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FROM SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN NAZARENES TO THE APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA. MIGRATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF ONE CHRISTIAN RENEWAL MOVEMENT

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1. Introduction

Renewal movements in Christian churches existed for centuries and are present in different national and geographical contexts. Variety of Christian communities include renewal movements within existing churches that embrace new worship practices and understanding of their own teachings. Renewal movements in Christianity focus on transformation, change and impact of this change on communities that have emerged in different parts of the world. One of the most intriguing examples are renewal movements within various Pentecostal groups. Well known studies of David Martin, Hervey Cox and other sociologists and anthropologists of religion analyze the spread of charismatic Christianity worldwide.¹ One of the most significant examples is the rise of global south Christianity which has gained religious scholars' attention; however, this overall diverse world of Southern Christian identities included little studies on the process of renewal. In these changes and inner-communities dynamic, migration had a very significant role. The area of Southeastern Europe was not excluded from this rising phenomenon. The emergence of new religious minorities had social, cultural and political impact within national and international framework. In the context of Southeastern Europe one of the significant impulses for renewal movements within Orthodox Churches was the influx of neo-Protestant movements in the late XIXth and first decades of the XXth century. The emergence of renewal movements indicates the dynamics of change in various Christian churches as well as the inner dynamics within renewal movements.²

In his book *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church*, Howard A. Snyder provides a comprehensive historical and theological understanding of

¹ D. Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Cambridge, 1990; H. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Re-shaping of Religion in the 21st Century*, Boston, 1994.

² A. Djurić Milovanović, R. Radić (eds), *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe*, New York, 2017.

how movements of renewal have played an integral part in the history of Christianity from its early times. Snyder notes the core elements of the renewal movements as: 1. Emphasis on the “new birth”; 2. Intensity of “personal religious experience”; 3. Focus on personal piety, holiness, and discipline; 4. Emphasis on Scripture; 5. Primitivism and an “opposite element” to the established churches; 6. “Religious Idealism”.³ The renewal movements are all characterized by intensity of personal religious experience, discipline, communion, Scriptural authority, the use of vernacular languages in religious service, hymn chanting, prayer, and the revival of pilgrimages and monasticism (in the case of Orthodox and Catholic renewal movements). The concept of renewal in Christianity has been widely explored, although little focus has been placed on the emergence of these movements in Southeastern Europe. In several national contexts, renewal movements had complex and sometimes different histories, but shared many common features. From the late XIXth century, much has been written about the abandonment of traditional religion and the birth of “cults” or new movements in the USA and Europe (Spiritualism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, etc.). It is less well known that reform movements also developed among Orthodox communities as dissatisfaction with the Church and a yearning to return to the principles of early Christianity increased.⁴ The appearance of these movements was significantly influenced by spread of Evangelical or neo-Protestant movements, since their number grew especially in the interwar period (Baptists, Nazarenes, Brethren, Seventh Day Adventists).

This paper focuses on one conservative neo-Protestant group of Anabaptist origin which emerged in Switzerland and expanded to Southeastern Europe. The movement history was marked with strong persecution from Europe to North America, due to their pacifist stance. In the Habsburg Empire and the Balkans, its adherents were called Nazarenes.⁵ In the new continent, community went through the process of renewal and developed their religious identity in several branches.

2. The emergence of the Nazarene or Neutäufer movement

The Nazarene or Neutäufer movement emerged in Switzerland in the 1830’s, under the charismatic leadership of Samuel Heinrich Fröhlich (1803-1857). Fröhlich was strongly influenced by Anabaptism and German Pietism: he opposed the Calvinist theology of infant baptism, insisting instead on inner conversion. This emerging religious community emphasized pacifism, the forbearance of oaths and child baptism, and the need to separate themselves

³ H. A. Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989.

⁴ Djurić Milovanović, Radić (eds), *Orthodox Christian...*, p. 14.

