Rev. Pavel Procházka, Possibilities and limits of ecumenical dialogues in the Slovak Republic

1. Introduction

At the outset, allow me to express my sincere thanks to the organizers and especially to Prof. Dr. Lukasz Kamykowski for the invitation to the conference “What is ecumenism? What is dialogue?” that is a result of the initiative remembering half a century of development of the church and ecumenical relations after the documents of Vatican II. I find it as honour paid to me because I’m not Roman Catholic, but a Methodist. The mere invitation to a conference of this kind to me counts as an effort to foster mutual understanding, which is very important for any act of convergence in the ecumenical environment. I serve as Slovak Methodist superintendent; I lead a parish, but also teach at Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica, as professor at the Department of Theology and Christian Education of the Faculty of Education. Here we prepare future theologians, pastors and other officials in various churches. Students come from Slovak and foreign churches. Their common interest is to study Holy Scripture in an evangelical theology environment. Community of teachers and students in the Department is open to dialogue with other Christian traditions.
The Roman Catholic tradition is inspiring for us as it is as old as Christianity itself. Documents of the Vatican II created a new space for ecumenical dialogues and gave inspirational thoughts for reflection and practice of ecumenism in the Roman Catholic Church. They also were grasped by non-Catholic churches and by their schools and academic circles, where they were studied and reflected theologically. These documents appeared in the 20th century, which dealt extensively with ecumenism. Their impact became even greater after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 when democratic changes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe took place. It is also necessary to mention Pope John Paul II. His heart was open for dialogues. I had the honour of meeting and shortly speaking with this great man three times, both in Slovakia and in Vatican. He was well informed about us in Slovakia, and about the dialogue between Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council. And he loved Slovak people. His charming and holy personality impressed me.

Our Protestant environment understands ecumenism as a movement that seeks cooperation and convergence of Christian churches in the world. It has its roots mainly in the collaboration of missionary organizations as well as in the cooperation of churches in expressing their shared responsibility for the events in the world. Ecumenical movement has been trying to search for unity of churches. It is also exploring and highlighting the existing extent of Christian unity, which is already there in spite of differences.¹

Roman Catholic professor of theology Lubomir Stanček characterizes ecumenism within the Catholic Church in Slovakia as developing: “The efforts to ecumenism, the fraternal relations between the churches have intensified since the Second Vatican Council. It was the search for Christian unity that was one of the objectives of the council. It is certain that the Council gave a very clear and accurate direction while finding and

embarking the path to dialogue with those who do not live in full communion with the Catholic Church. For this reason, the Church issued various documents that made dialogue with other churches more efficient and effective... Dialogue requires knowing, listening and responding, trying to understand and to be able to understand. That means to be prepared to ask questions and to be able to accept questions... The ecumenical dialogue is to enable members of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities to come to knowledge of one another, define the elements of faith and practice that are common and determine the points at which they differ.”

Experiences have shown that the ecumenical movement as an effort to unify the various Christian denominations is not a simple matter. There is no cheap way of mutual concessions, compromises, or clever organizational steps. Rather it is a matter of honest theological search. One Church of Jesus Christ is a fact. There is a common belief in the Triune God – the Father as Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Saviour, the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier. Christ cannot be divided, He remains to be one; and therefore the church of Jesus Christ is one; I guess it should express its oneness outwardly as well. People, however, do not reflect a single organization under one name and one teaching. Particularities and specificities of individual denominations – out of various reasons – are attractive for one and repel others. Ecumenism today is one of the major challenges to explain and understand.

A new phenomenon appeared: so called postmodern man manifests spiritual inclinations and needs, but he is not satisfied by classical spiritual traditions only; there is a tendency towards some kind of spiritual “borrowings” – and these go beyond denominations and Christianity. In such a situation, there comes

2 L. Stanček, Cirkvi na Slovensku a ekumenizmus, Spišská kapitula – Spišské Podhradie 2002 s. 11–12.

3 P. Sheldrake, Spiritualita a historie. Úvod do studia dějin a interpretace křesťanského duchovního života, Brno 2003, s. 7.
out a serious need for continuing efforts to work in the field of ecumenical theology in order that the ecumenical movement is not accompanied by theological emptiness.

The need for a continuous and theologically well-prepared ecumenical dialogue is becoming even more urgent in the face of the emerging inter-religious dialogue. People travel, meet, have personal experience with adherents to other religions. Moreover, they also better and easier communicate without traveling, especially thanks to accessible Internet. European Christianity is under the onslaught of advancing secularization. Traditionally Christian countries experience a decline in the number of practicing Christians. European statistics show an increase of communities with adherents of other religions because of immigration, but also because of the changing religious thinking of Europeans. In this process, the observer seems certain weakness of Christianity. The traditional Christian countries are still proud of their Christian heritage of the past, but often dwindling as to the confessing presence.

