CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENTECOSTALISM IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN NATIONS: ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, GREECE, MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, KOSOVO, SERBIA

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Introduction

This is a study of a large geopolitical area, which before the last Balkan wars would have encompassed only three countries: Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania. In this study we will look at the historical aspects and present developments of Pentecostalism in the successor states of the non-consensual disintegration of the Former Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo; as well as in Albania and Greece, which despite their very different history are part of the same region.

In the beginning we will look at the regional history of Pentecostalism and how this movement penetrated the Former Yugoslavia and Albania and Greece. We will continue by examining present developments in these countries separately. We will examine some of the key protagonists of the Pentecostal faith in this part of the world.

However, due to the large geographical area under consideration, the chapter will be largely descriptive. This chapter does not aim to discuss theological differences. Written evidence will be cited as often as possible. However, due to the shortage of written material on Pentecostalism in the region interviews have been used as a means of gathering information when no other source is available. In light of ongoing political disputes in the Balkans, all of the aforementioned countries will be referred to by their constitutional names. However, this is not intended to resolve any open political issues.

From about 1990–2010, the nations of the Balkans were once more torn by bloodshed. In our generation Rebecca West’s decades-old description still rings true: “The Balkans have belonged to the sphere
of tragedy”.¹ As part of the religious spectrum of these areas and as an integral part of their respective societies, Pentecostal believers have not been immune from these developments.

In general Pentecostals are listed as ‘the fastest growing wing of Christianity’² worldwide. According to a report prepared by David Barrett and Patrick Johnstone on the annual growth of religiosity, Pentecostal and Charismatic communities have the highest annual increase. ‘Pentecostal and Charismatic churches grow 4.5 times faster in comparison to World population growth’.³ In South-eastern Europe, Pentecostal churches⁴ have also seen significant growth in the past decades. In the geographical area covered by this study, Pentecostals have been the main vehicle for Evangelicalism in their respective countries.⁵ However, in most of the countries mentioned, Pentecostal churches have either been subsumed into various national Evangelical Alliances or have not insisted on being identified as explicitly Pentecostal.⁶

Such is the case in most of the countries covered in this chapter. Greece is the only country where Pentecostal churches are organised in Pentecostal Unions.⁷ For many people of this region the fundamental question: ‘Who are Pentecostals?’ is generally accompanied by another question: ‘Are Pentecostals one of those new sects?’

Gary McGee of Assemblies of God (AoG) has argued the idea that Pentecostalism ‘bears strong commonalities with evangelical doctrines

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² http://www.spiritrestoration.org/Church/Pastors%20Page/who_is_who.htm [Acc. 15/04/2009].
⁴ For the purposes of this paper I am not making a sharp distinction between Pentecostals and Charismatics.
⁵ According to various reports from senior church leaders in these areas, Pentecostal churches compose the majority in general. In Kosovo, for instance, according to a report prepared by the Kosova Protestant Evangelical Church (‘KPEC’), Pentecostal churches and/or church groups comprise over 85% of the evangelical church body. For reference see KPEC Report dt. November 2008.
⁶ This is an area that needs further study. However, there are two main possible reasons (both of which will be discussed in more detail further in this study):
   1. In general governmental authorities have been reluctant to recognize Pentecostals, which has left them vulnerable to attacks by the media and the public.
   2. Since the Evangelical Communities in these countries tended to be small, there was a perceived need to join other Evangelical groups in order ‘to speak with one voice’.
⁷ Free Apostolic Church of Pentecost is considered to be the largest Pentecostal Movement in the country with 140 local member congregations. See http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/free-apostolic-church-of-pentecost [Acc. 15/04/2009].