⁵ Brock Peter, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914*, Princeton, 1972, p. 495.

from the world. Communities practiced strict discipline, which included prohibitions against drinking alcohol and coffee, smoking, cursing, going to public festivities, and attending religious ceremonies in other churches. Icons and representations of the cross were strictly forbidden. In spreading Nazarene teachings and other missionary activities, the vernaculars of several languages had an important role in religious services and hymn singing. Because of their pacifist beliefs and refusal to swear and to take an oath, a large number of Nazarenes were condemned to severe prison sentences. Through different missionary journeys in Switzerland (Canton Aargau, Canton Bern, Emmental, Zurich and Eastern Switzerland), Fröhlich preached gaining new followers and baptizing people. Some of the religious meetings held by Froehlich were interrupted by police, but still the Nazarenes grow in their membership. By 1850 there were 110 churches. Communities spread in Germany, France, Austria and Hungary. After 1850, the Nazarenes spread east, towards Central and Eastern Europe, and west, towards North America. The Nazarenes in Eastern Europe would represent the first major Anabaptist movement in modern history to find a significant number of followers among various ethnicities. In multi-ethnic and multid denominational Austria-Hungary, the Nazarenes had an extremely mixed ethnic character, which enabled their rapid spread among different settlements. In the beginning, the Nazarenes had more members among the Protestant population (mostly Germans and Hungarians), but, over time, majority Orthodox ethnic groups, such as the Serbs and the Romanians, also joined the Nazarene community.⁶ They were the first Protestant Serbs that started to adhere in the late XIXth and early XXth centuries. The [Nazarene] community turned static, remained very conservative, and ceased the evangelization. Instead of aiming to increase in size, it aimed at increasing respect for its principles, one of them being the separation from the rest of the world. The Nazarenes were especially numerous among Orthodox Serbs and became known as the first “Protestant

⁶ According to Earl Pope, in 1864, a group of Russian refugees established a Baptist church in Dobrogea, and during the following years, such churches were founded in Transylvania and Banat. The first Romanian Baptist church was founded in Bucharest in 1912, which would later contribute to the founding of the Union of Baptist Churches in 1919. Most Romanian Evangelical communities were established due to missionary activities in the inter-war period. By 1923, as John David Hopper points out, the Baptist movement in Romania was well developed by early German settlers who had also worked actively among the Romanian population. At that time, “there were 800 German, 6,000 Hungarian, a few Russian and 17,000 Romanian Baptists in Romania“. See E. Pope, “Protestantism in Romania”, in S.P. Ramet (éd.), *Protestantism and Politics in eastern Europe and Russia. The communist and postcommunist eras*, Durham, 1995, p. 157-208, p. 177; J. D. Hopper, *A history of Baptists in Yugoslavia 1862–1962*, Fort Worth, 1997, p. 59.

Serbs". They were called "new believers" (ser. *novoverci*), "faithfuls" (ser. *verni*) and Nazarenes.⁷

The Nazarene emigration across the Atlantic in the late XIXth and during the whole XXth century, was a complex and almost unexplored phenomenon until recently. Available literature on the history of the Apostolic Christian Church both in Europe and in the United States is very limited. Comprehensive data on the organization activities in the United States are almost non-existent. The most influential work on the history of Nazarenes until the First World War, is the study of the historian Bojan Aleksov. Herman Ruegger published a brief *Apostolic Christian Church History* in 1947, with an accent put on their European roots. Perry Klopfenstein's *Marching to Zion* treats extensively the chronology and historical details of the founding and establishment of the Apostolic Christian Church of America from 1847 until 2007. There are several more important sources, like the unpublished thesis manuscript of Joseph Pfeiffer, entitled *Between Remnant and Renewal: A Historical and Comparative Study of the Apostolic Christian Church among Neo-Anabaptist Renewal Movements in Europe and Americas* (2010), and Darrel Sutter's *The Anabaptist Apostolic Christian Church of America* (1988) as well as Bernhard Ott's *Missionarische Gemeinde warden*.⁸

The material collected for the purposes of this paper comes from my own empirical research, conducted in Serbia (2008-2012) and in the United States (2015, 2019), on the history of the Nazarene emigration from Southeastern Europe to North America, especially focusing on the period after the Second World War. The geographical focus of my research is the area of Akron and Mansfield (Ohio, U.S.) which received the most part of the Nazarene immigrants from Yugoslavia. Defending their religious identity and escaping religious persecution, thousands of Nazarenes started to emigrate to North America especially before the First World War and in the period after the Second World War. In North America they joined the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarene), which was the official name of the Nazarene community in the United States and

⁷ A. Djurić Milovanović, *Dvostruke manjine u Srbiji. Posebnosti u religijskom i etničkom identitetu Rumuna u Vojvodini*, Belgrade, 2015.