In the following lines let me introduce:

2. Fellowship of churches and religious societies in Slovakia

According to the published data from the last census in 2011 it is clear that the majority of respondents adhered to the Roman Catholic Church (3 347 277 adherents), followed by the Lutheran Church (316 250 adherents), then Greek Catholic Church (206 871 adherents), Reformed Church (98 797 adherents), the Orthodox Church (49 133 adherents), Religious Society of Jehovah’s Witnesses (17 222 adherents), Methodist Church (10 328 adherents), Plymouth Brethren (7 720 adherents), Apostolic Church (5831 adherents), Baptist Union (3486 adherents), Brethren/Free Evangelical/Church (3396 adherents), the Seventh-day Adventist Church 2915 adherents, Jewish Union (1999 adherents), Czechoslovak Hussite Church (1782 adherents), Old Catholic Church (1687 adherents), the Bahá’í Communi-
Possibilities and limits of ecumenical dialogues in the Slovak Republic

According to the law, the churches are all equal. Everyone has the right to confess or change his religion or belief, and also to spread it. However, no one may be compelled to faith or atheism. The believer has the right to celebrate church feasts and exercise its rites; of course, providing they are in accordance with generally applicable law. Believers in our country have the right to associate and found churches and religious communities. Relations with other Christians can be maintained at national and international level. Legislation gives outdoor opportunities for ecumenism as it is in every democratic country. Limits to ecumenical life of churches mostly come out of their theological self-understanding.

2.1. Slovak Protestant Churches – sketches of their history, teaching and ecumenical engagements

There are several state-recognized protestant churches in Slovakia accompanied by ecclesial communities with a different legal statute. Each of them has its historical roots, basic theological emphases, and present life. Those give basics for their ecumenical perspectives. Let us try to draw very brief sketches in order to better realize their position giving them possibilities and limits for ecumenical dialogues. We will do this in alphabetical order according to their Slovak names.

Apoštolská cirkev na Slovensku (ACS)

This denomination reports to the widely extended family of Pentecostal churches that emerged as a specific revival de-

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4 A comparison of the figures from the last three censuses can be found at www.ecav.sk/files/user/scit_2012_naboz_vyz.pdf (9.10.2014).
5 www.acsr.sk/ (2.10.2014).
nomination. Pentecostalism as charismatic evangelical reform movement usually looks for its historical roots to the events of speaking in tongues in Topeka, Kansas in 1901, under the leadership of former Methodist preacher Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929), who founded the Bethel Bible School in Topeka and the first classical Pentecostal theology.

The first church as predecessor of today’s ACS called “Church of God” was started in Batizovce in year 1907. Through the activities of this church there arose groups of Pentecostal believers in other places. They were declaring to accept the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This church has undergone a difficult history. They experienced rejection, persecution by the communist authorities, and disqualifications. The ACS experienced state pressure to legally exist as part of a different denomination called the New Apostolic Church (in years 1956–1968).

ACS doctrinally stands on general ecumenical pillars (reports to the Apostolic, Nicene and Chalcedonian confessions of faith) and reports to the family of evangelical churches. The ACS believes in

- The Bible as the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, which is the only source of every divine revelation;
- God as one Being in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
- General sinfulness of man;
- Universality of Christ’s sacrifice in favour of saving people;
- The healing power of God;
- The church as the body of Christ;
- Two sacraments (“Lord’s provisions for church”): water baptism by immersion and the Lord’s Supper;
- The sanctification of the Christian life that the Holy Spirit works.

This basic faith allows Apostolic Church to take part in inner Pentecostal ecumenical dialogue and to be a part of the World Pentecostal Conference and the Pentecostal European Fellowship. ACS together with Pentecostal communities in the world,
while the whole denomination does not back away completely before wider ecumenism, there are many influential individuals that are openly reluctant to it.

ACS is a member of the Evangelical Alliance, the Association of Evangelical Churches and has observer status at the Ecumenical Council of Churches. This denomination declares openness for ecumenism in more practical way: in the mission, work among youth, mission between marginalized Roma community, drug addicts, alcoholics and physically disabled youth.

