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Izmir Evangelical Protestant Churches*

Abstract: Izmir is one of our cities with a rich history, known for its geographical structure and its embrace of different cultures and religions. As a central hub in many areas, particularly in art, culture, and commerce, the city of Izmir has continued to be a focal point from the past to the present, with a history dating back to around 8500 BC. Being one of the first regions where Christianity spread, Izmir has historically been a popular center for the Christian world as well. With its incorporation into Ottoman lands, it has maintained this valuable characteristic. Izmir, which holds an important position in the Christian world, has not only hosted communities where different cultures and civilizations coexist but has also housed various faith groups that have built their places of worship to freely practice their beliefs and rituals. Thus, Izmir has become one of our cities famous not only for its mosques but also for its churches. Recently, it has been observed that churches, particularly those with Protestant and Evangelical identities, have been operating within a more intensive working system in Izmir. The church is the term used for the community formed by those who believe that Jesus provides spiritual salvation and strive to live a life within the framework of Christian faith, as well as the place of worship where this community performs its religious rituals. Therefore, the church stands out not only as a place of worship where certain sacraments are performed but also as a center that fosters a sense of community. Protestantism, which aims to return Christianity to its form during the time of Jesus, emphasizes the importance of the spiritual connection that will be established between the individual and God. According to the Protestant perspective, it is accepted that the individual experiences spiritual enlightenment through inspiration believed to be sent by the Holy Spirit, alongside faith in Jesus' salvific role in their personal life. Therefore, rather than focusing on certain sacraments, the Protestant viewpoint highlights the importance of spiritual connection for the individual, centering on the spiritual relationship with Jesus as the path to spiritual salvation. Evangelism, which encompasses the meanings of the words gospel and good news, is essentially a movement to return to the Holy Scriptures, or in other words, to the true teachings of Jesus. Just as the emergence of Protestantism is attributed to Martin Luther, the name that first comes to mind when discussing Evangelism is also Luther. Initially used by Luther to signify a return to the true teachings of Jesus, Evangelism has undergone a shift in meaning over time, evolving into a movement aimed at proclaiming the message of the Gospel to the entire world. Additionally, while missionary work aims to convert non-Christians to Christianity, evangelism envisions spreading the message of the Gospel to all humanity. The re-Christianization of those who are Christians yet live lives distanced from the messages of the Gospel also falls within this framework. Therefore, Evangelism essentially sees the entire world as its field of activity, aiming to spread the message of the Gospel and the belief in Jesus' salvation to all corners of the globe. In this context, the effort of the founding members in the churches within our research area to manage the church congregation and organize it for various activities has been tried to be determined. In addition, the activities of the church members towards opening new churches have been conveyed. The similarities between the process of the spread of Christianity in the post-Jesus era and the contemporary evangelical movement have also been addressed. This study focuses on the New Birth Protestant Church, which has a Protestant-Evangelical identity and is located in the center of İzmir, and certain key churches affiliated with it. The relevant churches were visited, particularly on Sundays between 2003 and 2005, and their services and other activities were observed. The founding dates of these Protestant churches and their development processes up to the present have also been identified. One-on-one interviews were conducted with both the founding members and pastors of the churches, as well as

* Bu makale Çanakkale'de 15-17 Nisan 2005 tarihinde "*Türk Dünyasında Misyonerlik*" adlı sempozyumda sunulan "*İzmir'deki Bazı Misyoner Gruplar: Yeni Doğu Protestan Kilisesi Örneği*" adlı bildirinin genişletilmiş şeklidir. This article is an expanded version of the paper titled "*Some Missionary Groups in Izmir: The Case of the New Birth Protestant Church*", which was presented at the symposium "*Missionary Activities in the Turkic World*" held in Çanakkale on April 15-17, 2005.

with visitors, in an effort to get to know them closely. Our aim is to gain a closer understanding of a religious group existing in our country from a researcher's perspective and to introduce it. While examining the subject, written literature and websites of churches were used, field research was also conducted, and observations and evaluations made by personally participating in church programs were also conveyed. The information obtained was interpreted phenomenologically, and comparisons were occasionally included. Thus, the goal was to provide general information about the Protestant and Evangelical identity churches and their practices operating in İzmir.

Keywords: History of Religions, İzmir, Evangelism, Protestant, Church.