⁸ B. Aleksov, "The Dynamics of Extinction: The Nazarene Religious Community in Yugoslavia after 1945", M.A. Thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 1999; Idem, *Religious Dissent between the Modern and the National: Nazarenes in Hungary and Serbia 1850-1914*, Wiesbaden, 2006; O. Bernhard, *Missionarische Gemeinde werden: Der Weg der Evangelischen Täufergemeinden*, Uster, Switz., 1996; K. Eotvos. *The Nazarenes*, Fort Scott, 1997; H. Ruegger, *Apostolic Christian Church History*, Illinois, 1985; J. Pfeiffer, *Between Remnant and Renewal: A Historical and Comparative Study of the "Apostolic Christian Church" among the neo-Anabaptist Renewal Movement in Europe and America*, Elkhart: Thesis Faculty of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2010; D. Sutter. *The Anabaptist Apostolic Christian Church of America*, Urbana-Champaign, 1968; K. A. Perry. *Marching to Zion: a Study of the Apostolic Christian Church of America 1847-2007*, Fort Scott, 2008.

Canada. The Nazarenes were mostly persecuted during the communist era in Southeastern European countries (Romania, Yugoslavia) since they were considered disloyal citizens and a threat to the government. From 1945 until 1960, the Nazarene illegal border crossing from Yugoslavia to Italy or Austria was highly frequent.⁹ Thus, during the Cold War, the Nazarenes were seen as Christian refugees seeking countries providing religious freedom. Displacement of this neo-Protestant religious minority led to their almost extinction in the areas they left.¹⁰ Based on 25 qualitative interviews with community members in Ohio (USA) and on archival research (Virginia Historical Society Archives),¹¹ this article examines the relationship between the migration and renewal as one of the responses a religious minority group makes when facing displacement. My informants were members of several Apostolic Christian Churches of Nazarene: Brunswick Hills, Cleveland Romanian, West Akron, Mansfield, Norton and Ontario Christian Fellowship. Most of my informants came to the United States during the communist period in Yugoslavia, especially between 1950 and 1975; nevertheless, several families came earlier, so some of my research subjects belong to the second or third generation of immigrant families.¹²

3. Religious Minority Migration Journey

While most studies on migration limit their focus to economic or political motivations, religion has not been a focus in migration studies until recently. Researchers have also tended to neglect the role of religion as a source of emotional and cognitive support for migrants.¹³ However, over the last two decades sociological and anthropological studies have placed phenomena related to migration, diasporas, religious identity, and faith-based organizations at the center of their interests. The migration history of Nazarenes lasted from late XIXth century and through the whole XXth century with great intensity. First congregations were German speaking immigrants who came to America in the early 1900's. Some came from Germany and Switzerland, but more came from

⁹ A. Djurić-Milovanović, "Alternative Religiosity in Communist Yugoslavia: Migration as a Survival Strategy of the Nazarene Community", *Open Theology*, 3, 2017, p. 447-457.

¹⁰ B. Bjelajac, "The Persecution of the Nazarenes in Yugoslavia 1918-1941", *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 5:2, 2012, p. 79-91.

¹¹ Virginia Historical Society holds the archives of the Apostolic Christian Church Foundation from 1946.

¹² The field research in the United States was supported by the Apostolic Christian Church Foundation (Legacy Bible Institute and Wooster Church) grant for the research project "The Nazarene Emigration from Southeastern Europe to the United States: Historical and Contemporary Perspective" (March-June, 2015).

¹³ P. Levitt, "'You know Abraham was really the first immigrant': Religion and Transnational migration", *The International Migration Review*, 37 (3), 2003, p. 847-873, p. 847.

