife Louse D. had been in the heart of the Balkan country for almost seven years, and finally arrived from Birmingham to Belgrade in 1913. James, who had worked at Birmingham’s King Edward Grammar School, was employed as a professor of English at the University of Belgrade,

and then at the beginning of World War I as a translator and secretary for the Red Cross, which allowed him to move freely among prisoners and wounded, to whom he distributed thousands of Bibles. He also helped to relocate three hundred Serbian boys from the war zone to safety, where they attended the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and were exposed to Christian teachings daily. The Wiles couple traveled thousands of kilometers, visiting countries in the Balkans, including Croatia, to assist with humanitarian work and share the Word of God. Furthermore, the Englishmen J. Gaskin and E. Collins, and W. Dudgeon came to help with work in hospitals in Skopje, North Macedonia; Max Springer worked on spreading the gospel in Croatia, and James Lees in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia (Tatford 1986, 249-252).

In 1930, brother Mojsović, of Serbian origin, came from Czechoslovakia to Novi Sad, where he established several communities and published a Christian magazine in the Serbian language, which continued until World War II. In 1937, the first Yugoslav Conference of Brethren communities was held in Novi Sad, attended by brothers from that area, including some visitors from Great Britain. During World War II, several additional communities were established in Serbia, located near the Romanian border and south of the Sava River. In 1950, thanks to the work of two sisters who arrived from Italy, a community began to operate on the Croatian coast in Opatija. From that community, a Hungarian woman helped establish a community in her hometown of Subotica, Serbia, which by 1986 had approximately fifty members (Tatford 1986, 253). The community from Opatija relocated to Rijeka, where it experienced rapid growth, and by 1966, it had found a larger space and already had approximately a hundred members. Numerous brethren conferences are held in Rijeka, and in 1977, F. A. Tatford, among others, speaks. Given that Rijeka is a tourist destination, many in that community have heard the gospel and passed it on, such as a newly converted Macedonian family who, upon returning to their hometown of Bitola, continue to witness and work. A community was also established in Split, and in 1946, it was officially established in Zagreb, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The movement spread rapidly, aided by visits and assistance from brothers from Great Britain and other Western countries, so that by the time of World War II, there were approximately fifteen local communities in Vojvodina, in northern Serbia, and the movement was already expanding throughout Croatia (Ceranić 1970, 41). By 1970, the existence of 24 communities in the territory of Yugoslavia was recorded (2 in Slovenia, 5 in Croatia, and 17 in Serbia). At that time, two religious bimonthly magazines were already being published: *Vječni život* in the Slovakian language in Bački Petrovac (editor Jan Majerski) and *Bratski vjesnik* in Zagreb (editor Marija Berković), both with a circulation of one thousand copies (Ceranić 1970, 42). At that time, communities were active in six places in Croatia: Zagreb, Rijeka, Split, Duga Resa, Banova Jaruga, and Ludina (Jambrek,

2003, 166). According to Tatford, by 1986, approximately fifty communities had been recorded in the territory of Yugoslavia, including smaller groups and those with between one hundred and two hundred members, while the community in Zagreb, located on Gajeva Street, had around one hundred members (Tatford 1986, 253).

1.3. The Origin and Development of Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb was founded on November 3, 1946, when the founding group gathered and unanimously made the decision: "An independent Church Municipality is being formed, which enters into the closest cooperation with the work of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren, whose spirit and doctrine we already possess almost entirely. Gabrijel Jonke is God-appointed responsible elder and preacher" (Krštenje od 1946.). The church minutes list the names of nine founding members: Gabrijel Jonke, Jelena Jonke (Gabrijel's mother), Vaclav and Martha Hansal, Milka Peharda, Branko Đaković, Dragica Božičković, Olga Škaberna, and Nada Vacek. The following are listed as supporters of the founder: Ema Đaković (mother of Branko Đ.), Ivana Jonke, Anđelka and Barica Lukavečki, Biserka Marić, Darinka Horvat, and Slavica Lukić. The official founding of the church was preceded by Gabrijel Jonke's trip to Novi Sad for a meeting with P. K. Mojsović, the president of the General Eldership of the Brethren Church in Yugoslavia. The founding of the new church was also preceded by a meeting with the elders of the Baptist community in Zagreb. The church minutes state the following:

Gabrijel Jonke reports on his trip to Novi Sad and the discussions he had with brother P. K. Mojsović, the president of the General Eldership of the Brethren Church in Yugoslavia. He further reports on the discussions with the elders of the Baptist community in Zagreb, who were not willing to accept the recognition of the previous work in 38/IV Red Army Street⁴ as an independent church community based on the free and simple principles of the New Testament, which agreement was set as a condition for remaining within the Baptist Churches (Krštenje od 1946.).

Then, at the behest of Petar Mojsović, the church reported to the then authorities to receive their full recognition and protection.⁵ In this regard, the following conclusion is made: "It is concluded: 1) That among the brothers and sisters and

4 38/IV Red Army Street, today Nodilova 2, Zagreb. At that time, the Jonke family lived in that apartment, and today the Đaković family.

5 In the church minutes, it is stated that Petar Mojsović states the following: "He warns of the need for a new registration of our church and our meetings in Zagreb with the national authorities, namely with the Commission for Religious Affairs under the Presidency of the Government of the Republic of Srpska, which is responsible for us."

friends, in addition to spiritual knowledge, there is constantly spreading awareness of the need not only to submit to the authorities, but also to full loyalty and cooperation with our national government. 2) Brother Gabriel Jonke is entrusted with compiling and submitting a report about the church and church meetings" (Krštenje od 1946.).

According to the minutes, the church had its first baptism in 1947, and eight believers were baptized (the baptismal candidates were prepared and recommended by Gabrijel Jonke and baptized by Petar Mojsović).⁶ From its beginnings, the church kept a record, entitled "Krštenje od 1946." ("Baptisms since 1946"), which contains a list of those baptized from 1946 to 1960. The minutes also record meetings at which some important decisions were made regarding the founding of the church, and minutes of individual weddings. Gabrijel Jonke is listed as the recorder, and in 1953, Branko Đaković. Baptisms were first performed by Petar Mojsović, and from June 1949, this service was entrusted to Gabrijel Jonke. In 1958, it is mentioned that Branko Đaković led baptisms twice. The document lists the wedding of Branko Đaković and Hilda Punk on 13 November 1949, and the wedding of Gabrijel Jonka and Nada Emilija Vacek on 11 December 1949.⁷ According to the church records, 63 believers were baptized from the official beginnings of the church in late 1946 to July 1951, i.e., in five years. The baptisms were performed in Zagreb, but the records indicate that several individuals from other places and cities were also baptized. Several believers from the community in Opatija and Duhovo near Uljanik are listed, as well as two from Ludina near Kutina, and individuals from Bjelovar, Đakovo, and Maribor.⁸ At that time, sometime between 1946 and 1951, the church was located in the Jonke family apartment, where Jelena Jonke, then a widow, lived with her son, Gabrijel, and daughter, Hana. Hana's husband, Boris Gajer, and their two children also resided there. After their marriage in 1949, Nada Vacek, Gabrijel's wife, joined them (Jonke 2017). Out of a desire for more spiritual nourishment and fellowship, a few believers began to gather in the same space with the same fervor, and the initiator was mother Jelena, whose initiative was later taken up by her son Gabrijel. The meetings were first held in that apartment on Sunday afternoons, as some of the participants initially attended services at the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street, where Gabrijel also occasionally preached. Interestingly, Gabrijel Jonke and Nada Vacek, who later became his wife, attended the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street.

6 The following were baptized: Ema Đaković, Milena Šešić, Ivana Jonke, Magdalena Morlok, Anđela Lukavečki, Štefica Štulić from Ludina, Slavica Lukić from Sređani, Velika Tomović from Maribor.

7 According to the minutes, it is evident that the weddings took place first in the registry office, and then in the church premises, prayers were held for God's blessing and guidance over the married couple, and the meaning of marriage was discussed, while the newlyweds made promises of fidelity to God's precepts.

8 In later years, some believers from Karlovac, Sesvete, Duga Resa, etc. were baptized there.

Nada's father was Vinko Vacek, a preacher at that church, and she was converted in 1945 when Gabrijel Jonke preached there one afternoon (Jonke 2017). As the group grew, it sought to form an independent church community within the Baptist Church. However, their request was denied, so the group merged with Christ's Church of the Free Brethren, with which they also had a collaborative relationship. After the church received space from the city for use, the Jonke family moved to another apartment, while the Gajer family remained in theirs. In the early 1960s, Branko and his wife, Hilda, moved in. The Đaković family still lives in that apartment today.

Five years after its founding, in 1951, Christ's Church of the Free Brethren finally received space from the city to use in the very center of the city, on the second floor at 9a Gajeva Street⁹ (Fig. 1). This building, constructed in 1900, was later declared a heritage monument. The church later dropped the word "free" from its name and left only "brothers." Already in the *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*) from 1966, it only mentions Christ's Church of the Brethren, or CCB for short. "Most communities began to operate under the name of Christ's Church of the Brethren, but over time, some retained only the adjective 'brethren', and some left only the basic name, while some added a new name to the basic name. Some Brethren churches changed their name to Christian communities" (Jovanović 2007, 224).



Fig. 1: *The Community of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren in the church premises, Gajeva 9a, 1952*

9 On January 29, 1951, Christ's Church of the Free Brethren received a Decision from the city on the use of the premises at Gajeva 9a, i.e. a permit allowing it to move into that space within ten days.

The church experienced rapid growth in numbers during its early days, and according to Zorislav Đaković, son of Branko Đaković, it had approximately 100 people by around 1957-58 (Zorislav Đaković 2018). The church was very active in evangelization, mostly through the distribution of tracts and personal sharing of testimonies. Conferences, trips with children and young people, and later youth camps were organized throughout the year. The church was also regularly visited by foreign missionaries, who sometimes took entire groups of young people to England for international conferences and to experience church life there. They also attended conferences in Switzerland, France, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), and Germany. The community grew in Pietism. The leadership consisted of elders, including Gabrijel Jonke, Branko Đaković, Božo, and Jure Knežević, and others, but mostly Gabrijel and Branko preached, who were mostly involved in the leadership and work of the church (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: *The Community of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren in the church premises, Gajeva 9a, 1965*

During the 1970s, Gabrijel Jonke, who had previously led the community together with Branko Đaković, left for Germany, where he dedicated himself to missionary work with “migrant workers” in Munich, while Branko Đaković continued to lead the church with other elders. Around this time, tensions arose among a certain group of young people who increasingly felt the rigidity of the church's certain principles and rules. As a result, a large number of young people separated and continued to gather as independent home groups.