Bratská jednota baptistov v Slovenskej republike (BJB)
Baptist Union in the Slovak Republic (BJB)

Baptists often report to the radical reformation wing of Anabaptist movement. There are some features that are common to them, others are different. Together with Anabaptists they require believers’ radical obedience of Christ. They broke up with the ideal of “Christian society” and therefore also radically broke with infant baptism. Significantly different, however, is the relationship of Baptists to the public: they do not hesitate to be actively involved in politics, economy, and society.

Historical emergence of Baptists takes us to the beginning of the 17th century name of John Smyth (also spelled John Smith, 1566–1612). He was ordained Anglican priest, who held the principle of religious freedom. In 1609 he came to believe the accuracy of the baptism of believers against infant baptism.

Baptists transferred soon to America, where it quickly spread and done a lot of good service in a Christian family and in society. The “Baptist father” in the USA Roger Williams (1604–1683 preached that God’s will and command for all people in all countries, is the right to publicly profess their faith, even a non-Christian faith. By these thoughts Baptists contributed to the American conception of law, which is based on freedom of conscience.

The beginnings of Baptist work in Slovakia go back to 1882. The first house church Baptist meetings were held in Vavrišovo.

Although the name “Baptists” is derived from the practice of “believers’ baptism” by immersion in water, yet this act is not the main, what Baptists are. The main emphasis is laid on a personal rebirth, embattled faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Possibilities and limits of the ecumenical conversation are given by the doctrinal principles that BJB in Slovakia holds and expresses in several articles:

- Baptists identify themselves with the global church of Jesus Christ, who works here since the early church (the Church’s catholicity);
- The emphasis is laid upon radical discipleship of believers in Christ;
- The superiority of Christ’s authority over all other authorities is proclaimed;
- The sufficiency of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments for the knowledge of God’s revelation is declared;
- Baptist ecclesiology is explained as a community of believers around the Lord’s Table that practice baptism of believers;
- Their understanding of the church is linked to a local church (congregational) while also expressing their wish to seek unity with other churches within the meaning of the Gospel of John chapter 17;
- The principle of the common priesthood of all believers is confirmed;
- They recall discipleship and service vocation of those who believe in Christ;
- Baptists claim that secular authority is to advocate for freedom of conscience and religious freedom;
- Baptists urge their traditional principle of separation of church and state;
- Eschatological hope and its implications for the question of evangelization, social issues, environmental responsi-
bility, and the steadfast confidence in the final victory of God in Christ Jesus are expressed.

Baptist ecclesiology sets certain limits to ecumenical hope for one Church by their aim to minimize the church as an institution. Each local church is the full Church as “there is a church where two or three meet in the Name of Jesus”. The Church cannot be defined in terms of Augustana, they assume, simply because a number of formal Christians who go to listen to sermons and receive the sacraments do not automatically form a church. Only those confessing Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, who confess their faith, and show it by immersion baptism, they have the right to organize themselves into self-governing churches and communities in order to preserve Holy Scripture commands. Therefore, there is rejection of hierarchy among the Baptists. They do not see any significant difference between pastors and laity. Preachers hold office under the call of God. Self-governing churches are aggregated into larger units for practical reasons only.

BJB in the Slovak Republic is not a closed community. They do believe that truth is common property of all Christians, therefore it is necessary for them to seek cooperation with other Christians. BJB is a member of the Evangelical Alliance, the Association of Evangelical Churches and the Ecumenical Council of Churches. They are actively involved in practical ecumenical works (pastors in army, police, prison, education...).

Cirkev adventistov siedmeho dňa, Slovenské združenie (CASD)7

Seventh-Day Adventists, Slovak Association (CASD)

Adventism – generally conceived – is faith, which is based on the belief that Christ’s second coming is the only hope for the world. For the history of Adventists, prophetic and apocalyptic texts of the Prophet Daniel and the Revelation of St. John are of particular interest. Adventism believes that humanity is bro-

7 www.casd.sk/ (7.10.2014).
ken by sin. Those who ignore or reject God’s plan of salvation, will definitely be destroyed, while the believers come to salvation by God’s grace. After the cataclysmic events of Jesus Christ they will reign triumphant over one thousand years according to Revelation 20:1–6.

Adventists originated in the forties of the 19th century. It arose on the background of disappointing non-performance events of Advent predicted by Miller (22nd October 1844). They agreed that the period of fulfilment of the prophecy of Dn 8 will end sometime in the future. Members of smaller groups, which later became the Seventh-day Adventist, continued study of Scripture, searching for an explanation of the past and started to develop the “theology of the third angel’s message”, according to Revelation 14, with a further focus on the commandments of God and the faith of the Lord Jesus, to demonstrate the intrinsic relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Already in 1844 a small group of Adventists those living near Washington, began to ordain Sabbat as the seventh day (Saturday). Adventists became famous through the publication of a pamphlet by Joseph Bates (1792–1872) in 1846. Ellen Gould Harmon-White (1827–1915) also got attention with her writings. They have been accepted as inspired advice from the Lord.

