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1. Introduction

At the end of 1991, a group of pastors and deacons of the Evangelical church in the Republic of Croatia established a new organization for humanitarian aid named Agape. After fifteen years of continued activities and efforts, during which Agape established numerous branch offices in many areas (republics and provinces) of the former Yugoslavia, it was deemed important to thoroughly assess the extent to which Agape activities had contributed to the decrease of human suffering. Therefore I began investigating both the results of Agape’s humanitarian activities and the ways in which Agape’s founder (the Evangelical church) has itself been changed through its humanitarian engagement. Agape emerged after a hundred Evangelical churches committed to publicly, responsibly and efficiently respond to the needs created by the war. The organization also dealt with the painful consequences of the social and economic transitions which all post-communist countries in the Balkans were going through. The decision to found and later to expand Agape significantly contributed not only to decreasing general suffering, but also led to an inevitable change of the identity of the church itself, transforming the Evangelical church’s public activity and behaviour on different levels.

Researching such humanitarian activity was necessary also as many other Christian humanitarian organizations have began simultaneously to operate as non-governmental and non-for-profit organizations. As they gradually become part of the civil sector, which was for them an
unfamiliar area, they began to be confronted by numerous management-related problems (especially given the rapid initial expansion of these ministries in terms of span, diversity and territory). They urgently needed professional help in order to meet these challenges, especially in the areas of adopting and using management methods, and of their operational adjustment to the theological viewpoints related to church missions. Another aim of this work then is to offer professional assistance to all, individuals and organizations, who want to make a more significant impact than they have in the past within their humanitarian or social church organizations. Although in Croatia there is no specialized literature on topics related to humanitarian and social work/assistance as part of the church mission activities (not to mention complete lack of scientific and expert studies) it is possible – though with necessary adjustments – to make use of the rich and diverse foreign experience and managerial solutions.

My point of reference is to research and provide managerial insight for use by church organizations expanding into diverse and unfamiliar areas, using Agape’s humanitarian work as a case study. Although thebulk of my expertise was related to economy and management, I have also studied theology throughout a significant part of my life. I have had experience working, first in a printing house, then as a lecturer of economics in a secondary school, and finally, as a functionary in the town government administration for ten years. Besides that, I was also a long-time volunteer in Agape where I put to use the experience and skills I gained through my professional work. The continuity of my activities within Agape gave me a thorough knowledge of this organization from its beginnings through all its stages of development. It also provided me with insight into humanitarian work in Croatia, which was an additional motive for my researching and writing about this topic.

This work comprises several parts. In the introduction, I have articulated the main themes and dilemmas related to the area of research, as well as definitions and classifications of terms. Throughout the fol-
lowing chapters, I will discuss the biblical theology of evangelical humanitarian activity with special emphasis on the social ethics and social responsibility of churches, and the relation between the gospel and culture, or, in other words, how this relation results in the social engagement of churches. Based on this, it was possible to provide theological insight into the correlation between humanitarian work and the imperative of evangelism. In the following chapters, I will describe the work of church humanitarian organizations, attempting to define their mission and vision, aims and principles of work, program orientation and target groups, as well as other aspects. While describing types of humanitarian assistance, I will list different modalities of humanitarian assistance, especially analyzing the efficacy of the particular aid with regard to success in evangelization and the rise of new churches. The role of volunteering is another focus of my work, since it is considered vitally important for humanitarian organizations, and having in mind the general long tradition of volunteerism, both in churches and parachurch organizations.

Additionally, because of the importance of fund-raising, public relations and publicity (in general), I briefly talk about appropriate methods for these. Subsequently I analyze a possible model for a successful and efficient humanitarian organization in the framework of churches. My starting point is to define an integral, consistent and self-sustained model with efficient mechanisms for resource management, management of projects and crises, and networking with other organizations. After this, I bring in a detailed description of how Agape was founded and operated in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. This chapter ends with an evaluation using standardized criteria for humanitarian and mission work, and the method of comparing both aspects of Agape work, followed by relevant conclusions. At the very end, I list the research conclusions in a synthetic and itemized manner.

The basic purpose of this research is to increase information/knowledge about church humanitarian and social activities, this
being a relatively new area for Protestant church communities in southeastern Europe. Therefore, the research I present may benefit any who want to be more involved with humanitarian work in parachurch organizations. It can motivate involvement in humanitarian and social service as professionals or volunteers on a temporary or permanent basis. And it may encourage those already so engaged to use more creative approaches. Nonetheless, this text is primarily intended for the professional public, in particular for students of theology, pastors, priests, church deacons and others interested in this area.