CCB Gajeva continues to operate, but in smaller numbers. Around the first half of the 1970s, the church became more closely associated with the German, more conservative Brethren movement through missionaries coming from Ger-

many, from Dillenburg. The community is also visited by Brethren from France and Switzerland. Especially during the Homeland War in Croatia, the French assisted, sending humanitarian aid on several occasions. Over time, the number of members gradually decreased due to the aging of the members. Branko Đaković, who eventually remained the sole elder, passed the responsibility of leading the community to his son, Zorislav Đaković, in 2005 due to his advancing age and inability to continue. A year earlier, in 2004, the church was registered in the Register of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia under the name Christ's Church of Brethren – Zagreb. In 2008, an agreement was reached between CCB and the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, allowing the Institute to utilize the space for a reading room and classroom. Currently, the space at Gajeva 9a houses the Institute's reading room with reference literature and the Center for Biblical Research (CBR), a department of the Biblical Institute "established with the aim of encouraging public, personal and private reading of the Bible by preserving works of Croatian biblical heritage and promoting research into its history and research into biblical translation, with the aim of restoring the significance of the Bible and biblical values in Croatian society and informing the media and the public about everything related to the promotion of the Holy Scriptures" (Center for Biblical Research s.a.). The space organizes courses in Biblical Greek and Hebrew, as well as lectures on various biblical topics. The space is also used for various events, including book presentations, Christian meetings, and roundtables.

After the death of Branko Đaković in 2009, Zorislav Đaković was officially appointed by the Council of Churches of Christ in Croatia¹⁰ as the leader of the community at 9a Gajeva Street. In 2008, the book *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj* (*Religious Communities in Croatia*) was published, which included a chapter entitled "Churches of Christ in Croatia" under the category "Christian Churches of the Reformation Heritage," which presented a division of the Churches of Christ into two parts, according to their origin: 1) Churches of Christ from the Restoration Movement, which emerged in Great Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; 2) Churches of Christ originating from the English and German Brethren movement of the 19th century (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 123).

In 1979, Gabrijel's son, Tomislav Jonke, founded a community called the Church of Christ – Betania, which is considered a free church originating from the Anabaptist movement (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 125). They also used the space at Gajeva 9a, albeit at a different time of day, and

10 "In 2003, the Government of the Republic of Croatia concluded an agreement of mutual interest with the Churches of Christ in Croatia, by which the Churches acquired legal personality and the possibility of public activity in the social community in accordance with the Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities in the Republic of Croatia" (Church of Christ Varaždin s.a.).

later relocated to another location on Svačićev trg. The Betania Church, under the leadership of Tomislav Jonke, continued to organize summer camps in Lokve, later purchasing a larger space and, for many years, dedicating itself to working with addicts who come to Lokve throughout the year for a longer period of rehabilitation. They also continued to organize youth camps, which were attended by young people from other parts of Croatia, especially Rijeka.

From Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb, many are today pastors and elders, such as Tomislav Jonke (pastor of the Church of Christ – Betania in Zagreb) and Giorgio Grlj (pastor of the Baptist Church in Rijeka), and some were pastors for a certain period of time, such as Danijel Berković (formerly pastor of the EPC "Radosna vijest" in Zagreb, today a lecturer in Old Testament at the Bible Institute, Zagreb), Mihael Jonke (served as a pastor, evangelist and helped in the establishment and growth of the church), and some serve in church leadership, such as Zorislav Đaković (member of the eldership of the Church of Christ in Zagreb and current leader of Christ's Church of Brethren – Zagreb).

2. Organization and Structure

2.1. CCB Features

"The founders of the Brethren movement in England (*the Plymouth Brethren*) were mainly evangelical Christians from the Anglican Church who believed that Christianity must be faithful to the Holy Scripture, simple and practical" (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 123). These characteristics also applied to the Brethren in Zagreb, who cultivated fidelity to the Scriptures, simplicity, and practicality. The Bible was read daily, studied regularly, and some passages were committed to memory. Such a practice was encouraged even among children. Zorislav Đaković recalls how Božo Knežević knew an exceptionally large number of quotations and parts of the Bible by heart: "I remember that some people always questioned us as children. Especially Božo Knežević, the father of Mira and Dunja, who used to ask us, for example: 'Where does it say *I am the way, the truth and the life* or *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened?*'" And if anyone knew, they would give them a reward, ice cream or something. So, we tried to find out. The Bible was quoted a lot, a lot of people knew certain parts of the Bible" (Zorislav Đaković 2018). The book *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj* for the Brethren movement states the following:

The movement became known for emphasizing that for Christian unity, one should renounce denominational structures and names and meet simply as brothers, welcoming all who belong to Christ. Understanding the Church as a community of believers who meet to glorify God, emphasizing the autonomy

of each local church. They believe that the ministries and gifts in the church are given to all believers. In addition to accepting biblical teaching, the *Brethren churches* emphasize the imminent coming of Christ, the preaching of the gospel, and the necessity of personal conversion. In the *Brethren movement*, each local church is independent, and there is no hierarchy or centralized organization (Marinović-Bobinac and Marinović-Jerolimov 2008, 131).

Christ's Church of Brethren, as already mentioned, was founded out of a desire "for more spiritual food and fellowship" and continued to operate through many joint meetings with an emphasis on the study of the Holy Scripture. All members, i.e., brothers, could teach, depending on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Although they avoided denominational classification and hierarchical structure, a certain structure and leadership still existed, which will be discussed below. Full-time pastoral ministry was out of the question, but all of the leadership and elders of the church had their secular jobs and ways of financing, following the example of the apostle Paul, who, while preaching the gospel, was also engaged in tent-making. In this way, he supported himself and was not a burden to others, as is written in 1 Thessalonians 2:9: "You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."¹² They also found the basis for this in 1 Corinthians 9:17-18: "For if I do this of my own will, I have a wage, but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my wage? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel." The church fund (collected from the voluntary offerings of members) was used for the needs of the church and the spread of the gospel, which included: maintaining the premises, organizing events, conferences, publishing literature, helping the needy, etc.

The community was characterized by Pietism, which emphasized piety, as well as puritanism and a desire for separation from the world and spiritual purity. Such an effort was practically visible in some external characteristics, such as: women were encouraged to wear skirts instead of trousers (which were considered men's clothing), to wear appropriate hair length and hairstyle (1 Cor 11:14-15) and to generally dress more modestly and chastely (no jewelry or only modest jewelry, without emphasizing the eyes or lips with makeup, etc.), referring to biblical verses (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:2-5; Deut 22:5); men were encouraged to cut their hair (1 Cor 11:14) and wear clothing appropriate for men. They also avoided wearing a tie, which was considered unnecessary adornment (Deut 22:5). Women were supposed to cover their heads in church meetings, in accordance with the biblical verses in 1 Corinthians 11:5-16 where it is written that "but any woman who prays

11 Except for women who could teach children and other women.

12 Unless otherwise noted, the biblical text used in this article comes from the NRSV (Updated Edition).

or prophesies with her head unveiled shames her head" (1 Cor 11:5) and where Paul, in the tenth verse, notes that "...a woman ought to have authority over her head, because of the angels," and further in verse 13 says: "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled?" Accordingly, women would put a scarf or kerchief on their heads during the meeting, which they would then remove when leaving the church, unless they wore it constantly, as was the custom among older women in suburban settlements. In some places, this tradition is still observed today. The preferred hairstyle was a bun, which was worn by almost all women, except for a few from the younger generation. Since the 1970s, when the "hippie movement" among young people began, conflicts have arisen between the older and younger generations. Young men wanted to wear longer hair, while girls sought to wear jeans, which were increasingly popular at the time, and let their hair down. Danijel Berković (2018) recalls:

In this room in Gajeva, where Christ's Church of the Free Brethren was, when you entered on the right side, by the windows and where the harmonium was, women sat there, and men on the left, where the tiled stove was. That was generally the rule. Women in church did not have the right to vote (in terms of public speaking), not even in public prayer, and head coverings were mandatory for women. So, a "bare-headed" woman was not allowed to attend church services... on the one hand, women were forbidden to have short hair, and on the other hand, if they had long hair, they were not allowed to let it down because that was like some religions, like Islam. Then women tied their hair into a so-called bun, and on top of that they wore a scarf or kerchief. Some women also wore hats instead of a kerchief; generally, the head covering was important.

2.1.1. Theology

In the book *Hrvatski bezimprimaturni biblijski prijevodi*, Ruben Knežević states about Christ's Church of Brethren:

In theology and interpretation of the Bible, the so-called dispensationalist approach with an emphasized eschatological note was adopted (the history of salvation is usually divided into seven time periods – dispensations, in which God acts in a diverse way specific to each period), the father of which is considered to be John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), one of the main founders of the Plymouth Brethren movement in European countries. Classically educated, he prepared Bible translations in French, German, and English (Knežević 2019, 137).

Christ's Church of Brethren emphasized the experience of personal conversion, which implied a person's encounter with the living God, and as a result, a change in lifestyle and the abandonment of old, bad habits. Baptism would then follow, preceded by a conversation and a certain period of observation. Then the person

would be baptized by the brothers from the church leadership. Only adults could be baptized by immersion in water. The baptism would take place on the premises of the church, at Gajeva 9a (in the bathtub provided for it) or on the Sava River (see Fig. 3). Additionally, the imminent arrival of Christ, God's judgment, and the necessity of conversion were emphasized.



Fig. 3: Baptism on the Sava River, Zagreb, July 23, 1968

2.2. Church Organization

Local churches operated independently under the leadership of elders. Every four years, and if necessary, more often, the general assembly was held to resolve common issues. Other ongoing issues were handled by the main delegation, which consisted of selected elders for the territory of each republic with a few other affiliated members. The president of the Main Representatives of the church in the sixties was Samuel Rybar, based in Bački Petrovac, while the headquarters of the secretariat was in Zagreb.