İzmir Evanjelist Protestan Kiliseleri

Öz: İzmir coğrafi yapısı, farklı kültür ve dinlere kucak açması yönüyle köklü bir tarihe sahip olan şehirlerimizden biridir. Sanat, kültür ve ticaret başta olmak üzere pek çok alanda merkezi bir konunda bulunan İzmir şehri, MÖ. 8500'lü yıllara dayanan tarihiyle geçmişten günümüze ilgi odağı olmaya devam etmiştir. Hristiyanlığın yayıldığı ilk bölgelerden biri olan İzmir, tarihsel olarak Hristiyan dünyası için de popüler bir merkez olmuştur. Osmanlı topraklarına katılmasıyla birlikte sahip olduğu bu değeri koruma özelliğini sürdürmüştür. Hristiyan dünyası açısından önemli bir konumda bulunan İzmir şehrinde farklı kültür ve medeniyetlere sahip topluluklar bir arada yaşadığı gibi farklı inanç mensupları inanç ve ibadetlerini rahatça uygulama adına kendilerine ait ibadet mekânları da inşa etmişlerdir. Böylece İzmir şehri camileri kadar kiliseleri ile de meşhur olan şehirlerimizden biri olmuştur. Son dönemde İzmir'de özellikle Protestan ve Evanjelik kimliğe sahip kiliselerin daha yoğun bir çalışma sistemi içerisinde oldukları fark edilmiştir. Kilise, İsa'nın ruhsal kurtuluşu sağlayacağına inanarak ona bağlanan ve Hristiyanlık inancı çerçevesinde bir hayat yaşamaya çalışan kimselerin oluşturduğu topluluğa ve bu topluluğun dini ritüellerini yerine getirdiği ibadet mekânına verilen addır. Dolayısıyla kilisenin işlevi belli sakramentlerin yerine getirildiği ibadet mekânı olması yanı sıra topluluk ruhunu hissettiren bir merkez olmasıyla ön plana çıkmaktadır. Hristiyanlığın İsa zamanındaki şekline dönmesini amaçlayan Protestanlık, birey ile tanrı arasında kurulacak olan ruhsal bağlantının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Protestan yaklaşımına göre bireyin şahsi hayatında, İsa'nın kurtarıcılığına imanı ile birlikte Kutsal Ruh tarafından üzerine gönderildiğine inanılan esinlenme yoluyla ruhsal bir aydınlanma yaşadığı kabul edilmektedir. Dolayısıyla belli sakramentlerden ziyade bireye ruhsal bağlantının önemini vurgulayan Protestan bakış açısı İsa ile kurulacak ruhsal bağlantıyı merkeze alarak manevi kurtuluş yolu olduğunu aktarmaktadır. İncil sözcüğünün karşılığı olan müjde ve iyi haber anlamlarını da içeren Evanjelizm ise esasen Kutsal Kitaba diğer bir deyişle İsa'nın gerçek öğretilerine dönüş hareketidir. Protestanlığın ortaya çıkışı Martin Luther'e dayandığı gibi Evanjelizm denildiğinde de ilk akla gelen isim Luther'dir. İlk kez Luther tarafından İsa'nın gerçek öğretilerine dönüş anlamında kullanılan Evanjelizm, ilerleyen süreçte bir anlam kayması yaşayarak İncil mesajını tüm dünyaya duyurmayı hedefleyen bir harekete doğru geçiş yaşamıştır. Ayrıca misyonerlik, Hristiyan olmayanların Hristiyanlaştırılmasını hedeflerken evanjelizasyon, İncil mesajının tüm insanlığa ulaştırılmasını öngörür. Hristiyan olduğu halde İncil mesajlarından uzak bir yaşantı içinde olanların yeniden Hristiyanlaştırılması da bu çerçevede yer almaktadır. Dolayısıyla Evanjelizm, İncil mesajının ve İsa'nın kurtarıcılığına olan inancın tüm dünyaya yayılmasını hedef edinen bir akım olması yönüyle esasen tüm dünyayı kendisinin faaliyet alanı olarak görmektedir. Bu bağlamda araştırma alanımıza dâhil olan kiliselerdeki kurucu üyelerin kilise cemaatini idare ve çeşitli faaliyetler için organize etme gayreti tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bununla