Some parts of Adventist teaching is close to protestant, conservative evangelical wing. They believe in the authority of God’s revelation through the inspired Scriptures. Their standard opinion, published annually in the yearbook says that they believe in a transcendent, personal and communicating God who revealed Himself in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of them is uniquely divine, personal and eternal. They believe in creation by the Word of God, recognize the fall of the human race. People are mortal, but may take on immortality through God’s grace and redemption offered through conciliation work of Jesus Christ. The emphasis is on the Ten Commandments and its exemplary fulfilment in the life of Jesus Christ. The study of Scripture is a feature of Adventist piety. Saturday, based on the fourth commandment of God, is considered a day of rest.
and worship. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath. Saturday is considered a symbol of redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a sign of devotion to God and some foreshadowing of our eternal future in God’s kingdom.

They believe that the human body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore require abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse. Many do not consume coffee and meat, and are dedicated to vegetarianism while disseminating knowledge about health and healthy living.

The origins of Adventism in Slovakia are associated with the action of evangelists from Germany and Austria. First Adventists were baptized in Bratislava in 1903 and founded their church in 1911. Communists did mind that Adventists refused to work on Saturdays and did not accept military service with a gun. That gave rise to persecutions. Some loosening occurred in 1956, when some imprisoned pastors were released. At that time, church activities were partially restored. Slovak Advent Association was re-established in 1968 and state-stolen property given back after the political changes in 1989.

The CASD is not a member of any ecumenical grouping with other Christian churches. However, Adventists are present in the Ecumenical Council of Churches with observer’s status. They take part in the work of the Slovak Bible Society.

Cirkev bratská na Slovensku (CB)
Brethren (Free Evangelical) Church in Slovakia (CB)

The history of the Brethren Church in Slovakia is associated with the history of the churches in Bohemia (Czech Republic). It originated by the action of American missionaries (Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission) after 1872. Through their activities, the Free Reformed Church in Prague arose in 1880; its first minister Alois Adlof (1861 to 1927) was theologically educated man, with a wide heart for people. However, already

8 www.cb.sk (7.10.2014).
in 1870 in eastern Bohemia, there came to existence similarly theologically oriented group called the Free Evangelical Czech Church in the Horní Radechová (from year 1880 in Bysté) led by a simple man, a weaver named Jan Balcar (1832–1888). He was formerly Catholic who read the Bible and gathered around him likeminded people. Later, this two churches united, had a common management and accepted name the Free Reformed Church.

At a conference in Prague in 1919 they adopted the name “Unity of Czech Bretheren” in 1967 again changed the name to the present one.

The work in Slovakia developed after the First World War. Missionary workers were engaged in two foci of activity, from 1923 in Prešov and its surroundings, and since 1926 in Bratislava and its surroundings. For work was distinctive emphasis on evangelical, traditional biblical teachings and life line. It was aimed at the preservation of biblical Christianity in the face of strong rational shock of that time. Membership in this church was strongly based on personal repentance and reception of Jesus – the Lord.

Brethren Church members take these principles:

- The Word of God is the only source of knowledge of God and man and world. God speaks to us through Holy Scripture. Every Christian should read it and hear his testimony;
- God is the Creator of all and the Lord, Sustainer, Redeemer and Judge. Only He is worthy of honour. He is the giver of law and order, because no one can live a full Christian life without obedience. The cross is a testimony to the saving power of God;
- Jesus Christ is the Son of God from all eternity, which came in the form of a servant, and spoke and acted in power. His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead express the redemptive power;
- The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. He calls sinners to salvation and makes the mysteries of God
known. He is the Sanctifier of life, who causes spiritual growth of a born again believer.

• The Church is God’s and is kept by the Holy Spirit. The Church of Jesus Christ includes all those who believed in Him as personal Saviour and those who experienced the Holy Spirit’s adoption as sons of God (R 8:16).

• The sacraments are two, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They are to be understood as seals of our faith and hope in Jesus Christ. They are always associated with the Word and salvation in Jesus Christ.

• A believer looks forward to the second coming of Christ, and He will come in God’s appointed time. Sanctification and obedience prepares the Church for the coming of the Lord.