In 1945, the Brethren churches published a booklet entitled *Načela: (kao stalni program) na kojima se zasniva i na osnovu kojih djeluje Kršćanska zajednica slobodne braće (1 Kor 1,9) (Gal 6, 15-16) (Principles: (as a permanent program) on which the Christian Community of Christ's Church of the Free Brethren is based and operates (1 Kor 1:9) (Gal 6:15-16))* (Bogdanov 1945). It is a small booklet (16 x 10 cm) with eighteen pages, compiled by Bogdanov Ljubomir in Novi Sad. Inside the booklet is the seal of the Main Committee with the signature of Petar Mojsović. The booklet was published to inform the authorities about the church's activities and to ensure its free operation. *Načela* provided an overview of the church's organization and operational methods, free from religious dogma. At the beginning of the booklet, the basic religious principles are briefly presented in eight points, starting with point number 1. "The spiritual head of the Community

is Jesus Christ himself, who is in heaven and represented on earth by His Spirit, whose teaching is the only authoritative and obligatory for the spiritual life of every member of the Community (Eph 1:20, Col 1:18, Jn 14:26).” The task of the community is stated to be preaching, interpreting the gospel, strengthening members in faith and moral Christian life according to the precepts of the gospel as preparation for eternal life, and the basis of the community’s teachings is the Holy Scriptures. Regarding the relationship with the authorities, as stated, the members of the community are taught to exhibit unconditional loyalty and obediently fulfill military obligations. The following 28 points describe the organization and rules that must be respected, which apply to the free brothers in the FPRY.¹³ According to *Načela*, each local community with a sufficient number of members constitutes a public religious body supervised by a Local Committee with one representative, i.e., an elder and several board members, who are responsible before God and the civil authorities for their local community, or as it is written, “an assembly.” The representative of the Local Committee is elected by the Main Representatives, with the approval of the local community, which also elects the committee members, subject to the approval of the Main Representatives. The Main Representatives is the body that consists of twelve members who make up the Main Committee, which is elected by the Main Assembly for a term of four years. The members of the Main Committee were Petar K. Mojsović, as president, and Samuel Cibula, as deputy. Andrija Stracinsky was appointed president of the Supervisory Committee, and Miro Hornyak was appointed as his deputy.

Furthermore, ten members of the Main Committee, five members of the Supervisory Committee, and nine deputy councilors are listed from the following places: Čurug, Gospodinci, Novi Sad, Đurđevo, Kisač, Kulpin, Belgrade, and Neštin, which suggests that local Brethren communities also existed in these places. Novi Sad is listed as the location of the Main Representatives for the entire territory of the FPR of Yugoslavia, and local communities, depending on their capabilities, from time to time make voluntary contributions to the board of the Main Representatives, which uses these funds for its expenses related to publishing magazines, organizing major conferences, and possibly, if there were missionaries sent, to finance their maintenance.

In addition to describing the administration, *Načela* list some of the responsibilities of members, describe the method of resolving disagreements (within the community or more widely through the Court of honor of the local communities and the Disciplinary court), the method of action (meetings, preaching the gospel, conferences and Bible studies) and the relationship towards the authorities (i.e. respect for authorities and renunciation of any political activity). Petar K. Mojsović emphasizes in his note at the end that this is not the dogmatics of the church, because the community does not rely on dogmatics, but only on the per-

13 FPRY - Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

son of the Son of God Jesus Christ, and these rules and principles were issued for the sake of the interests of the people and the authorities regarding the external movement, action, method of work, beliefs, order and order of the community. He further states that believers who do not walk in the love of Christ are cold dogmatists and sectarians, while Christ left his followers the commandment of love that unites and makes the community. Therefore, believers should rely on Christ's New Testament logical commandments, without religious fanaticism (Bogdanov 1945).

2.2.1. Gabriel and Nada Jonke

Gabrijel Jonke (1921–2002)¹⁴ was born in Skopje by chance, but grew up and was educated in Zagreb. Gabrijel and Nada married in 1949, served the Lord together in building a church, and also managed to raise six children (Danijela, Mihael,



*Fig. 4: Gabrijel and Nada Jonke,
December 11, 1949*

Tomislav, Ivana, Lidija, and Mirjana) (Fig. 4). Gabrijel is a graduate economist who graduated from the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb. He worked for approximately twenty years as an economist for a company in Zagreb, and then spent two years in Egypt, where he managed finances during the construction of the Aswan Dam. Then he got a job in a company in Strasbourg, France, as an economic commercialist for Eastern Europe. While working in Strasbourg, he lived between Zagreb and Strasbourg, as his wife, Nada, resided in Zagreb with their six children. At that time, he was also active in the leadership of the church at Gajeva 9a. After an extraordinary job he did for that company in Bulgaria, he received an offer to retire early with full salary, and then went to Munich to spread

the gospel among the “migrant workers” from Yugoslavia who lived there.

In addition to serving at the CCB in Zagreb, Gabrijel and Nada are actively working to create a community in Munich that brings together believers primar-

¹⁴ Biography written according to the testimony of Mihael Jonke, Gabriel's son.

ily from the former Yugoslavia. The community initially began as a home group and then expanded to a community of thirty to forty people. This community did not want to define itself by denomination. Initially, they began with regular street evangelism, which was assisted by brother Vlado Majersky, who had come to Munich from Novi Sad to work. They would set up a table with Christian literature on the street and often sing Christian songs and preach there. In their early days, they would go around the neighborhood and, if they saw a surname from their region, they would ring the bell and share the gospel with them. This is how some who came to Germany from the former Yugoslavia first heard the Good News and received salvation there.

Gabriel was an evangelist and preacher, while Nada (1928) had a gift for working with children, as well as a gift of encouragement and prayer. Together, they traveled almost the entire length of Yugoslavia, visiting the believers. After Gabriel's health deteriorated, Nada continued to live with him in Lokve and remained there after his death until her old age. In her old age, she wrote a daily reading, i.e., a reading of selected biblical quotes for each day of the year, entitled *Kompas za svaki dan*, published by the Church of Christ – Betania.

3. Community Activities and Work

3.1. Meetings, Teaching, Fellowship, and Evangelism

3.1.1. Church Meetings

Meetings were held on Sunday mornings and afternoons, as well as on Fridays and Wednesdays. On Wednesdays, the Bible was studied, and on Fridays, a prayer meeting was held. Members generally attended all of these meetings in full (Zorislav Đaković 2018). At that time, it was common not to miss meetings, including those during the week, unless there were justified reasons. On Sundays at 10 a.m., a service was held, which the church referred to as “breaking of bread” or worship (Zorislav Đaković 2018), and it was a gathering of the brethren, i.e., members of the community. The meeting on Sunday afternoon was an evangelistic meeting open to all. Sunday morning worship would begin with a song, followed by one of the brethren standing up to pray. During the prayer, everyone would usually stand up, and then the singing would continue. The singing was usually accompanied by the harmonium,¹⁵ which was first played by Sister Marta Hanzel, then by Hana Gajer, and later by Ana Woskrasenski and Astrid from Rijeka. The

15 The guitar was not played during Sunday worship, only the harmonium, because the guitar was associated with secular music, but later it was played on other occasions, such as at youth meetings and camps.

singing was led by Nada Jonke, while Hana G. sometimes sang the second part in two-part singing. Everyone participated in the singing, using hymnbooks. At first, these were small booklets with only the words, and later they began to use much larger Baptist hymnbooks called *Spiritual Songs*, also known as the “black hymnbooks,” which included notes. Then came the so-called Lord’s Supper, which was called “breaking of bread,” and after that, charitable giving or almsgiving. A table with a white tablecloth on which there was bread and wine was placed in the center of the room, and chairs were placed in a circle around the table. Danijel Berković (2018) recalls:

The Holy Supper, it was called the “breaking of bread,” it was every Sunday, it was indispensable. For the free brothers, it was actually the center of worship, although the sermon occupied a very important place; just as for the Roman Catholics, the Eucharist is the center of the mass, the “breaking of bread” would also be the center. What was significant about the sermon here, similar to Sunday school, the sermon was not so much thematic as it adhered to a specific biblical text. So, what is called “expository preaching” in English today, they already practiced it then. It was later lost, and today there is talk again that this type of expository preaching should be rehabilitated.

Furthermore, Berković (2018) continues: “It was all mostly in silence, and there was an aspect of great seriousness felt at the Holy Supper, i.e., the ‘breaking of bread.’ Often, people even cried. The emphasis was on suffering: on the cross, the death of Christ. Therefore, the element of resurrection, victory over death, and so on, was largely absent. So, the emphasis at the ‘breaking of bread’ was on suffering and death.”

To begin the Lord’s Supper, which was one of the key elements of the meeting, someone would always share a relevant passage from the Word and pray for the bread and wine. Other brothers would also join in, as Ivana Đaković, Branko’s daughter, comments: “It didn’t go by so quickly, that prayer ‘Thank you, Lord, for suffering for us,’ you know how it goes, but they read from the Psalms and then from the Gospels, repeating that event more. The men participated there to pray and read” (Zorislav Đaković 2018). During the Lord’s Supper, wine was drunk from one glass, one chalice, which was circulated from person to person. The bread on the plate was also distributed among those present, and each one broke off a piece.¹⁶ Then someone would come forward to the pulpit and read a passage from the Word, and a sermon would be preached on that topic. Several brothers could share something if they felt the prompting of the Spirit. Everyone usually carried their own Bible in which they would follow what was being said. Ultimately, it concluded with a song. The meeting lasted approximately an hour and a half in total, followed by the so-called “Sunday

16 Marija Galović initially baked the bread, and later some pastries were bought.



Fig. 5: Children in the “Sunday school” at Gajeva 9a, around 1961

school” for the children (Fig. 5). When the adults left the room, the children who were present during the morning worship remained for their Bible teaching, which was most often led by Nada Jonke. Zorislav Đaković (2018) recalls: “We had cut out characters from Bible stories and then glued them onto flannel, onto some kind of surface, and that was very interesting and fun for us children at that time.” Jadranka Fumić Belamarić (2018) also recalls those classes with joy: “It was really great with sister Nada, we taught those songs that I sing to my grandchildren today, so it was something wonderful. She taught us a lot, she really taught us a lot, she really kept us in the faith, they weren’t meetings for the sake of order, but it was deep, filled with the Spirit, it was very beautiful.” Danijel Berković (2018) also comments:

What was characteristic of that Sunday school, I would say, was that it was unique from our traditions in that they were not manuals, but rather they went through the biblical text. Very often, these were texts from the Old Testament, specifically from the Pentateuch, and topics related to the Israelites, the temple, and other relevant subjects were discussed. That was practically one of the first analyses, we theologians would call it “exegesis” today, but when you look back, for that time it was at a fairly high level at which exegetical texts were studied, of course for a child’s approach, but it was “on par” with a good exegesis of a Bible school... It was from twelve to sixteen, seventeen, so, as they say, “young adolescents” were... in those Sunday schools, programs were prepared for the holidays: Christmas and Easter. There were also small dramas, choir singing, there were a lot of activities.

3.1.2. Youth Meetings, Excursions, and Trips

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a large number of young people had gathered, youth meetings were organized on Thursdays, usually led by Ivan Vacek,

known as Johnny, and later joined by Peter MacKenzie. Jadranka Fumić Belamarić (2018) recalls those days:

Then Gajeva was quite popular, especially with the youth. There were many young people, and wonderful youth meetings. There were really a lot of us, and we even traveled to England together with Peter... We went to that "Spree '73" together in 1973... where Bill Graham was also there... Gajeva was usually a church with a lot of people. On Sunday, we stood there in the hall because we didn't have any room. It was a very big church. They were excellent. We had a lot of guests from Germany, the United States, and other countries.