birlikte kilise üyelerinin yeni kiliseler açılması yönündeki faaliyetleri aktarılmıştır. Ayrıca İsa sonrası dönemdeki Hristiyanlığın yayılma süreci ile günümüz Evanjelizm hareketinin benzerlik arz eden noktalarına da değinilmiştir. Bu çalışmada İzmir merkezde bulunan Protestan-Evanjelik kimliğe sahip olan Yeni Doğu Protestan Kilisesi ve bu kilise ile bağlantılı olan belli başlı kiliseler ele alınmıştır. İlgili kiliseler 2003-2005 yılları arasında özellikle Pazar günleri ziyaret edilerek ayinleri ve diğer çalışmaları gözlemlenmiştir. Ayrıca bu Protestan kiliselerinin kuruluş tarihi ve günümüze kadar geliş süreçleri de tespit edilmiştir. Gerek kiliselerin kurucu üyeleri ve pastörler gerek buraya gelen ziyaretçilerle birebir görüşmeler yapılarak kendileri yakından tanınmaya çalışılmıştır. Amacımız bir araştırmacı gözüyle ülkemizde var olan bir dini grubu daha yakından tanımak ve tanıtmaktır. Konu incelenirken yazılı literatürden, kiliselerin internet sitelerinden istifade edildiği gibi alan araştırması da yapılmış, kilise programlarına bizzat iştirak edilerek gerçekleştirilen gözlem ve değerlendirmeler aktarılmıştır. Elde edilen bilgiler fenomenolojik olarak yorumlanmış, zaman zaman karşılaştırmalara da yer verilmiştir. Böylece İzmir’de faaliyette bulunan Protestan ve Evanjelik kimliğe sahip kiliseler ve uygulamaları hakkında genel bir bilgilendirme yapılması hedeflenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinler Tarihi, İzmir, Evanjelizm, Protestan, Kilise.

Introduction

The city of İzmir is one of the oldest settlements in Anatolia, with a history dating back to around 8500 BC.¹ It is accepted that the name İzmir evolved from the name of an Amazon queen named Smyrna, who is believed to have lived here in ancient times. In the course of history, traces of the first urbanization in the city were found, first in Bayraklı and later in the area where Kadifekale is located. Excavation work in the Tepekule area of the Bayraklı district has unearthed remains dating back to 3000 BC. Additionally, the discovery of the Yeşilova Mound² in the Yeşilova neighborhood of the Bornova district in 2003, along with the information obtained from the excavations conducted there, has revealed that İzmir was a center of civilization dating back to around 8500 BC. The city, which has hosted different civilizations and cultures, has attracted attention throughout history due to its geographical location and the vibrant religious life in the region. İzmir has been a central hub in many areas, particularly in culture, art, and trade, from the past to the present. While under the rule of the Byzantine Empire, İzmir was one of its prominent religious centers and was endowed with privileges as the capital of the empire. After the period of the Turkish Beyliks, it became a famous port city of the Mediterranean and a favored city of the Ottoman Empire, which was considered a world power of its time, serving as the empire’s gateway to the world.³

In his works *Medinet’ü’l-Fazıla* and *Fususu’l-Medeni*, Farabi expresses that a city inhabited by a single nation and a single race is lacking in essential qualities. He argues that a truly civilized urban structure can emerge in a region if the dominant religious authority establishes an understanding that can accommodate multiple languages, religions, and cultures.⁴ In this context, İzmir is one of our

¹ Akın Ersoy, *Smyrna/İzmir Kazı ve Araştırmaları II*, “Buluntular Işığında Smyrna ve İlişkili Kentler”, *Ege Yayınları*, (2017); Hakan Göncü vd., “Smyrna/İzmir Kazı ve Araştırmaları-III”, *Ege Yayınları*, (İstanbul 2019); Zafer Derin, “Smyrna/İzmir Kazı ve Araştırmaları II, İzmir’in 8500 yıllık Sakinine İlişkin İzler... Traces of an 8500 Year-Old Resident of İzmir .”, *Ege Yayınları* 10 (İzmir 2017), 93-98.

² <https://yesilova.ege.edu.tr/> (17.11.2024).

³ <https://www.izmir.bel.tr/tr/izmirintarihi/225/257> (17.11.2024); <https://www.apikam.org.tr/tr/izmir-hakkinda/9/28?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1> (17.11.2024). See also. Ersoy, *Smyrna/İzmir Kazı ve Araştırmaları II*, 93.