Austria-Hungary where they had been first generation believers persecuted for leaving the state church. The first waves of migration of Froehlich's followers across the Atlantic date back to 1847. They were mostly ethnic Germans, settling in the American Midwest. The first Evangelical Baptist community (Ger. *Evangelische Taufgesinnter*), later known as Apostolic Christian Church, was organized in 1852 among Amish and Mennonites in Croghan, New York. According to Pfeiffer, „their traditional name long had been the *Gemeinschaft Evangelisch Taufgesinnter*”, *Taufgesinnter* being a word that specifically refers to the Swiss Anabaptist-Mennonites that the English translation of Ruegger's *Apostolic Christian Church History* calls “Baptists”.¹⁴

Members of the new churches in the United States consisted of immigrants from the Evangelical Baptist Church in Europe and of American converts among those who had previously settled in those areas, especially Amish and Mennonite groups.¹⁵ The first Evangelical Baptist in North America, elder Benedict Weyeneth (1819-1887), preached the necessity among Amish and Mennonites, of the adults' new birth through baptism. Their theology was close to the teachings of the Evangelical Baptists. However, many new congregations were established by Evangelical Baptists coming from Europe and with no Amish or Mennonite background. In 1906 the *Apostolic Christian Church* split into the *Apostolic Christian Church of America* (ab. ACCA), which was more conservative, and the *Apostolic Christian Church of Nazarene* (ab. ACCN), more liberal and evangelistic branch. The division of the community emerged due to some specific religious practices of the European Nazarenes (such as wearing a mustache, a certain way of dressing, or the style of head covering etc.), as well as the use of the German language, which, was the official language of the Nazarene congregations in America and Canada until the early XXth century. Until 1917 the name of the community was Evangelical Baptists or sometimes New Amish, afterwards they were officially named the *Apostolic Christian Church*.

Already settled Nazarenes would often send financial help to their relatives and Nazarene communities they left in their homeland. Even though Nazarenes were persecuted and imprisoned, their number continued to grow in South-eastern Europe even in the interwar period. With the growing number of new members in their homeland, more waves of emigration were also present. However, following World War I, the flow of immigrants was reduced. The literacy requirement adopted by Congress in 1917 in the Quota Act of 1921, marked a turning point in the American immigration policy. After heavy

¹⁴ J. Pfeiffer, *Between Remnant and Renewal...*, p. 1.

¹⁵ N. Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation*, New York, 2015.

immigration waves before the Great War, immigration policy after 1918 was more selective and restrictive. Although most of the immigrants were looking for better economic opportunities, among them, a small group of Nazarenes was searching for religious freedom. After the Second World War, the most significant organization for Nazarene migrants was Church World Service. Escaping from Communist country during the Cold War, the Nazarenes were seen as Christian refugees seeking a country with religious freedom. Church World Service was founded in 1946 in the United States, as cooperative ministry for 37 Christian denominations, providing assistance also to refugees and asylum seekers around the world. The Apostolic Christian Church of Nazarene was among Church World Service members and all of my informants coming after the WWII arrived via CWS. Archival sources indicate that since 1959 Nazarenes from Yugoslavia were using CWS assistance to immigrate to North America. Nazarenes as multi-ethnic religious minority group emigrated primarily because of their pacifist doctrine and the persecution they were exposed to. Going abroad, the Nazarenes remained committed to the religious communities to which they belonged in their homeland, which was an important basis for a better integration into the new society (finding jobs, housing, etc.), but it also showed an expression of unity and solidarity among members and the importance of their religious identity.

The transnational character of this community and its congregational principle and internal cohesion contributed to the group mobilization. Although their theology emphasizes the communitarian principle, the perception of the Nazarenes as a “state enemy” strengthened even more the community mobility. Furthermore, transnational ties with other Nazarene communities abroad played a significant role in their decision to emigrate. Leaving their homeland, the Nazarenes settled in those areas of North America where Nazarene churches already existed. Doing research among Romanian migrants in Italy, Cingolani stresses that Romanians are mostly Orthodox, but there is also a considerable number of Catholics and Protestants (belonging above all to Pentecostal and Adventist churches). Cingolani’s field studies reveal how affiliation to these protestant groups provides people with a form of solidarity and help (of a moral and financial nature), which is less common among the Orthodox group, where there is increasing individualisation and community relations are tending to unravel.¹⁶

Post-migratory experiences brought various changes since the beliefs and practices of the several branches of the Nazarenes in North America were no longer homogenous; they have become polarized. They now encompass conservative as well as moderate, and liberal theologies and

¹⁶ P. Cingolani, “The Romanians in Italy”, *Transnational Communities in Globalized World*, 2009, p. 17.