From approximately 1965 to the early 1970s, missionaries from England would organize month-long trips for young people to experience life in their local communities and learn English. The young people were placed with Christian families, mostly in the London area. Zorislav Đaković (2018) recalls:

We young people traveled to London together, by train and boat; there was no Channel Tunnel back then. I went to stay with a family once in '65, after finishing primary school, and then again in '69. My parents would pay for our travel, and the accommodation was free. We applied for visas, which were difficult to obtain at the time, so they would send a letter of guarantee. It was a nice experience in those English churches and useful for learning the language in those Christian families. A large group always went from all over what was then Yugoslavia, and it was organized by Bill Grünbaum.

In the summer of 1973, MacKenzie took a group of young people from Gajeva, joined by several young people from Radićeva, to an international evangelistic youth conference called "Spree '73."¹⁷ It was held at the famous Wembley football stadium in London (Fumić 2018). The conference lasted four days with several Christian concerts and messages, featuring famous names such as Johnny Cash and Cliff Richard, and the main speaker was the famous evangelist and organizer of the event, Billy Graham. The conference was attended by more than 20,000 visitors from twenty-six nations (Plowman 1973).

Furthermore, Jadranka F. Belamarić continues: "We were in Gajeva regularly, every Thursday, it was wonderful, we played the guitar, those who knew how to play like Johnny and Peter, and they sang along" (Fumić 2018). Unfortunately, in the early 70s, Johnny Vacek died suddenly in a car accident, and the work with young people was continued by Peter MacKenzie (1942–2007), who came from Great Britain as a missionary around 1971 to Christ's Church of Brethren in Gajeva. J. F. Belamarić (2018) recalls from that time:

I was eighteen when we went to Lokve. Then that year Johnny, Ivan Johnny Vacek, died in a car accident, it was '72 or something like that, I don't know exactly. That year, I was supposed to go to Lokve too, but I didn't go, as if God

17 *Spree = SPIritual REemphasis.*

knew. I was supposed to go with him, and he was supposed to drive me, and then that car broke down... That Johnny was a big loss for me... The church was very lively and constantly growing, there were a lot of us, especially the young people, and then it all kind of stopped, which is a great shame. We split up and then went to the Baptist church, we scattered in all directions.

Around that time, under the influence of missionaries from the West, especially from Germany, Puritanism began to be increasingly emphasized, which was no longer acceptable to the young people. Due to disagreements that arose, MacKenzie left Gajeva and joined the Baptists in Radićeva, where he later became a pastor.¹⁸ After MacKenzie, a part of the youth group, also joined the Baptist Church.

The others, mostly young people, met for a shorter period in a home group. The group grew rapidly, so their living space at the time became too small for gatherings. At one point, the senior of the Evangelical Church, Vladimir L. Deutsch, gave them the use of a space located on Gundulićeva Street. They continued to meet there once a week. By inviting friends and acquaintances, the group grew, eventually reaching a size of forty to fifty young people. The meetings were held without a specific protocol, featuring singing accompanied by guitar, brief teaching, and two or three prayers. The teaching was usually led by Tomislav or Mihael Jonke (Gabriel's sons), the brothers Branimir and Radica Gajer, and sometimes Danijel Berković. However, this was not classic teaching; rather, the moderators would start a topic with an introductory presentation, which would then be further explained through an open discussion based on the biblical text. This was, as Berković comments, an innovation for the time – thematic teaching, i.e., discussion based on a biblical text on a topic, in contrast to the previous expository teaching (where the starting point was exclusively a specific biblical text, not a given topic) (Berković 2018). Also, a novelty at that time was the way of singing. A lot of singing was done, but no longer from hymnbooks, but mostly so-called “choruses” of one to two verses that were repeated. Newer songs from the English-speaking world were largely translated. As Berković (2018) concludes, it became a “new musical genre.”

After a year or two of meeting in Gundulićeva Street, in the space provided by Senior Deutsch, the group of young people began to feel pressure from the evangelicals to align with their principles, and they left the space, dispersing in various directions thereafter. Around that time, in 1978, Zorislav and Marina Đaković met Mladen Jovanović and began meeting with him in the home group he led.¹⁹ Zorislav Đaković (2018) had met Mladen Jovanović even earlier, while they were having youth meetings in Gajeva Street, and he states:

18 For more on Peter MacKenzie see: Informatička katolička agencija 2007.

19 Later, the Church of Christ was created from this, first at Amruševa Street No. 11, and since 2000 at Kušlanova Street 21, where it is still located today.

While we were still in Gajeva, sometime before we left, when Peter MacKenzie was already there, Bud Pickl and David Gatewood, missionaries from America, came. They came to Gajeva and invited us young people to their meetings. That was sometime in the early seventies. David Gatewood's father, a dean at the Bible School in Vienna. They used to invite us to their home for Bible teaching and socializing, and that was also very interesting to us. They had an apartment or house rented here in Zagreb, and that's where we first met Mladen and some other people. Later on, I regularly went with Mladen to the Church of Christ in Amruševa, but also occasionally to Gajeva. I helped with various humanitarian actions organized by Gajeva's church during the war. They brought help from France, Germany, and from everywhere, and so we somehow became close again. As Branko, my dad, became weaker and weaker, I slowly took over some of the work for Gajeva, particularly in terms of organization, leadership, church administration, and literature. And later, we would often organize thematic meetings there for larger groups of our friends, and that tradition has remained the same to this day. We occasionally have thematic meetings or other events take place in Gajeva, such as Hebrew school, PEV meetings, and book promotions.

3.1.3. Excursions and Evangelism

Since evangelism was not allowed on the streets in the 1960s, the CCB in Gajeva used various approaches to reach people. One approach was publishing. Another approach was through organized excursions for evangelism. The excursions were held on Sunday afternoons, at least once a month, in small groups. The surrounding villages were visited, and the believers shared their testimonies with the locals. Usually, they went to the Samobor Mountains, Žumberak, and the surrounding



Fig. 6: *Evangelization mission in Duga Resa, 1963*

villages, and sometimes the excursionists even slept in a barn. Sometimes people were converted, and those who could came to the community (Berković 2018). Figure 6 shows a group of believers on an evangelistic mission in Duga Resa in 1963. The picture shows believers from the Brethren Church from Zagreb: Gabrijel Jonke, Branko Đaković, Jure Knežević, Ana Woskрасenski, Meri Magerle, etc., and the brothers from Duga Resa with Pastor Steve Mikan.

In the church in Gajeva, great attention was paid to young people, so they regularly took them to Sljeme almost every Saturday. The trips were usually taken by several adults who took all the children from twelve years old and up, as well as young people up to twenty-five or thirty years old. Sometimes up to thirty young people gathered. This was during the 1960s, until a location was found in Lokve in the late 1960s, and from then on, it became a new destination where people went for holidays throughout the year, especially during the summer (Berković 2018).

3.1.4. Camps

As the number of young people in the church grew, and at the instigation of the Jonke family to find a suitable location in nature for joint gatherings of their family and church, a location for holding camps began to be sought. A meadow was soon found in the village of Homer near Lake Lokvar in Gorski Kotar. At that time, holding Christian youth camps was a novelty within evangelical churches, and this was one of the first of its kind in Croatia.

The first youth camp in the so-called "Lokve" was held in 1966, when seven tents were set up in a meadow by the dam. The following year, in 1967, Gabrijel and Nada Jonke leased a nearby piece of land and purchased a hayloft, an old shack. Since then, camps have been organized at that location every summer. The shack was very dilapidated, so their neighbor, Nada Pintarić, from whom they had bought the shack and who had also heard the word of the gospel from them, came to their aid by lending them her kitchen to use. Initially, the men slept in tents, while the girls stayed at Mrs. Pintarić's (Jonke 2017). Later, the shack was renovated, and there were approximately twenty beds, with about ten for men and ten for women. However, with the addition of tents, this space could accommodate around forty young people. They were mostly young people from the Zagreb church, but some from Rijeka and other cities of the former Yugoslavia would join in (Berković 2018). These youth meetings were mainly led by Gabrijel Jonke. He led Bible studies and organized field trips. His wife, Nada, was also very involved in running the camp, from taking care of meals to spiritually influencing the youth through prayer, leading singing, and sharing the message from God's Word. These camps were held regularly until the mid-1970s (Zorislav Đaković 2018) and were very popular because they encouraged brotherly love and Christian fellowship. Time was spent in nature and on field trips, the Word of God was studied, and Christian songs were sung around a campfire with a guitar (Fig. 7). Even today,

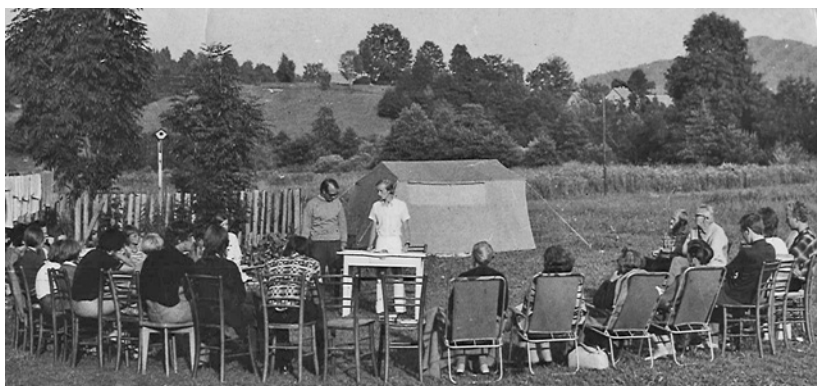


Fig. 7: *Sermon on the meadow, young people with MacKenzie, Lokve, 1971*

many fondly remember these camps where they first experienced God's closeness and love, as well as Christian fellowship.

In 1988, the Jonke family purchased another nearby piece of land and a dilapidated house, which was renovated and expanded, completing the project in 1991. The Jonke family spent every holiday in Lokve, and after moving to Munich, they would spend two months there during the summer, and the rest of the time they stayed in Munich. Unfortunately, when the house was just finished being built, in 1992, Gabrijel Jonke fell into a coma. While he was still in Germany, a small tumor was discovered on his cerebellum, which was removed, but his brain atrophied after that, and he spent ten years lying in a coma in his home in Lokve from 1992 to 2002, while his wife Nada took care of him throughout that time until his death (Jonke 2017). After that, the camps continued to be held, and their leadership and organization were taken over by Gabrijel's son Tomislav Jonke and his associate Zlatko Vidačić (Christ's Church Betania in Zagreb).