Brethren Church in the ecumenical family of churches characterized by an interest in common things. The CB is a member of the International Community of Evangelical Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. On the ecumenical scene in Slovakia the CB is a member of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Association of Evangelical Churches. Its members and churches take part in various ecumenical activities together with other churches (such as Jesus for everyone, World Day of Prayer, TWR-Slovakia and others).

Cirkev československá husitská na Slovensku (CČSH)
Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Slovakia (ČČSH)

The Church understands its identity following the Hussite tradition of the 15th century.

After World War I, a modernist Catholic priest and patriot Karel Farský knew that religious reform, after which he desired together with a lot of Czech people, could not be carried out within Roman Catholicism. It was necessary for their implementation to establish a new denomination – the Church of Czechoslovakia (later Czechoslovak Hussite Church). It was founded on 8th January 1920 in Prague. Farský wanted to cope with people’s desires for “faith of fathers” that was “somehow
hidden for centuries”, but now clearly stated and required. At that time the CČSH became truly mass, Czech folk church.

The basics of the faith and life of the CČSH are the followings:

- **Source of faith, message, doctrine and mission is the Word of God, witnessed by Scripture and the Christian tradition;**
- **The highest standard for the church is the Spirit of Christ, which has is subject to the church and its believers in faith, life and efforts in preaching the gospel, teaching and theological formation;**
- **The principle of freedom of conscience lies in obedience to the Spirit of Christ, at which the Church disciplines points;**
- **Articles of faith are not immutable dogmas and are not subject, but an expression of faith and direction indicator that the Church lives and professes;**
- **The theological activity is guided by the principles of respect for the results of scientific research;**
- **The interest of the church includes all issues of human individual and social life, especially efforts for peace among people;**
- **The establishment of the Church rests on presbyter principles with elements of episcopalianism.**

Church membership is acquired by baptism. Persons baptized in another church become members by adoption.

Theologically Czechoslovak Hussite Church has undergone a long period of liberalism, to which even today many of the clergy consistently reported. The liturgy of the Church preserves the basic structure of the Catholic Mass, but was supplemented by reformist proclamation of the Word. Catholic transubstantiation and the sacrificial conception of the Lord’s Supper replaced reformist faith in the presence of Christ and His grace in the fellowship of faith, hope and love. Liturgical nature draws the Czechoslovak Hussite Church near to Catholi-
cism, but its theology and teaching moves it to the side of the Reformation.

The ČČSH understands the Church according to Hussites as predestine and mystical body of Christ. No institution of the church represents the true Church, but in each local church of any denomination lives true Church of Christ.

This ecclesiological basis gives a significant prerequisite for ecumenical dialogues. The ČČSH never prevented ecumenical efforts, but on the contrary, since 1925, it participated in the global ecumenical movement. They sent its delegates to the congress “Life and Work” to Stockholm, then two years later to Lausanne Congress on “Faith and Order”. In 1962, ČČSH joined the World Council of Churches; at home the ČČSH participated in the work of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Christian Peace Conference.

Evanjelická cirkev augsburského vyznania na Slovensku (ECAV)\(^9\)

_Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (ECAV)_

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutherans) is the second largest Christian Church and the biggest Protestant church in Slovakia.

Luther’s teachings in the 16\(^{th}\) century were rapidly transported into our country. Ideas of the Reformation got here mainly thanks to Slovak students who studied in German cities. The greatest response was found in the German population of mining towns in Slovakia. Towards the end of the 16\(^{th}\) century, almost the entire territory of Slovakia was strongly influenced by the Reformation ideas. Synod in Žilina (1610), Spišské Podhradí (1614) and Ružomberok (1707) established the Evangelical Church in matters of doctrine, services and church order.

After 1989 began various church activities that were not previously possible: work with children and adolescents, educational activities, work of diacony and publishing. In 1993,
the church adopted a new constitution, which prepared the ground for the work of the church under the new and democratic conditions.

The Church maintains two primary and four secondary schools. New generation of pastors and theologians gets education at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Bratislava, which is a part of the Comenius University.

The only rule of faith and life for the members of the Evangelical Church is the Bible – holy Word, interpreted according to the symbolic books and general church creeds. The ECAV maintains presbyterian-synod character of its proceedings. Its main purpose is to preach the word of God and administer the two sacraments – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In this way the church wants to deepen the Christian faith among the people, with the aim of continuous improvement of spiritual and moral standards of individuals and the whole society. Church devotes considerable attention to youth work and the work of Christian service (diaconia). The church also extends its pastoral care to Slovak Lutherans who live in ethnic minorities in Serbia, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The basic principle of the church is the idea of ecumenism. The Church is a member of the World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia, the Conference of European Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

Evanjelická cirkev metodistická, Slovenská oblast (ECM) ¹⁰

United Methodist Church, Slovak District (ECM)

Methodism has its cradle in the 18th century Anglican Church and Oxford, where a small group of pious students methodically decided to use their time (today we might say – consistently applied time management!). They reserved the time for prayer and Bible reading, as well as all other obligations of students – Christians, such as charity, visiting prisoners, and so

on. They were given several names, also Methodists. John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and other serious students talked about the need to be justified before sanctification occurs, the need for holiness in human life.