practices comparing to Fröhlich's original teachings. Divisions occurred in the 1960's in two of the historic ACCN churches which had been centers of progressist modernizing impulses. Major division occurred in the Mansfield congregation: it involved a group of progressists who left the congregation in 1969 to form a new Apostolic Christian congregation in Ontario, OH, a western suburb of Mansfield. This congregation maintained an affiliation with the ACCN and became one of the flagship churches of what has come to be known as the "Western Conference". The members have adopted a more contemporary praise and worship music, modern Bible translations, modern dressing fashion, although modesty would continue to be encouraged. The requirement of women's prayer veiling has largely been removed.¹⁷

4. The beginning of missionary work in the Global South

While living in Southeastern Europe, members of the Nazarene community were not missionary oriented. In comparison to other neo-Protestant groups like Baptists or Seventh Day Adventists, who were preaching and organizing public Biblical lectures or similar, Nazarenes were not transmitting their doctrine to non-converted. Membership within the community was usually expanding by numerous families and individuals who would know about Nazarene community and its teachings. The missionary work became characteristic of the Nazarene communities in North America¹⁸. Pfeiffer stresses that "one of the major shifts within the more progressive branches of the Apostolic Christian Church traditions is in terms of ecclesiology".¹⁹ The spreading of the movement from Europe and North America to the Global South, marked a new period in the history of the Apostolic Christian Church of Nazarene, giving a global identity of the community as well. With internationally missionary outreach, new churches started to be established after 1950s. The establishment of the Church in South America began with several Nazarene families immigrating from Yugoslavia to Brazil after World War I and settling in Sao Paulo and Sao Jose dos Campos. This was the beginning of the "Evangelica Nazareno Church" in Brazil. These congregations would remain small and in relative ethnic isolation until the coming of the American (and later some European) missionaries in the 1950's. The first missionaries, Melvin and Katherine Huber, made their primary agenda to work among the local Portuguese-speaking populations, although they maintained ties with the Nazareno churches. By the 1960's the Mission had regular missionaries coming

¹⁷ A. Djurić Milovanović, "'Our faith is good, but strict': The Transformation of the Apostolic Christian Church of Nazarene in North America", *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies*, 6 (1), 2018, p. 61-72.

¹⁸ <https://accfoundation.org/missionaries/> accessed 25 June 2020.

¹⁹ J. Pfeiffer, *Between Remnant and Renewal...*, p. 169

from North American and Europe. It was also during this time that the Mission became increasingly concerned with the poverty conditions of many Brazilian people, established orphanages at Nepomuceno, Boa Esperanca, and Parana, and initiated medical missionary endeavors after 1963.²⁰ One of my informants in Ohio is sharing a short history on the first missionary initiatives by one family in South America:

Melvin Huber with his wife Katherine and 4 children went to the country of Brazil in 1955. While in language school, a fifth child was born and by 1961 several churches were planted around the city of Belo Horizonte and the surrounding towns. They also had a part in starting an orphanage in the town of Nepomuceno. After a few years, the family moved to another capital city to begin the ministry of planting churches around the city of Goiania. By this time the children are growing up, finishing high school in Brazil and then off to the States for college. The eldest son, Luke, was a visionary and wanted to explore the large Amazon region and in 1976 he landed in the capital city of Santarem along the Amazon river. It was there where the whole family joined Luke and began to evangelize the Amazon Basin. The churches took on the name of "PAZ", which means peace in Portuguese. Hundreds of churches have been planted up and down the Amazon River and its tributaries. One of the sons felt called to begin a ministry in Japan which opened the door for 3rd generation Hubers to join him. Another son moved to the seaport of Fortelaza where there are several thousand believers in more than 20 churches. The Melvin and Katherine Huber family has been a real influence on the churches of N. America to the extent that many individuals and families were inspired to join them or to be a part of a short-term work team that wanted to be a part of the ministry. The mission is now referred to as "Project Amazon" and is also active in Bolivia and Japan with plans to continue to expand to other countries.²¹

Project Amazon (Mission) has spread far and wide in northern Brazil and into Bolivia. There are now several hundred churches and thousands of followers in that huge Amazon Basin. There are also associated churches in Paraguay and Argentina. All this has been achieved by providing education and health, preaching, teaching, music, literature (newsletter, statement of faith, pamphlets, Bible distribution etc.). The main aim of the mission was to provide humanitarian aid to the needy, food, clothing, schools. It aims also to disseminate the message through modern communication technologies and engages itself at a global, national and local level. They are also more willing to send their ministers to evangelical schools or seminaries, usually Baptist or similar conservative evangelical Free Church groups.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 166.