2. The Problem and Its Setting

a. Political Issues

The contentious issue of nationalism has received considerable attention since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Many observers outside the Balkan arena have frequently characterized the period of Yugoslav disintegration as the outcome of a power struggle between megalomaniacal actors. Others saw the wars as primordially linked to violent chapters of history. This perspective, adopted most visibly by the international media, relentlessly claimed that Serb-Croat enmities were rooted in ancient ethnic hatreds, overlooking or underplaying long periods of peaceful coexistence. Other factors, such as the rapidly failing economy of the 1980s, post-communist social developments in Eastern Europe, or geopolitical constraints on the region have been equally ignored by many academics.

The pivotal event of the former Yugoslavia’s fragmentation process was the simultaneously announced declaration of independence by both Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. Religions played an insignificant role at the outset of the secessionist conflicts, which first pitted Slovenia’s territorial defence units against the numerically superior Yugoslav People’s Army or JNA. Religious difference, however, rapidly became a contributing element as the conflict spread to Croatia and Bosnia. Misha Glenny
observed that “the wars increasingly assimilated the characteristics of religious struggle, defined by three great European faiths – Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam, the confessional detritus of the empires whose frontiers collided in Bosnia.”¹

In the years following, religions were effectively manipulated as cultural markers and mobilized as standards for ethnic exclusion of other groups, with little regard for the fragile multi-ethnic tapestry. Leaders of the three monotheistic confessions of Yugoslavia (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam) engaged to lesser or greater degrees in nationalist rhetoric, reinforcing old stereotypes and exacerbating current nationalist identity formation.

b. Religious Issues
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the Communist regime began to encounter serious economic, political and inter-ethnic problems during the twilight of Tito’s rule and the first half-decade of the post-Tito period, new tendencies toward the slowing and possible reversal of the secularization process appeared. The end of Tito’s personal control and the mushrooming of internal conflicts which resulted from the accumulated problems of the one-party regime were partially responsible for a major shift in public attitudes regarding religion.

As the economic and social woes following Tito’s death in 1980 continued, members of different communities gradually lost confidence in the federation’s legitimacy. The decrease of authority was characterized by a shift of political power from the centralized federal system to the republic level; this transfer was constitutionally guaranteed by several earlier amendments, most notably the one in 1974. David Brown accurately summarizes the cause of such a political malaise: “The inability of state elites to fulfil their developmental promises translates into the erosion of its main legitimate ideology.” This problem forced disillusioned citizens to become more receptive to

new social justice claims by aspiring political elites who depicted ethnicity as the alternative imagined kinship community. The rising desecularization, combined with constitutional decentralization, massive social and economic decline and the erosion of state legitimacy allowed Yugoslav religious elites, profiting from a vast social vacuum, to create more ethnically congruent identities. During this time, different Christian humanitarian organizations, mission organizations, churches and semi-church organizations, as well as individual missionaries, began entering and operating within the country, bringing their short and/or long-term humanitarian, publishing, media, educational and other projects.

By 1990, the problems seemed unsolvable. The war that followed left more than four million people homeless and created “the most extensive problem of refugees and displaced persons that Europe experienced since the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.”

c. The Rise of Agape

Agape, the humanitarian organization of the Evangelical Church in Croatia, was formed December 11, 1991, in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, as the result of the growing humanitarian and social crisis that followed the war in former Yugoslavia. The biblical foundation of this act is within the “Great Commission,” which is found in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 28. During this time other religious communities also formed humanitarian organizations in order to assist to their members.

The founders of Agape were high-ranking leaders of various Protestant churches in Croatia. Immediately after it was founded, churches abroad were appealed to for humanitarian aid for victims of the war in Croatia. Relief started to flow abundantly in the form of clothes and shoes, food, medications, second-hand furniture, bedding, funding, etc. As time progressed, Agape also received donations of agricultural

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tools, seeds for farms, and livestock and building materials for house and farm rebuilding projects.

From its very beginning the basic philosophy of Agape was a holistic one. Its mission was to meet two complementary needs of the people it assisted, providing \textit{physical bread} for their everyday life and \textit{spiritual bread} for their eternal life. Having this approach, the founders of Agape intended to accomplish both obedience to the Great Commission (Mt 28) and the practice of the Great Compassion.

Agape workers were untrained volunteers from local Evangelical churches, mostly with no previous managerial or humanitarian experience. In a short time, almost every local evangelical church became a centre for humanitarian aid developed in accordance with applicable Croatian laws and regulations. Church boards became local centres for humanitarian aid as they undertook the role of coordinating Agape’s work in a particular area. Organizational problems had to be solved along the way; the whole organization with its many local centres was challenged to work fast and hard, anticipating many mistakes and errors, or not to work at all.