Founder of Methodism John Wesley underwent significant personal spiritual formation: from certain mystical inclinations, over his own efforts, to personal knowledge of the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice.

Despite Wesley’s efforts to maintain continuity of contact with the Anglican Church, the practice of groups showed the need for separately organized church congregation. Legal status was given to the Methodist Conference by A Deed of Declaration of 1784.

Meanwhile Methodism quickly spread beyond the insular British Empire, especially in America, but gradually all over the world. The history of the Methodist Church in Slovakia starts with missionaries from the Methodist Episcopal Church South in the United States after the First World War. In 1924, the first Methodist activities were connected to the dissemination of Bibles and Christian literature in Slovakia, especially in Bratislava, Vrútky, Trnava, Sered, Košice, Uzhgorod.

World War II brought about the creation of a strong nationalistic Slovak state Slovak. On September 23, 1940 the Methodist work was banned in Slovakia and preachers and several members of the Methodist Church had to leave the country. After the war the work started in 1945 again from virtually nothing. The period of freedom, however, was short – till February 1948.

Communism period meant difficult times of oppression for many churches, including Methodists. A new development for this church and its ecumenical life opened freedom after 1989.

The ECM has ever been open to ecumenical movement worldwide. Wesley’s rule applies: “We want to think and let others to think.” That is why Methodism has been involved in the development of various ecumenical organizations. Methodists G. Bromley Oxnam and Frank Mason North were at the birth of the Federal Council of Churches. Methodist E. Stanley Jones (1894–1973)
ecumenically worked in India. Methodists Reuben H. Mueller and Glen R. Phillips were instrumental in the formation of the Consultation on Church Union. Several Methodists were in position of the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches (Philip A. Potter, Emilo Castro, and Samuel Kobia).

ECM in Slovakia is a member of the Association of Evangelical Churches, the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and the Slovak Bible Society. Some of its members are working in the Evangelical Alliance and many participate in World Day of Prayer.

Kresťanské zbory na Slovensku (KZ)\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Plymouth Brethren in Slovakia (KZ)}

Plymouth Brethren are not, globally speaking, a very strong group of Christians, but in the environment of Slovakia among Evangelicals, they have a nice representation. The history of this community leads us back to about r. 1825 to the British Isles, particularly in Ireland. Independent groups of believers were led by Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853). They challenged Christians to return to the original apostolic simplicity, without churches, no church ceremonies. Ministers were not paid for their work. Each Assembly of Brethren considered itself completely independent, reporting directly to God. Way of their spiritual life was very simple: reading the Bible, thinking about its contents, prayer and celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Their vision of Christian unity did not build on fusion of denominations, but rather that Christians would eventually leave “unnecessary church structure and organization” and simply meet as Christians who believe in Christ.

The origins of this denomination in Slovakia are connected with the mission of Englishmen who worked in Hungary (F. Butcher, J. Sadloň and K. Pavlovich).

In the post-war history they were at one time outlawed. It was in the years 1949–1956.

\textsuperscript{11} www.krestanskezbory.sk/ (21.10.2014).
Members from among Plymouth Brethren are open for “lower form” of ecumenism. They do not believe in organized ecumenism, but they rather favour practical cooperation of Christians in evangelism projects.

That is why we do not find the KZ in any ecumenical organization in Slovakia that tries to ecumenically work across denominations.

Reformovaná kresťanská cirkev na Slovensku (RefKC)\(^{12}\)
Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia (RefKC)

Calvinist history and theology points to unmerited grace of God, grateful recognition of God, life in obedience and discipline. The RefKC lives on classical theological postulates by Calvin and others (Institution from 1536, Confessio Helvetica posterior from 1566, Heidelberg Catechism of 1563). It also creates confessions under the territorial jurisdiction, for example: Confessio gallica (French Confession of 1559), Confessio scotica (Scottish Confession of 1560), Confessio Belgica (Belgian confession from 1561), Confessio ungarica (Hungarian Confession of 1562). Considerable emphasis is laid upon Christ’s dominion in the world. Emphasis on God’s sovereign grace has given a theological foundation for learning about predestination. We cannot add anything to salvation, God himself decides about human present state and the future.

Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia has its roots in the time of the Reformation in the historic Hungarian lands in 1567. Its teachings are based on the witness of the prophets and apostles, as contained in Holy Scripture. Scripture has the highest authority for matters of the life and work of the church. The main feature of the Reformed faith is the acceptance of God’s sovereignty, the governing of the Risen Christ in human life on a personal level. The heritage values of the Reformation – sola fide, sola gratia, sola Scriptura, solus Christus – are respected.

The mission of the Reformed Church is primarily focused on the work in local churches: the proclamation of the Word, Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, worship and children’s Bible studies and other regular church activities. After 1989, the work of the Reformed Church expanded. Now it involves well organized work among youth, teaching of religion in schools, confirmation classes, charity events and the like. The RefKC now runs theological seminary in Komárom.

The RefKC in Slovakia is an ecumenically open church. As it is well known, the RefKC was at the birth of the World Council of Churches. It is a member of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic and of the Slovak Bible Society. Individual members and churches are also involved in other ecumenical organizations and events, such as World Day of Prayer, and others.

2.2. Various ecclesial communities, mostly “charismatic”.

There are a number of small ecclesial communities in the Slovak Republic. For various reasons they are not registered under the Church Law no. 308/1991. They are differently registered. They legal existence gives them space to live; however, they do not have certain privileges of others.

These groups often represent a challenge to traditional churches in several respects. Their strong emphasis on personal willingness to sacrifice their time and money in favour of preaching the Gospel makes them quite live.

Unfortunately these groups typically own negative concepts about ecumenism. Their attitudes to formal ecumenical initiatives are in some cases reserved, or even hostile. Characteristic for them are disunity, strong congregational focus, an emphasis on strong charismatic leader, so often each church is more or less independent organization with a special emphasis. Some do not developed church structures. In critical sermons and publications sometimes deliberately focusing on people who have a negative experience with registered churches.
Their members attract particularly, though not exclusively, a radical young generation.

2.3. Protestant ecumenical organisations in Slovakia

Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic (ERC)

Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic (ERC) is an association of those churches who are recognized as churches by the Law and are open to ecumenism. ERC does not interfere into inner matters of the member churches. Rather, the member churches want to inquire and realize possibilities of cooperation and mutual understanding. Another important position is inscribed to the ERC in regard to state institutions and international church organisations. A welcome practical meaning of the ERC is seen in the real platform for Christian dialogues among the churches including the biggest and most important Roman Catholic Church.

Presently, the following entities make up the ERC:
1. Baptist Union in the Slovak Republic
2. The Brethren Church in the Slovak Republic
3. Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Slovakia
4. Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia
5. United Methodist Church, Slovak District
6. Orthodox Church in Slovakia
7. Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia

Observer’s statute in the ERC hold:
1. Apostolic Church in Slovakia
2. Seventh Day Adventists in Slovakia
3. Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic
4. Old Catholic Church in Slovakia

The Association of Evangelical Churches in the Slovak Republic (ZEC)

The Association of Evangelical Churches has been made up by churches that characteristically favour evangelical theological accents and practise conservative Protestant church
life. Members are: Apostolic Church, Baptist Union, Brethren Church and the United Methodist Church.

The main goal of its formation in 1993 was to provide for quality education of their workers: preachers, mission workers, and catechists. That happens in the university environment: Matej Bel University, Pedagogical Faculty, Banská Bystrica. The department is called The Department of Theology and Christian Education (Katedra teológie a katechetiky). The ecumenical dialogues within the ZEC are possible thanks to mutual acceptance of Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Alliance and the programme manifest of the Laussane Movement.13

Evangelical Alliance (EA)

The EA founded in London 1846 has ever since proclaimed unity among individual Christians that belong to various denominations. Based on the Scripture, it encourages everyone to read and interpret God’s word. The aim is to promote and encourage people to make up networks, and to work together towards mutual goal, for instance: evangelism meetings, or prayer meetings.

At the time of communist ruled Czechoslovakia the EA was successful in organising Week of Prayer at the beginning of January. These meetings were helping Christians to keep in touch during those tough times.

World Day of Prayer (SDM)

The SDM is an international movement of Christian women since 1887. From the beginning the organisers have accentuated the power of prayer to improve the destiny the powerless. They claimed university education to be accessible to women everywhere in the world. The SDM prayers, typically delivered during special liturgy on the first Friday in March, were directed to

support newly founded schools for girls and women in world areas where education was traditionally denied to them.