3.1.5. Conferences

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb was well connected with other Brethren communities in the country and beyond, mostly with Rijeka, Bački Petrovac, and Novi Sad. Once or twice a year, conferences were organized where believers gathered from all over Yugoslavia (Fig. 8). These conferences were mostly attended by local speakers such as: Samuel Rybar (older and younger), Gabrijel Jonke, Branko Đaković, and Mijo Strbad. Samuel Rybar led the community in Bački Petrovac, and Mijo Strbad in Rijeka (Zorislav Đaković 2018). Foreign speakers, such as Bill Grünbaum and Ken Andverta from England, who often came as missionaries, also knew how to speak. There were also some internationally known names like Bakht Singh from India and Roger T. Foster from England.

Bakht Singh (1903–2000). Many fondly remember how Bakht Singh spoke in Gajeva in October 1965 (Fig. 9). On that occasion, the church space was filled.



Fig. 8: *A group of young people at the Main Station in Zagreb on their way to a conference in Novi Sad (Ivan Vacek, aka Johnny, second from the left).*

Bakht was a very good and dynamic speaker (Zorislav Đaković 2018), a great evangelist, teacher, and founder of large churches in India. Many called him the Billy Graham of India and Asia. Examining his way of life, it becomes apparent that many of the principles Bakht adhered to were also followed by the fraternal churches in this area.

Bakht was a humble man, and on the day of his last rites, the following account was published: "Traffic came to a standstill as a procession of 300,000 mourners followed the coffin to the cemetery. For whom were they weeping? He was not a wealthy man; he had lived most of his life in a small room measuring 3 x 2.4 square meters and had never owned a bank account... He was a Bible teacher, known to thousands only as 'brother'" (Hawksley 2009). Bakht was raised in a traditional Indian family, devoted from birth to the guru, the founder of Sikhism. He despised Christianity, but while studying in Canada, he experienced a profound sense of God's presence at a Christian gathering he happened to attend. He soon began reading the Bible and was converted. After this experience, he decided to



Fig. 9: *Bakht Singh with Gabriel Jonke, October 1965.*

dedicate himself completely to God and serve him. Returning to India, he began to pray, fast, and preach. Disowned by his family for converting to Christianity, he slept with the homeless and preached to the poor. Soon, word spread about him, and churches began inviting him to preach.

In the summer of 1937, he traveled to a place called Martinpur. At that time, this place, part of what was then India and now part of Pakistan, was known for its immorality and alcoholism. There, he prayed and preached until one evening, when everyone got up to pray, fell to their knees, and cried all night long, confessing their sins to God. A revival occurred. From there, he chose seventy people with whom he walked to the next destination, where the same thing happened again, and the revival began to spread to other places. Bakht was an excellent Bible scholar and encouraged everyone to buy a Bible and learn it by heart. He always prayed on his knees and encouraged others to do the same. Bakht Singh also used to pray for the sick during his sermons. Often, those present could witness miraculous healings, but because he did not want to attract people to Christ for the wrong reasons, he even prayed that God would stop healing through him.

Through his evangelistic campaigns, Bakht planted 350 churches, while several thousand church communities considered him their spiritual father. Every year, he would hold a conference where all the communities associated with him would gather. The conference lasted approximately nineteen days, and participants would be housed in tents and attend so-called “love feasts,” where they would gather and eat together. Everyone would be fed, and no voluntary contribution was ever asked for, nor were there any charges for these conferences. There was often prayer throughout the night, and the speaker was never announced in advance. Bakht would pray with his associates just before the meeting and ask if anyone had received a message from the Lord. He never wanted to agree in advance who would preach because he believed that this hindered the work of the Spirit. The expository style of preaching was practiced, and everyone was expected to carry their Bibles and follow in them what was being preached. These gatherings often looked like this: rising early in the morning, after sunrise, followed by baptisms (of which there were many) and the laying on of hands on the baptized, then worship, a sermon and finally the “breaking of bread,” followed by a “love feast” (lunch) and an evangelistic meeting in the evening. Bakht held fast to his principles, never reading newspapers or watching television, and encouraged others to do the same. He spent many hours in prayer and studying the Scriptures. After 1946, he began traveling regularly outside India to various countries, where he was invited to speak. That is how he came to Zagreb (Hawksley 2009).

3.2. *Publishing and Branko Đaković*

In Croatia, specifically in the former Yugoslavia, during the period when the community was most active (1950–1975), public preaching was not possible, and publishing and distributing Christian literature were the main methods of evangelization, i.e., sharing the word of God and the Good News of salvation. Therefore, the CCB worked diligently on producing printed materials, ranging from various tracts and brochures that were always carried with them to booklets, books, and magazines. The regime at the time prohibited the public holding of any religious gatherings, except in premises permitted by the authorities. Even gatherings in a family home were limited to family members only, as such gatherings could also be reported to the authorities (Zorislav Đaković 2018). Even during a certain period, theological literature could not be printed in traditional printing houses. Therefore, the church used its resources and premises to print Christian literature and evangelistic materials (Zorislav Đaković 2018). The church owned the so-called mimeograph, a device for manually reproducing up to a hundred copies, on which the original was transferred to prepared paper with special ink. Such a device was located in the church premises, at Gajeva 9a, and church members helped in the production process.

Most of the published literature was printed on this machine until it became impossible to print freely, and when the main collaboration began with a printing house called “Grafička galanterija Časni” in Severin na Kupi. Branko Đaković (Fig. 10), one of the community’s elders, was most dedicated to translating Christian literature. He translated a large number of titles, mainly from English, German, French, and Italian. His most significant work is the translation of the entire Bible and the *Bible Dictionary*. He was also the editor-in-chief of *Bratski vjesnik*, a magazine with Christian themes published by the CCB in Zagreb. Branko Đaković collected materials for the magazine, and Marija

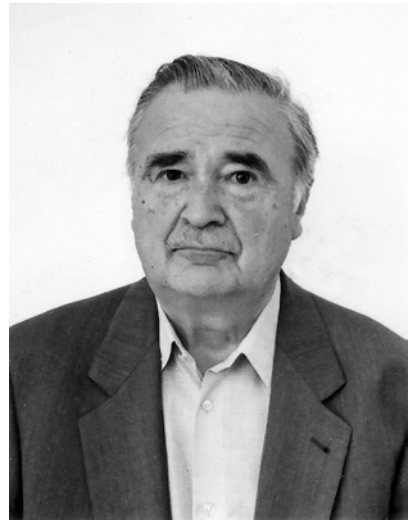


Fig. 10: Branko Đaković, 2000

Berković coordinated everything, from retyping texts on a typewriter to composing and printing on a mimeograph. Although she is listed as an editor in some editions, she never translated or wrote texts, but Branko Đaković would consult with her about the selection of texts. He wrote, translated, and selected texts, and Marija prepared everything necessary for production and printing. In a modern

context, she would likely be referred to as an executive editor, while Branko would be the editor-in-chief.²⁰ Dragica Božičković also helped with the production and preparation of printed materials, as did some other church members. Branko's son Zorislav Đaković (2018) recalls:

He always had a great desire to publish something, some written material, and that's when it started with Marija Berković and Dragica Božičković. He would translate or write certain texts, and they would write them on matrices. Then they would jointly print them on a gesthertner (an old printing technique), and make copies. That was the only reproduction technique at that time. That was done in Gajevo, there in the lobby, there was that gesthertner, those colors, and that was cut. Since my father was employed at the Institute, in one part of the Faculty of Agriculture, as a research associate and advisor. At work, they knew that he was a believer, and they called him "pop." That was his nickname. At that time, it was not allowed to publish or write anything special, so Marija Berković was the one who took it upon herself, to put her name on those materials and to be the editor-in-chief... my dad edited it, she actually wrote it with him, she just wrote down what he edited and did... but they also consulted together, they were friends and Dragica Božić participated in it, graphically. We translated many booklets, such as *Knjiga o džungli* (*The Jungle Book*), and he even let me draw an illustration once, like in *Put u sunčanu zemlju* (*The Journey to the Sunny Land*), by Kristina Roy, and various other booklets. At that time, small brochures were produced in large quantities as materials for missionary work and evangelization in the area where we lived.

The printed materials produced by the church were modestly designed, especially those produced on a mimeograph. They were mostly in black and white, stapled in the middle, with soft covers, and occasionally other colors were used. Of course, later, when cooperation with printing houses began, plasticized covers in color were produced. First, cooperation was established with local printing houses, such as Časni printing house. Later, cooperation was also established with a printing house in France. In later years, cooperation increased with the publishing house in Germany, Dillenburg: Gute Botschaft Verlag (GBV), which prints the New Testament, the Bible, and some other publications. They were one of the first publishers to print daily readings and calendars with a biblical message. Even today, GBV publications can be purchased through the Christian Association in Rijeka, led by Danijel Lukić. The GBV publishing house, whose name translates to "Publishers of the Good News," was founded by several brothers in the 1960s. While distributing tracts in their language to migrants, they recognized the need for Christian literature for missionary purposes. This need has increased with the growing number of missionaries going abroad, and these publishers can now

20 Also, due to the regime at the time, Branko Đaković, since he was employed by a state-owned company, could not be listed as the editor of the magazine at the same time, so in some issues Marija Berković is listed as the editor.

boast of offering Christian literature in more than ninety languages, which they send to over one hundred countries worldwide every year. All the literature published by GBV stems from the desire to spread the gospel throughout the world, and all these publishing activities are not for profit, but are financed by a foundation that translates as "Friends of Christian Mission and Charity" (Gute Botschaft Verlag s.a.).

3.2.1. Branko Đaković – Biography

Branko Đaković (Novska, 27 February 1921 – Zagreb, 9 September 2009) was born in Novska, and at the age of eight, he came to Zagreb with his parents. At the age of sixteen, his father Milan died, and he remained to live with his mother Ema at Vlaška 125/I. He graduated from the First Boys' Gymnasium on Roosevelt Square in 1940 and later graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry in Zagreb. He received his doctorate from the Faculty of Agronomy in Novi Sad²¹ and specialized in soil physics at institutions in Versailles and Bremen.²² He worked at the Soil Science Institute of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry in Zagreb, and later at the Institute for Agricultural Research in Sarajevo. Until his retirement in 1985, he served as a scientific advisor at the Institute of Agroecology of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in Zagreb. He often traveled on official business to foreign countries with developed water regulation systems, such as France, and was most impressed by how Israel created fertile soil from the desert using an irrigation system, which he wrote about in his scientific papers (Zorislav Đaković 2018). He wrote more than a hundred scientific and professional papers. At the age of twenty-eight, he married Brunhilda Punk (known as Hilda), with whom he had three children: Zorislav (1950), Ivana (1953), and Elizabeta (1955–2022).