Humanitarian assistance was coming abundantly from all corners of the world, from different churches, church and non-government organizations, and even from several European countries (such as the governmental relief organizations of Sweden and Finland). The needs for relief grew rapidly as the war expanded, especially because domestic industry was not able to satisfy the people’s needs efficiently. In 1992, almost one quarter of the Croatian population were considered refugees or displaced. The Serbian army and paramilitary forces occupied one third of the country, and many of the larger cities were found to be on the so-called “front line,” without regular power or water supplies. The population was under a constant threat of artillery, and about half of the adult male population was mobilized into the Croatian army to defend the country. Those who stayed worked in the factories or served in civil defence units. Travelling throughout the country and leaving its borders was extremely difficult, and a great
number of the population were not allowed to leave their homes in search of a safer place. With the danger of war imminent, army fortifications were set on the streets and squares in case of enemy intrusion, and bunkers and shelters were built. The atmosphere of fear and uncertainty was present everywhere.

c. **Defining the Idea for This Research**

In this paper, I intend to research the long-term impact of the response of the Evangelical Church in Croatia to the turbulent state of war described above, the problems of the post-war period and the painful process of social and economic transition in post-communist countries in the Balkan region. I would like to demonstrate that the decision to establish the humanitarian aid organization Agape and its subsequent development and expansion, significantly and permanently contributed not only to decreasing the general suffering, but also to changing the identity of the church (as the founder of the organization) and modifying its behaviour with respect to different areas of public activity. At the same time, I would argue that Christian religious communities in general show a tendency to conduct their missions and Christian services in accordance to their traditions, strongly resisting changes in their own behaviour and seldom adjusting to the changes around them. Church communities are often more resistant to changes in methodology than other non-for-profit organizations and institutions, and the roots of this resistance probably lie in the nature of the church itself. On the other hand, the diversity and acceleration of the changes around them are often so obvious and inevitable that the adjustments of the religious communities to the new social, economic, political and information circumstances becomes an important condition for their survival.

In the early 1990s, after becoming part of the so-called civil society, or the third sector as it is called nowadays, religious communities across the denominational spectrum and even non-religious communities became important partners in promoting Christian values, values
which churches had advocated for centuries. The success in managing this change turned out to be crucial for the church in performing its age-old mission of preaching the gospel, though in new social conditions. Only through this engagement could these churches ensure their continuing influence on social change and on social behaviour of individuals, families and society as a whole.

This new paradigm of social behaviour for Christian religious communities should bring them to a deeper understanding of their own ethos and transform their methods without changing their basic mission. Such a transformation is necessary, considering the rapid globalization which is occurring in our postmodern age, the numerous challenges that confront the contemporary urban way of living, and the demographic, social, ethical, technological, ecologic and other factors which determine the contemporary contour of life.

The need remains for research into the problem of how the Christian religious community, in these new circumstances, can effectively communicate evangelical values with the aim of changing the social behaviour of target groups and individuals. Accepting their social responsibility and offering humanitarian assistance to those who have suddenly found themselves in difficulty, the church can significantly redefine its public image, as well as the way it views itself. In this case it is vitally important to successfully balance the humanitarian and social aspects of church activities with its central mission – preaching the gospel.

Especially important is the change in the way the church became closer and more open to its immediate surroundings, though this was a mutual process. Throughout this time, other inner changes occurred as well, which consequently created self-sustaining mechanisms for continuous adjustment of the Evangelical churches to the permanent changes in their surroundings. As a result, the announcement of the evangelical message to the world increased in its intensity and authenticity, as well as in its contextualization.
3. Theological Framework

The term “mission” is highly complex and multifaceted, having a variety of meanings in different areas of life. For the purpose of this text, I will use this term to denote Christian mission, whose origins can be traced within biblical theology. The Holy Scripture describes mission in the following ways: as electio (the chosen), vocatio (the calling/vocation) and missio (the mission). In the theological sense, mission is fundamental to all believers and aims at preaching the gospel to those who have not heard it. In the organizational sense, mission denotes the organization that manages the work of missionaries in their own or in a foreign country. Missiology is also, as defined by W. A. Elwell, “a science of multicultural communication of the Christian faith or a scientific discipline focused on the task of evangelizing the World.” In this sense, he considers three areas to be of special influence on mission: theology, anthropology and history. Other social disciplines also contribute to development of the mission, such as psychology, communications theory and sociology. Through their multi-level interaction, the field of applied theology has been outlined with a common title: missiology. The origin of the word “mission” can be found in the Latin language referring to missio, while being contextually founded within Christ’s Great Promise, which precedes the Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

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3 There are 192 words similar to the term mission. See [online]; available at: <URL:http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/mission> [accessed 11 November 2006].