The SDM prayers were held under communism in many Czechoslovakian churches. They were the broadest “folk” ecumenical platform for both Protestants and Catholics at those tough times.

Slovak Bible Society (SBS)

The SBS is ecumenically run fellowship of Christians and Christian churches that are linked by a specific wish: to help distribute and support knowledge of the Bible. In today’s Slovakia the following churches cooperate: Apostolic Church, Baptist Union, Brethren Church, Evangelical Church of A. C., Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches, Old Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Reformed Christian Church, Seventh Day Adventists, United Methodist Church. All those churches have its representative in the Steering Committee of the SBS.

3. Conclusions

Possibilities and limits of ecumenical dialogues in the Slovak Republic are linked to their history, teaching, and today’s organisation. Following our inquiry as featured above, we may boldly presume that possibilities for ecumenical dialogues can be found.

As part of their theological studies, my university students made a research among various church traditions. The goal of it was to select what is common and what is specific among the protestant churches in regard to ecumenism. In their reports they pointed to an encouraging finding that the examined denominations were mostly confident that their church is ecumenically open. They pointed to Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All share this concept of God while excluding those with different concepts.

Another common ecumenical base for them is Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. He is the centre of Christian procla-
mation, and that is common to all churches. At the same time, Jesus Christ – as such – is also seen as a limit to ecumenism. There was no willingness to understand ecumenism in sense of an interreligious dialogue with religious groups other than Christian.

The question of God’s revelation is another item. It is common to all churches: Jesus Christ is the true revelation of God. But how we get this revelation? Protestant family unanimously say: It is the Bible. The Bible bears witness to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. However, the way denominations use the Bible and interpret it, vary largely. And here is another limit for ecumenical dialogues. It is clear that ecumenical theological training, such as given for instance by the Department of Theology and Christian Education, can help overcome lots of traditional prejudices or even mistakes in exegesis and proclamation of the Gospel.

The Bible is also differently seen as to its authority. For some, it is inerrable. A conservative approach to the Bible sets limits to those who are more open to current findings that influence our exegesis. This opens the question of the Bible as a text inspired by the Holy Spirit as well as the demand for Christocentric interpretation of the Bible. Authentic Biblical interpretation and preaching is required everywhere, but the answer of the quest on the authentic Bible interpretation and preaching is given differently. However, the research has also pointed to an ecumenical chance in this area: Various traditions can bring forward Bible interpretations that can become a subject of mutual learning and sharing.

Among the dogmatic matters students further discovered the meaning of creation and the place of man in it. Christians are seen as the elected people that took over the place of the old Israel. Man is accepted to this elect family though compensation of his being guilty before God because of sin. Christ is bringing this compensation through His cross. This is common and gives a broad space for ecumenical dialogues. However, as the understanding of how it comes true in man’s life differs, it can also be quite a deal of a limit for ecumenical dialogues.
Finally, dogmatic positions of Christ’s Second Coming are various. It is clear that those righteous will rise up for eternal life with God while other will perish. However the way how this common belief influences evangelisation, differs largely and sets limits to ecumenical dialogues as well.

The research disclosed various areas of possibilities for ecumenical dialogues. At the same time, it became clear that a concrete dialogue mostly remains a possibility that is not grasped and utilized. Some limits could be overcome if ecumenism is looked up and cultivated. This is mostly not the case. In some church constitutional documents you look for ecumenism in vain. That is why many ecumenical activities are accidental. It may or may not be accepted by the majority of particular church. This especially concerns ecumenical activities of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. The package of historical hurts is still on our shoulders. Protestant church members still wrestle with lots of prejudices against Roman Catholicism. We are not yet able to fulfil Jesus’ prayer „that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” (John 17:21) Our hope is in God who rises new generation of Christians with eyes open for the Kingdom of God among us. There is a lot to do for us all. If we are aware of all those possibilities and limits of ecumenical dialogues, it is already a good step to towards the desired unity of Christians. The Roman Catholic ecumenical understanding of churches including Protestant churches has been examined and expressed by Walter Casper in his article Current Problems in Ecumenical Theology.14 The development shows that future ecumenism may take different shape, as Slovak Roman Catholic theologian Pavol Tomek expresses in the term “communion ecclesiarum” – from ecumenism of comeback to ecumenism of dialogue.15 As reported in press articles, Pope Francis has also been ecumenically opened, focused even

15 P. Tomek, p. 6.
on the Evangelical and Pentecostal worlds. This gives hope for future coping with our limits toward convergence and unity.

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