During his student days in Zagreb, during the time of the Independent State of Croatia, due to political turmoil and great insecurity, his mother, Ema, sent her son, Branko, temporarily to Slavonia, where she had grown up, to live with her relatives. Ema had already converted by then and tried to connect him with some local believers. There he met a believer, Maženka Kovaž, a Czech woman who had probably heard the gospel from a Baptist. She testified to him about her faith in God, and Branko accepted it. And then she told him:

"I know a good preacher, an evangelical, who is a converted man, has experienced conversion and salvation. He accepts you into his family while you are here, and you can live with him." Branko was deeply affected by what he saw in the life of that family. Everything was so beautiful, quiet, yet determined and dedicated. He was one dedicated man who had undergone conversion, and his wife and family lived accordingly (Zorislav Đaković 2018).

21 The topic of the doctoral thesis was: "Contribution to the Knowledge of Hydromorphic Soils of the Lower Course of the Krapina River and their Amelioration."

22 For more on his scientific work, see: Juras 1993.

This preacher was of Czech origin. Branko stayed with him for a short time, but he had already accepted the gospel there. When the danger was no longer there, this preacher instructed him to contact Gabrijel Jonke upon his return to Zagreb. This preacher knew the Jonke family (Gabrijel and his mother Jelena) and directed Branko to them so that they could better introduce him to the truths of the gospel. The Jonke family at that time attended the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street, but they also had their home group. In 1946, Branko was baptized in Mačkovac in the Baptist Church. In that group of baptized people, there were four other converts: Franjo Bulek, Danijel Grujić, Hilda Punk (later Branko's wife), and Adam.²³ Branko and Hilda were married in 1949 in Zagreb.

Branko Đaković, although an agronomist by profession and a doctor of agronomy who left behind numerous scientific papers and other publications in his field, spent his free time translating and writing Christian literature. He was the editor of *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*) and led Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb. From his conversion until his old age, he tirelessly wrote and worked to ensure that the word of God touched as many human hearts as possible. Branko was a polyglot, fluent in six foreign languages (French, English, German, Italian, Czech, and Russian), and had a good command of Latin and Greek. He used English, French, and German the most, and he loved French the most. He owned a sizable home library of mostly foreign Christian literature, but also lexicons, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. The most significant theological works he left behind are the translation of the New Testament and the entire Bible (Zagreb, 2000), as well as the *Bible Dictionary* (Zagreb, 1973), the first of this kind in Yugoslav Protestantism (Knežević 2019, 138).

He met his wife, Hilda (1930), at Christian meetings in Zagreb. It is interesting to note that Branko's wife, Hilda, was also introduced to the faith by her grandmother, Theresia Magerle (1873–1962), née Konrad,²⁴ who in her youth, around the turn of the century during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, experienced conversion in Sarajevo, probably through Baptists who came from Germany (Hilda Đaković 2018). Hilda Punk was born in Sarajevo, completed her religious education, and was baptized in the Catholic Church by her Catholic father. However, since her aunt married an evangelical, Hussite, she, her mother, and grandmother also joined the Evangelical Church at the same time. Her grandmother, Theresia, also read to her selected texts from the Scriptures and Spurgeon's daily devotions in German every day (Hilda Đaković 2018). Hilda states that her grandmother was one of the first converts in Sarajevo. At that time, there was no community in Sarajevo to which they could go, so they had a home group that met regularly

23 Adam – last name unknown.

24 Otherwise of Hungarian origin, she married a Silesian German (Joseph Magrle) at the age of fifteen, and in addition to Hungarian, Czech and German were spoken at home, while she spoke mostly German with her granddaughter Hilda.

in her home, and which was also visited by some missionaries.²⁵ Hilda remembers that when she was still little, they would regularly meet on Sundays at her grandmother's house and pray, sing, and play the harmonium, and her two uncles, Miroslav (Fritz) Magerle and Alojz (Lojzi) Magerle,²⁶ and Aunt Viki on the violin would join in. Baptists from Germany were visiting Sarajevo at that time, with whom Theresija was in contact, and she was also connected to Baptists in Zagreb through Danijela Vacek (known as Danko), who occasionally visited them. He began coming after the war to visit relatives, but also to spread the gospel.²⁷ At the age of sixteen, Hilda came to visit her aunt Meri Magerle (née Vacek) in Zagreb in the summer of 1946,²⁸ and in conversation and prayer with Danijel Vacek, she experienced true conversion, although she had already heard the word of salvation from her grandmother (Hilda Đaković 2018).

3.2.2. Publications

As already mentioned, publishing within the played a crucial role in the evangelism and discipleship of believers. For the needs of evangelism, tracts and some small pocket-sized booklets were most often used. In 1971, *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*) published an offer of their literature by categories of applicability: 1. Reflection on the Word of God; 2. Books for Instruction and Edification; 3. Reflection on the Word of God for Every Day; 4. Stories; 5. Evangelistic Brochures.

Some of the evangelistic materials were: *Zašto to Bog dopušta?* (*Why Does God Allow It?*) by A. E. Wilder Smith, *Sin čovječji* (*Son of Man*) by R. Wolf, and the titles: *Pavle Smoljoni* (*Paul Smoljoni*) and *Život za život* (*Life for Life*). There was also *the Expanded New Testament* (from Romans to Revelation). Of other literature for the instruction and edification of believers and the study of the Word, William MacDonald (1917–2007), Charles Henry Macintosh (1820–1896), and Watchman Nee (1903–1972) were the most widely represented. From MacDonald, titles such as: *Što uči Biblija* (*What the Bible Teaches*), *Pouke za kršćanski život* (*Lessons for Christian Living*), *Postoji povratak Bogu* (*There's a Way Back to God*), *Božja milost* (*Grace of God*), etc., were published, and from W. Nee, a Chinese missionary, titles such as: *Pravi kršćanski život* (*The Normal Christian Life*), *Kršćanska služba* (*What Shall This Man Do?*), *Promijenjeni u Njegov lik* (*Changed into His Likeness*), and literature for daily devotion: *Stol u pustinji* (*A Table in the Wilder-*

25 She was probably converted through Baptists from Germany, left the Catholic Church, and was baptized.

26 Miroslav and Alojz Magerle later, when they moved to Zagreb, became elders in the Baptist Church on Radićeva Street.

27 Danijel Vacek was related to them by family, as Theresa's son Lojzi, Hilda's uncle, married Danijel's sister, Meri Vacek.

28 Hilda and her grandmother Theresia sometimes came to Zagreb in the summer to visit Meri and Alojz Magerla, at Medveščak No. 14.

ness). Also in great demand were C. H. Macintosh's books, *Razmatranja o pet knjiga Mojsijevih* (*Notes on the Pentateuch*), which have been reprinted several times. Furthermore, at that time, stories with a Christian message by the Slovak writer Kristina Roy, such as *Put u sunčanu zemlju* (*Sunshine Country*), *Sluga* (*The Servant*), *Sretni ljudi* (*The Happy People*), etc., were in great demand.

The editions were published by the publishing house *Bratski vjesnik* (*The Brethren Herald*). The same name was used for a magazine, i.e., a church bulletin, which was published several times a year. In later years, the GBV increasingly took over the publishing. Almost all editions were edited and translated by Branko Đaković, who did not sign his name on many editions. Even the translation of the entire Bible does not mention his name as the translator, but only signs it at the end of the introduction, which aligns with the characteristics of the Brethren movement: simplicity and modesty. Branko Đaković did not want to impose himself; instead, he did his translation work out of love for God, his Word, and a desire for as many people as possible to experience salvation through the written word.

3.2.2.1. The Brethren Herald

Branko Đaković was the editor-in-chief of *Bratski vjesnik*, a magazine that he edited for some time together with Marija Berković. The oldest issue found is

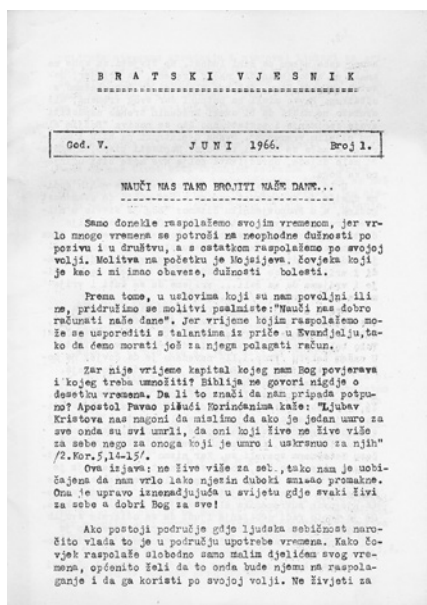


Fig. 11: *The Brethren Herald*, 1966

premises. It was produced in a folded A4 or A5 format (15 x 21 cm) and stapled in the middle. It had a simple design, typed on a machine, printed in black and

from 1966 (Fig. 11), and J. Majerski is listed as the editor-in-chief (as well as at the beginning of 1967). Between 1967 and 1975, Marija Berković served as editor-in-chief, and from 1975 to 1993, Dr. B. Đaković. From 1966 to 1991, the publisher is listed as "Kristova Crkva Braće u SFRJ," and from 1992, it is listed only as "*Bratski vjesnik*, Zagreb, HR." The year of publication in the 1966 issue is V, and in the 1967 issue it is VI, which suggests that *Bratski vjesnik* began publishing in 1962. The 1993 issue is the last copy found, so it can be assumed that *Bratski vjesnik* was published in 1962–1993 (copies from 1966–1993 are currently in the Library of the Biblical Institute, Amruševa 11, Zagreb).

Bratski vjesnik newsletter was of simple production because it was entirely produced and reproduced in the church

white, with only text and monotone colors used, for example, on the cover in 1969 and on several occasions in later years. It mostly contained about twenty to thirty pages, and some later issues had about sixty pages. The texts addressed biblical themes, with the purpose of edifying believers. It was published bimonthly and quarterly.²⁹

Alongside *Bratski vjesnik*, there were also supplements and publications with specific topics (in the same format and design as *Bratski vjesnik*), such as *Stol u pustiji* and *Dnevno svjetlo* by Watchman Nee, which were later published as separate editions. Some of the libraries that own *Bratski vjesnik* are: Research Library of Zadar, which owns issues from 1966 and 1967, and University Library Split, which owns issues from 1966–1968, and NSK, 1966–1968.