6 Elwell, ed., Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 724.
and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.\(^7\)

Christian mission is defined here as evangelization in general. The church has both a contemporary and an ancient mandate to carry out what is considered as her lasting task — *missio Dei* — God’s work of salvation, within and throughout the whole of human history.\(^8\) The history of Christian mission and her biblical foundation are mutually and closely related and interwoven. One of the most essential definitions of missions is the following:

> The entire Christian existence is to be characterized as missionary existence, or, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “the church on earth is by its very nature missionary.” In light of this, it is tautological to refer to a “universal gospel.” The church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the gospel, but through the universality of the gospel it proclaims.\(^9\)

The focus of Christian missionary activities, according to H. Turner, is towards three main areas: the individual or personal area, the general or public area, and the social or cultural area.\(^10\) On the other hand, M. W. Dempster names three types of mission activities: *kerygma, koinonia* and *diakonia*. *Kerygma* literally means preaching, and the traditional name for these activities is evangelization. *Koinonia* marks the unity of believers in their narrower or wider sense, as well as other ac-

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\(^7\) Mt 28:18–20; or in another place where he says, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mk 16:15–19). *Jeruzalemska Biblija* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost), 2003.

\(^8\) *Missio Dei* is realized following the concept of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “The context of the church’s mission” [online]; available at: <URL:http://www.wemtc.freeserve.co.uk/vo1mission.html> [accessed 11 November 2006].


tivities that occur within this community. *Diakonia* denotes serving the needs of others and is related both to serving different groups of believers inside the church as well as those who surround the Christian community and can be found outside the church.\(^{11}\)

These descriptions of Christian mission can also be compared to the three main aspects of the Christian life:

*Liturgia*: liturgy, worshiping God, both individually and collectively;

*Didaskalia*: religious teachings;

*Diakonia*: serving the community of believers, as well as those outside the church community.

Worshiping, learning the teachings of the apostles and serving the needy are the three components of the complete Christian life. The above aspects have their enduring starting point with the Great Commission and should be in permanent interdependence and inner equilibrium. The growth and maturity of each Christian believer and each Christian community (i.e., each church) is impossible without the balance of these three areas, on both the individual and collective levels. General and long-term mission efficiency is based upon the maturity and development of the missionaries, but also on the maturity and completeness of those who send them out as missionaries.

In speaking of Christian mission in an operational sense, as the preaching of the gospel, various literature sources discuss different division levels of mission activities. Most often, they talk about three levels of Christian mission: individual, social and cultural.\(^{12}\) The indi-

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individual level is associated with the process of personal conversion and further Christian growth and maturity. The social level integrates every aspect and modality of Christian service directed to serving the needs of others. This service level can be conducted individually or collectively, as directed towards the members of a single Christian community or toward those outside of it, towards the wider social community. The third level is carried out on the culturological level and is often known as “deep mission.” It aims at radical transformation of society’s basic values and key beliefs. In explaining to his disciples this part of their charge and role, Jesus used a metaphor calling them “yeast,” which gives a completely new quality to the world where he sent them to go. The influence of Christian mission on the general culture is slow, and the process is difficult to notice, but once it puts down its roots it becomes permanent. Hence, it is important that every believer be fully aware of the triplicity of his/her calling or personal mission, in order to be fully engaged on all three levels. Equally important is the collective dimension of the Christian communities on all three levels, especially considering their interconnection.

Experiences of mission development during the ’90s in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later in Kosovo, indicate that the focal point both in evangelizing and in the founding of new communities (in a later phase), was on serving the churches, *diakonia* stirred by the overwhelming humanitarian and social needs of people caught by war. The need to change the way missions were run meant finding and using new and efficient formulas to preach the gospel within brand new social circumstances.

4. **Outcomes**

Our final aim is to explore the following points:

1. To analyze the past humanitarian activities of the evangelical churches in the countries of the region;
   2. To establish the main characteristics of their humanitarian work;
3. To determine the humanitarian activities that were dominant and those considered secondary, and to determine which combination of different humanitarian activities and evangelization methods achieved most success in preaching the gospel, as well founding new churches;

4. To distinguish the characteristics of each Agape organization in different countries of the region and the factors that influenced these differences;

5. To research the mutual influences and interactions of evangelical churches in their humanitarian work in the narrower and wider surroundings;

6. To determine the contribution of both development and promotion of the methodology of the evangelical church’s humanitarian work in this region and to mission studies in general;

7. To analyze the ways in which humanitarian activities led to a more efficient presentation of the gospel; in other words to see how other methods of evangelization become more efficient when applied in parallel to the humanitarian project(s);

8. To investigate other church actions and activities that resulted from this humanitarian project, as well as the interconnection and long-term interaction.

Besides the general and basic principles employed in this research, this work seeks to provide concrete, practical information regarding the most efficient methods of religious humanitarian work. It also seeks to provide clear answers to the specific and general conceptual problems of contemporary organizations concerning their functioning and activities. Another outcome of this work will certainly be the motivation for further professional improvement of the author himself; developing this theme, he will need to study a significant number of texts from this area. Finally, after finishing and publishing the text, it should serve as motivation for all those in the church who work in the area of humanitarian activities.
References