²¹ JH, interview conducted in Ohio in April 2015.

One of the founding statements of the congregation was to provide a means of promoting foreign mission work. Members of the ACCN became a missionary oriented movement especially in Brazil, Paraguay and Ghana. Along with missionary work, the church also engages and operates in several nursing homes, schools, charities and orphanages. The story of the Apostolic Christian Connections in Papua New Guinea owes its genesis and stability to the faithful life's work of Vic and Elsie Schlatter. The Church they planted came to be called the Tiliba Christian Church, meaning "beside the Til river" where their work began "Good News Christian Church". The Church has functioned independently since 1994, and consists of

123 congregations of some 10,000 believers. The church culture and religious practices reflect a mixture of the basic practices of the Apostolic Christian Church, including singing worship and simple preaching from the Scriptures, with many particular Waola cultural customs and styles integrated into the worship life.²²

In Zambia, the mission focused on building school facilities and has a full time missionary. In 2011, the ACCMBC sent the first work team to Zambia, Africa. The work was mainly focused on the school project called *The Lifesong Harmony School* in Zambia, Africa. This is a school in the Chipata Compound which does not require a minimum standard for children in order to attend the classes and receives mostly orphan children.²³

The renewal which occurred in the Apostolic Christian Church of Nazarene in North America in the last decades brought new mission through the Apostolic Christian Church Foundation established in 1952 in Mansfield, Ohio.²⁴ In the mission statement of the Apostolic Christian Church Mission Board of Canada (ACCMBC) one can read: "to provide humanitarian aid and volunteer labor to alleviate human misery and suffering throughout the world in a way that is a Christian witness and brings glory to God. We seek to serve our Lord by sharing our resources and abilities to benefit both the soul and body of those in need, and thereby communicate the love of God through His Son, Jesus Christ."²⁵ Their work in foreign missions is well organized and active with different groups of believers from around North America who are joining and supporting work of the church abroad.²⁶

²² JH, interview conducted in Ohio in April 2015.

²³ Missionary news and updates are published regularly in the *Apostolic Christian Church Newsletter* <https://accfoundation.org/publications/>, accessed 25 June 2020.

²⁴ The organization was originally based in Mansfield, Ohio. In 1962 it moved to Akron, Ohio; in 1975, to Tremont, Illinois; and in 1992, to Richmond, Virginia.

²⁵ <https://accmbc.org/missions/>, accessed 26 June 2020.

²⁶ Email correspondence with Doug Savin (Ontario, Canada), 18 May 2017.

5. Concluding remarks

Research on different religious experiences of immigrants provides an insight into how faith is embodied, lived, and carried across borders, where it may be renegotiated and transformed. In this paper, based on the case study of the community of Nazarene immigrants in the USA, I have tried to introduce the concept of *renewal* in order to indicate the dynamic of change within this minority religious community. Therefore, the paper represents the initial step in contextualizing the role of migration, dislocation, and change and the correlation of migration and community transformation in the new environment. During the Second World War and the communist era in the countries of South-eastern Europe, many Nazarene believers were strongly persecuted and imprisoned due to their pacifist stance and refusal to take an oath or to vote. Even though their number weakened in the second half of the XXth century, the community exists in Serbia, Hungary, Romania, and Croatia. The presented case study is a small contribution that could bring a better understanding of how migration can have an important role in the transformation and later on the renewal of one religious minority community from South-eastern Europe. Seeking a ‘free society’ to escape religious and political oppression, the Nazarenes from Yugoslavia left church buildings, land, and even family members. Migration and escape could be seen as a survival strategy of one alternative religious community in the years of communist rule in Yugoslavia.²⁷ In the new setting across the Atlantic, they found themselves in a tension between a conservative heritage to which they seek to be faithful, and renewal impulses of the American society. Slowly, they would start to move away from a *sectarian* separatist identity to accepting a *denominational* framework of self-understanding and approaching ecclesiological issues. They would be more open to interaction with other similar traditions and churches, and to adopt their (more Anglo-American) forms of piety as part of their enculturation into modern American society. Their missionary efforts and community expansion in the Global South present an important example of religious community renewal in XXth and XXIst century.

²⁷ A. Djurić-Milovanović, “Alternative Religiosity in Communist Yugoslavia...”, p. 446.