3.2.2.2. Bible Dictionary

The *Bible Dictionary* was created out of a desire to approach and deepen the understanding of the biblical text. It is significant to note that it is “the first work of this kind in the Yugoslav Protestantism of that time” (Knežević 2019, 139), given that there were no similar works. The dictionary is large in format, simple in design, without an introduction or imprint (except for the title, author's name, and year of publication), and contains an explanation of certain biblical terms in alphabetical order (from A to Z) on 514 pages. *The Brethren Herald* from 1973 promoted its

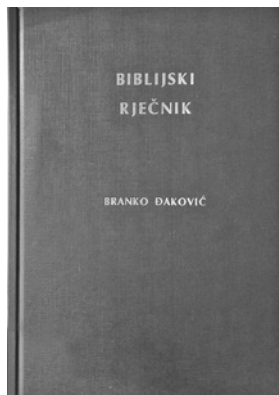


Fig. 12: Bible Dictionary, cover

Hardcover, large format: 30.2 x 21.2 cm (3 cm spine). Book block: 29.7 x 20 cm. Year of publication: 1973. Number of pages: 514. Self-published. Publisher: Bratski vjesnik Kristove Crkve Braće, Zagreb, Gajeva 9a. Editor-in-chief: Dr. Branko Đaković, Zagreb, Nodilova 2, Duplicated: Zagreb, Gajeva 9a

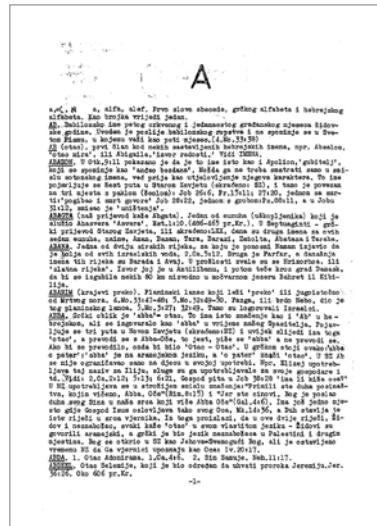


Fig. 13: Bible Dictionary, first page

²⁹ For example, on the 1987 copy, issue 3, it says: “A magazine for the edification of Christians, published quarterly.”

sale, stating that it contained 514 pages and 400,000 words (Fig. 12 and 13). The exact circulation is unknown, but it can be assumed that it was not large, because there are not many copies today. For example, the library of the Biblical Institute has one copy, and the library of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek has two. According to Danijel Lukić, the current head of the Brethren community in Rijeka, who worked closely with Branko Đaković on publishing, a second edition of the dictionary was subsequently printed by the French publishing house Bibles et Publications Chrésiennes from Valence. There were probably not many copies of that edition, because neither he nor anyone from the Đaković family owns that copy, nor has any been found so far. Danijel Lukić believes that the dictionary was modeled after the *Concise Bible Dictionary* (1993). This dictionary, used for comparison and owned by Branko Đaković, is a 1993 reprint, has a hard-cover, and contains 877 pages. The author and editor are not listed. Danijel Lukić probably owns an older copy of the same dictionary, which does not state the year, but does list the author H. L. Heijkoop (Blijhamsterstraat 58, Winschoten, Netherlands, published by Bible Truth Publishers, Illinois, previously printed by George Morrish of London). Hendrik L. Heijkoop (1906–1995) (Cross s.a.) is the author of the booklet *Pisma za mlade ljude* (*Beginning with Christ: A Series of Letters to Young Christians*), also published by GBV, Dillenburg, with a translation by Branko Đaković, as well as some other editions.

3.2.2.3. Bible Translations

The Bible translations of Branko Đaković were written about by Knežević in his 2019 book, which dedicates an entire chapter to his translations. In the introduction, Knežević writes: “Although Branko Đaković’s translations originated within the theology and biblical studies of *Christ’s Church of Brethren*, they eventually became known among other domestic churches that followed the Reformation. After Šulek’s translation of the New Testament and Psalms, these were the first domestic standard translations of Protestant provenance” (Knežević 2019, 137).

Of Branko Đaković’s Bible translations, the first to be published was *the Expanded New Testament* (1969) (Fig. 14), followed by the *Gospel of John* (1989 and 1993) (Fig. 15), and then the *New Testament* (1989) (Fig. 16) and the *New Testament and Psalms* (1993 and 1994) (Fig. 17).³⁰ Finally, the entire Bible was published: *The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (2000, 2006, and 2008) (Fig. 18). In none of these editions, although he translated them all, is B. Đaković listed as the translator (except for *The Expanded New Testament*), but rather as the editor-in-chief.

In 1969, the *Amplified New Testament* was published, from the Epistle to the Romans to the Revelation. These copies are almost non-existent today; there are

30 *The New Testament and Psalms* are listed as second (1993) and third editions (1994).

two copies in the library of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, and there is a record of it in the National University Library (NSK: II-50.173) and the Cambridge University Library (BSS.252.1.F69.2).³¹ The English so-called expanded New Testament is listed as the original: "The Amplified New Testament." Branko Djaković is listed as the translator of the Croatian edition.³² He is also listed as the publisher (Dr Branko Djaković, Zagreb, Nodilova 2), and it is



Fig. 14:
The Expanded New Testament, 1969

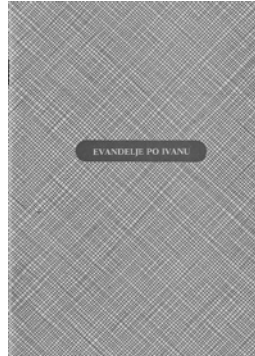


Fig. 15:
The Gospel of John, 1989

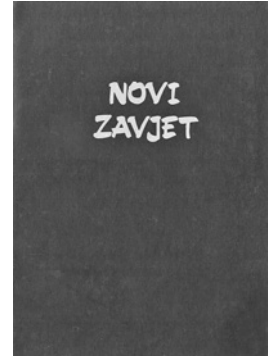


Fig. 16:
New Testament, 1989

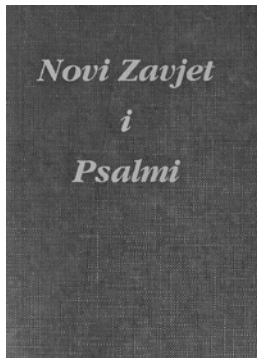


Fig. 17:
New Testament and Psalms, 1993

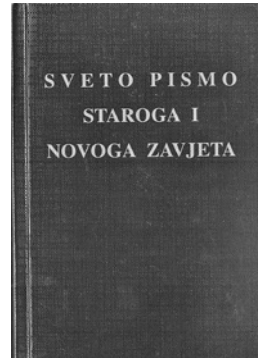


Fig. 18:
Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, 2000

31 Although the introduction to the *Expanded New Testament* states that it is a translation into Croatian, the Cambridge catalog lists it under Serbian, probably because at that time Serbian was considered an official language alongside Croatian (Knežević 2019, 141).

32 Given that at that time everything was written on a typewriter on which there was no printed letter "Đ," it was common to use "Dj" instead of "Đ." For this reason, Brano Đaković sometimes signed with Djaković.

stated that the edition was reproduced in the premises of the Brethren Church in Zagreb, Gajeva 9a.

The Gospel of John was published as a supplement to the *Bratski vjesnik*, and Branko Đaković is listed as the editor-in-chief. The publisher (Christ's Church of Brethren, "Bratski vjesnik," Gajeva 9a) and the printing house (Grafička galanterija Časni, Severin na Kupi) are the same for both the *Gospel of John* and the *New Testament* (Zagreb edition), which were printed in the same year, 1989. For the editions of the *New Testament with Psalms* (1993 and 1994), the publisher is listed as the Udruga za širenje vjerske literature (Association for the Spread of Religious Literature) (Žrtava fašizma 2)³³ and Dillenburg, GBV.³⁴ The same publisher is also used for all subsequent editions of the entire Holy Scripture.

The first edition of the *Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* from 2000 was printed in 5,000 copies, and according to Danijela Lukić (GBV representative in Croatia), this edition was quickly distributed. Most of this edition, approximately 3,000 copies, was distributed in Croatia, with the remainder in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (Vojvodina), and a portion in Germany and other European countries. The second edition from 2006 (in a larger format) was also distributed. The exact circulation is not known, but it is known that GBV prints a minimum of 3,000 copies. The third edition, printed in 2008, was exclusive to the needs of Germany and other Western European countries, and "only about two hundred copies of that reached Croatia."³⁵ Today, GBV offers only Vrtarić's translation of the Croatian translation, while Đaković's is no longer in print. Draško Đenović, head of the Church of Christ in Belgrade and president of the Ikonos association,³⁶ a partner organization of TWR (Trans World Radio, formerly Radio Monte Carlo), known in evangelical circles as a religious analyst, comments on the applicability of Branko Đaković's Bible translation in Serbia and Bosnia:

With the New Testament translated by Dr. Branko Đaković, I met for the first time in 1994... It was a time of deep national divisions... I am free to say that his misfortune was an unfavorable political and historical moment when he appeared, so he was not Serbian enough for the Serbs, and often not Croatian enough for the Croats... It should not be forgotten that the GBV that prints this translation does not have a permanent representative in Serbia, and therefore, the distribution of their publications is very limited.

33 The association is located in Rijeka (Danijel Lukić), and the name was later changed to the Association for the Promotion of Spiritual Culture and then to Živa riječ, Krasica.

34 The publisher is GBV, and the Association for the Promotion of Spiritual Culture is the distributor for the Croatian territory.

35 Danijel Lukić, via email to the author, November 20, 2023.

36 Ikonos was initially TWR's partner for Serbia, and then for the entire former Yugoslavia, except for Slovenia, after "Val evanđelja" was shut down.

Đaković's translation found its place in Serbia in mixed environments and churches that were composed of believers who belonged to national minorities living in Vojvodina. In a way, it was ideal for believers who linguistically gravitated towards Croatian or Croatian-Serbian, particularly those living in Serbian environments. It was especially widespread in the Brethren churches, which were almost exclusively Slovak. According to individuals, Đaković's translation was also popular in certain Baptist communities in Vojvodina, which should not be surprising if we know that in the 1990s the largest number of believers were of Croatian, Bunjevac, and Slovak ethnicity. He was also a favorite among the local Methodists, whose nineteen churches, at least two-thirds, were communities where preaching was done in the Slovak language... The then Methodist preacher in Šid (who has not been there for a long time), Darko Vika, even considered the idea that, following Ruben Knežević's revision of the *New Testament* in the Bosnian language, a Serbian revision of Đaković's translation of the complete Holy Scripture should be undertaken. At that time, there was only Daničić's translation of the Old Testament and a revision of Bakotić's translation...

