

Ruben Knežević

**I Live with Christ! 70 Years of the Baptist Church in Pakrac 1938-2008**

(*Živim s Kristom! 70 godina Baptističke crkve u Pakracu 1938.-2008.*)

Đuro Maraković, Baptist Union in the Republic of Croatia, Baptist church in Pakrac, Zagreb, May 2009., 154. pp.

The Bible states the words of Gamaliel, “For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men” (Ac 5:38-39). The book highlighted in this review speaks about the work that began 70 years ago, about God’s leadership, and about the blessings and the testimonies of proclaiming the Gospel, and the zeal of believers in their Christian lives.

Ruben Knežević is an elder of the Baptist church in Rijeka. Inspired by his *Overview of Baptist History in Croatia (Pregled povijesti baptizma na hrvatskim prostorima)* (2001) which was intended for students of the Baptist Institute within the Baptist Union in the Republic of Croatia, as well as by the church-historical research on specific Baptist churches, he takes a step toward the future by looking at the memory of the past. The goal of this work is to make a correct record of *yesterday*, so that *today* gets better prepared for *tomorrow*. Besides the introduction, the book consists of several chapters and appendices – “Baptist Beginnings in the Pakrac Region,” “The Baptist Church in Prekopakra,” “The Baptist Church in Pakrac,” “Summary,” “From the Church Album,” “Notes,” “A List of Selected Materials and Literature,” and finally, “Sources of Materials and Illustrations.”

The author investigates basic information on the development of Pakrac and the Baptists’ connections with the regions of Pakrac and Prekopakra, but he also cites exhaustive data for those who want to do more research. Thus Knežević uses archived material from the Baptist Union in the Republic of Croatia, from Baptist churches in Sirač and in Pakrac, as well as numerous manuscripts, printed works, magazines, news papers and audio-visual materials. Beginning with research on Pakrac throughout history – the first Baptist connections with the Pakrac region, the earliest Protestant movements in the Pakrac region, the mission work of the Baptists from Sirač in the 1930’s – the author places a strong emphasis on the Baptists’ beginnings in the regions of Pakrac and Prekopakra, specifically in Donji Grahovljani, Prekopakra, Klisa and Filipovci. The middle part of the book is reserved for texts about the Baptist church in Pakrac. The evident beginning refers to the purchase of a building in Pakrac (1953) and the chronological arrival of the pastors and preachers Josip Mađar (1954-1956), Josip Sudar (1956-1958) and Vladimir Čanji (1965-1968). Describing ministries and different activities of the pastors and preachers Nikola Vukov (1974-1985), Josip Kubica and Ladislav

Ružička (1987-1988), and finally Miško Horvatek (1991-1995), the author also investigates the work of the Baptist church during the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), especially regarding the spiritual sphere, evangelism and humanitarian activities through the Humanitarian association *My neighbor* (Moj bližnji).

Additional value is given to the written words by the numerous photographs gathered from all the stages of the church in Pakrac displayed chronologically and thematically. Some photographs are accompanied by texts, and the reader also needs to pay attention to the large amount of photographs displayed at the end of the book which can be considered a specific church album. In that way, the author endeavors to record and visually confirm the events in a time that is past, but still continues. Through the Baptist church in Pakrac, the reader can see the work of God. Regardless of the trials believers had to face and the crises the church went through, they showed by their deeds that they did not forget God's commission. Ruben Knežević concludes his research by saying that this church too, as every other, has its ups and downs, it is not perfect, but that it strives toward perfection. He notes the words of the present pastor of Pakrac' church, Timothy-Ivan Špičak, who said that the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church is not a remembrance or thanksgiving to glorify people, rather to glorify Christ and further proclaim the gospel. The message contained in this book applies to all generations – younger, middle and older – and refers to the consideration, (re) view and research of the past that should serve as a model for ways to build the future, instead of being a burden. Therefore, even in the title of the book, there is a message which is not constrained – I Live with Christ!

This book is not only a valuable work that illuminates memories and speaks about history, but is also like a sign post for believers who are considering the future, a way to follow guided by the words of Đuro Maraković, the first words he learned from the Scriptures, and which are written at the beginning of the book: "But we preach Christ crucified" (1 Co 1:23).

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Translated by *Ljubinka Jambrek*