Somewhere around 2004, Ikonos, which had previously been TWR's partner for Serbia, took over and began broadcasting programs in the Bosnian language. When the question arose as to which translation to offer to the radio listeners of the Bosnian program, the logical choice fell precisely on Đaković's translation because it was somehow acceptable to all parties in ethnically mixed Bosnia. For that occasion, for the needs of Ikonos, GBV printed a new edition with wider margins (the previous edition was trimmed to some 5 mm of text), and Ikonos bought and distributed in Bosnia, if I remember correctly, some 500 copies. When, in the early 2020s, Ikonos sought to utilize Đaković's translation of the Holy Scriptures for a Bosnian program application to meet TWR's needs, it was discovered that, according to Danijel Lukić, GBV also lacked a digital file. This was one of the reasons why TWR abandoned the idea of using this translation for the series of radio programs *Kroz Sveto pismo* (a systematic study of the Holy Scriptures) in Bosnian.

As for the spread of Đaković's translation, it has fallen into oblivion over time in Serbia today. The reason for this is primarily the appearance of new translations of the complete Holy Scriptures in the Serbian language (Modern Serbian translation in Cyrillic, New Serbian translation in Cyrillic, Latin and Cyrillic capitals, and the Milin-Čarnić translation in both scripts)... Another problem that caused some believers to give up on Đaković's translation is the fact that it is printed in relatively small letters in a situation where the "market" is mostly of older age and therefore of weaker eyesight, as well as procurement, bearing in mind that the only source was practically GBV, whose service is not so developed in Serbia. What you should know, however, is the fact that there is not a single book fair in Belgrade or Novi Sad where at least someone does not ask where and how to get Đaković's translation of the Holy Scriptures.³⁷

37 Draško Đenović, by e-mail to the author, November 18, 2023.

Conclusion

Christ's Church of Brethren in Zagreb was founded by a few religious enthusiasts who sought greater fellowship and a deeper abiding in God's word and prayer. It was a community where weekly meetings were not missed, evangelism was attended on weekends, and prayer was prayed regularly and persistently, often on one's knees. The Bible was thoroughly studied and memorized, and the so-called biblical "priesthood of all believers" was practically implemented among the brethren, allowing everyone to preach. They came to meetings ready to be prompted by the Holy Spirit to share something from the Word for that day. The restrictions and constant checks by the then-Yugoslav regime, as well as the impossibility of public preaching or using public printing presses, did not prevent believers from finding a way to share the gospel in their midst. Selected Christian literature was tirelessly translated to bring the gospel message closer to the common people through the written word, and also to build up the body of Christ in discipleship. The entire publishing process was carried out manually, from typing to copying, through the hard work of believers within the church itself. It seems incredible how the church at that time managed to secure a space from the city, located in the very center of the city, but this was preceded by a demonstration of respect for the authorities through the fulfillment of certain conditions and transparency in its activities. Modesty, simplicity, separation from the world, and growth in piety were the characteristics of this group of believers, always ready for evangelization, with at least a tract in their pocket, if not a more concrete book. Many devoted believers and a wealth of literature emerged from this community, which shaped and strengthened the Croatian people's faith and touched their hearts. The extent of its real influence is difficult to fully comprehend. Unfortunately, after the period of culmination, the church began to decline in numbers, primarily among the young population, largely due to its rigid principles. Some events are difficult to understand today, and some should simply be left in the past, because those were different times, and every generation has some new challenges. Therefore, we should learn from history that in other situations we can act more correctly and wisely, all in the light of God's word. The community has provided many people with a solid biblical foundation, leaving behind fond memories of fellowship and spiritual experiences from summer camps in Lokve, as well as some incredible conferences and trips to foreign countries, and transformative experiences in contact with the transcendent. The church has provided a solid foundation for believers who have grown up within its fold and have continued to establish other communities and serve the body of Christ. The same church space is still used for biblical research, the preservation of the past, Christian literature, and the formation of disciples of Christ. People pass away, communities are formed and transformed, but the sown word of God always remains and continues to live.

In the process of writing, it was sometimes difficult to reconstruct historical events through conversations with living witnesses; however, it was also a great privilege to delve into ancient memories with them and peer into the past together. It was also a pleasure to collect some valuable, old, and almost forgotten editions, pulling them out of boxes and old cupboards. Sometimes, it was a real challenge to arrange them in chronological order and connect the pieces. Only one part of the history and church legacy is presented here. It seems to me that this is just the beginning in preserving this part of the past, and I hope that this article opens the door to some new research and insights.

Reference List

- Bogdanov, Ljubomir. 1945. *Načela*. Novi Sad: Hrišćanska zajednica slobodne braće.
- Centar biblijskih istraživanja. s.a. "O nama." <https://cbi.bizg.hr/hr/o-nama/> (accessed November 18, 2023).
- Ceranić, Ivan. 1970. "Konfesionalne zajednice u SFRJ Jugoslaviji." In: *Vjerske zajednice u Jugoslaviji*, eds. V. Bajsić and Z. Frid, 7-44. Zagreb: NIP "Binoza."
- Concise Bible Dictionary*. 1993. Dillenburg: Gute Botschaft Verlag.
- Cross, Edwin N. s.a. "Hendrik L. Heijkoop 1906–1995." *Biblecentre*. <https://www.biblecentre.org/content.php?mode=7&item=1068> (accessed October 20, 2023).
- Gute Botschaft Verlag. s.a. "About us." <https://gbv-dillenburg.de/eng/about> (accessed September 6, 2023).
- Hawksley, T. G. S. 2009. "Bakht Singh 1903–2000, India's Billy Graham and more." *Sternfield Thoughts*. April 6, 2009. <https://sternfieldthoughts.blogspot.com/2009/04/bakht-singh-1903-2000-indias-billy.html> (accessed October 26, 2023).
- Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje. s.a. "Kredo." Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2021. <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=33844> (accessed August 22, 2023).
- Informatička katolička agencija. 2007. "Preminuo baptistički pastor Peter MacKenzie." July 5, 2007. <https://ika.hkm.hr/novosti/preminuo-baptisticki-pastor-peter-mackenzie/> (accessed November 20, 2023).
- Jambrek, Stanko. 2003. *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Bogoslovni institut.
- Jovanović, Mladen. 2007. "Kristove crkve." In: *Leksikon evanđeoskoga kršćanstva*, ed. Stanko Jambrek, 224-226. Zagreb: Bogoslovni institut.

- Juras, Filip. 1993. "Đaković, Branko." *Hrvatski biografski leksikon (1983–2024), mrežno izdanje*. <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/4746> (accessed September 19, 2023).
- Knežević, Ruben. 2019. *Hrvatski bezimprimaturni biblijski prijevodi*. Zagreb: Teološki fakultet "Matija Vlačić Ilirik."
- Kolarić, Juraj. 2005. *Ekumenska trilogija: Istočni kršćani, pravoslavni, protestanti*. Zagreb: Prometej.
- Kristova crkva Varaždin. s.a. "O nama." <https://kristova-crkva.hr/o-nama/> (accessed September 25, 2023).
- Marinović-Bobinac, Ankica, and Dinka Marinović-Jerolimov. 2008. *Vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj: Kratka povijest, vjerovanje, obredi, hijerarhija, organizacija, članstvo, tradicija, običaji i blagdani*. Zagreb: Udruga za vjersku slobodu u RH.
- Miller, Andrew. 1992. *The Brethren: Commonly so-called, a brief sketch*. Dillenburg: Gute Botschaft Verlag.
- My Brethren. s.a. "J. G. Bellett (1795–1864)." <https://www.mybrethren.org/bios/framjgb.htm> (accessed September 14, 2023).
- Plowman, Edward E. 1973. "Spree '73: Fueling the Fire." *Christianity Today*. September 28, 1973. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/1973/09/spree-73-fueling-fire/> (accessed September 10, 2023).
- Rainey, W. Ross, s.a. "Frederick Albert Tatford (1901–1986)." *Plymouth Brethren Writings*. <https://plymouthbrethren.org/article/10251> (accessed September 10, 2023).
- Tatford, Frederick A. 1986. *Red Glow over Eastern Europe*. Bath: Echoes of Service.

Sources

Kršenje od 1946. Church record in manuscript

Interview with Hilda Đaković, Zagreb, spring 2018.

Interview with Milan and Jadranka Fumić, Zagreb, spring 2018.

Interview with Nada Jonke, Lokve, August 6, 2017.

Interview with Danijel Berković, Zagreb, July 13, 2018.

Interview with Zorislav Đaković, Zagreb, September 17, 2018.

Iva Đaković

Razvoj i djelovanje Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu

Sažetak

Kristova crkva braće u Zagrebu od svog osnutka 1946. godine pa do početka sedamdesetih bila je jedna od najvećih i najaktivnijih zajednica na području Hrvatske. Smještena u samom centru u blizini glavnog zagrebačkog trga u Gajevoj 9a, brojila je oko stotinjak članova. Članovi crkve bili su aktivni u evangelizaciji, najviše putem dijeljenja traktata, osobnim svjedočenjem i obilaženjem okolnih mjesta, unatoč ograničenjima ondašnjeg režima. Dva puta godišnje održavale su se konferencije na kojima su se okupljale sve bratske zajednice iz bivše Jugoslavije. Crkvu su posjećivali poznati inozemni propovjednici poput Bakhta Singa i Rogera T. Fostera. Posjete raznih inozemnih misionara, posebice iz Švicarske i Engleske, kasnije i Njemačke, otvorilo je već tijekom šezdesetih godina nove mogućnosti, posebice mladima, za sudjelovanje u kršćanskim događanjima i izvan zemlje. Uz putovanja i konferencije redovito su se organizirali izleti za mlade te kampovi u Gorskom kotaru, blizu Lokvarskog jezera, ali i odlasci u Englesku, što je sve ostavilo veliki pečat na životima mladih. Izdavaštvo je zauimalo bitno mjesto u evangelizaciji te ohrabrivanju, učeništvu i podizanju vjernika. Dr. Branko Đaković, jedan od starješina Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu, iza sebe je ostavio značajan broj prijevoda kršćanske literature, a njegovo najveće prevoditeljsko djelo predstavlja prijevod cjelokupnog Svetog pisma. Također, njegov Biblijski rječnik prvi je biblijski protestantski rječnik na području tadašnje Jugoslavije, a njegovi su biblijski prijevodi prvi standardni protestantski prijevodi na području Hrvatske. U prvom djelu donosi se pregled nastanka bratskih crkava u Europi, kako se taj pokret proširio na područje bivše Jugoslavije te nastanak i razvoj Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu. Drugi dio govori o organizacijskoj strukturi Kristove crkve braće u Zagrebu, a u trećem dijelu razmatra se njezin rad, djelovanje i izdavaštvo. Od izdavaštva, malo pobliže se govori o *Bratskom vjesniku*, biblijskim prijevodima te nastanku *Biblijskog rječnika*. Također se donosi životopis starješine Branka Đakovića i još nekih važnih osoba za život zajednice.