⁴ Mahmut Kaya, “Fârâbî” (Ankara: TDV Yayınları: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 1995), 12/145-162; Mahmut Kaya, “el-Medinet’ü’l-Fazıla” (Ankara: TDV Yayınları: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 2003), 28/318-320; Ebu Nasr Muallim-i Sani Muhammed b Muhammed b Tarhan Farabi, *Farabi’nin İki Eseri: Fusulü’l-Medeni (Siyaset Felsefesine Dair Görüşler) Tenbihat Ala Sebîl’s-Sa’ade (Mutluluk Yoluna Yönelme)*, çev. Hanifi Özcan (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2014). See also. İftar Gözaydın, “Dini Doğruluk İddiası ve Çoğulculuk: Türkiye Örneği” (İstanbul,

cities where adherents of two major religions, Islam and Christianity, live together in a framework of respect and tolerance.

It is known that some Christian groups living in Izmir are only trying to practice their own religious beliefs, while others are striving to convey their beliefs to other people. In this context, the activities of Protestant churches in Izmir, particularly those with a prominent missionary identity, are noteworthy. Before introducing these churches, it would be appropriate to provide a brief introduction to fundamental concepts such as church, Protestantism, and Evangelicalism.

The Church is the name given to the community formed by those who embrace the Christian faith, founded by Jesus Christ, and established under the leadership of the apostles with the support of the Holy Spirit. In addition to referring to the group formed by individuals devoted to Jesus, the term "church" is also used for the sacred places where those who adhere to the Christian faith gather for worship.⁵ In other words, the Church is a concept used to define the community of people who believe in Jesus's salvation, are connected to him through faith, and claim to follow in his footsteps. It is generally accepted that the concept of the Church encompasses five different meanings: institution, sacrament, communion, servant, and herald. Therefore, in the Christian tradition, the Church is used to refer to a sacred place, the name of the Christian community, and a denomination or congregation.⁶

If we were to briefly define the denominations of the Christian church, namely Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, all Christians accept the "Catholic" designation in terms of representing the universal message of Jesus. However, the concept of Catholic in its general, universal sense essentially refers to the broadest segment of Christianity. This segment considers the papacy as the authority on Christian doctrines and morality, is thought to represent the true church against later-emerging groups within Christianity, and defends the universality of the church in contrast to local churches.⁷

The emergence of Orthodoxy in Christian history is based on political developments in the 4th century. In particular, the relocation of the capital of the Roman Empire to Istanbul in 330 AD transformed it into the new center of the Christian world. The internal church disagreements that began at the council held in Sofia in 343 AD during the reign of Emperor Constantius gradually increased, eventually leading to the establishment of Rome as the center of Catholicism and Istanbul as the center of Orthodoxy. Christians belonging to the Orthodox Church maintain that their denomination represents the truest path among Christian denominations, as reflected in the term "Orthodox," which means "correct way." Sharing the same adherence to the seven sacraments as the Catholic Church, Orthodoxy is most distinctly differentiated from other Christian denominations by the sanctity they attribute to icons. Icons, consisting of paintings and reliefs of important figures in Christian history, are considered important ritual objects in churches and homes. During worship, the conveyance of wishes through icons, mystical union with icons, and the meanings attributed to icons hold particular significance.⁸

Protestantism is a reformation movement centered on Martin Luther in the 16th century, representing a return to the essence of the Christian faith. It is also used to describe churches and communities established based on the theological and moral reinterpretation of Christianity. After Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin are known to be the most prominent representatives of the Protestant movement. As a religious movement that emerged as a reaction to the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism does not accept church authority and hierarchy, but rather considers the Bible as the sole authority. They only accept baptism and the Eucharist from the seven sacraments. Emphasizing the importance of the individual's spiritual connection with God rather

2015).

⁵ Mehmet Aydın, "Kilise", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2002), 26/11-14.

⁶ <https://turkiyeturizmansiklopedisi.com/kilise-church> (29.12.2024).

⁷ Ömer Faruk Harman, "Katoliklik", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2002).

⁸ Kürşat Demirci, "Ortodoksluk", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2007).

than rituals, Protestantism is built upon a Christ-centered understanding of faith.⁹

Evangelicalism is a movement that developed primarily within Protestantism. Evangelicalism, which encompasses the meanings of "good news" and "gospel" corresponding to the word "Bible," is essentially a return to the Holy Scripture, or in other words, to the true teachings of Jesus. Just as the emergence of Protestantism is attributed to Martin Luther, Luther is also the first name that comes to mind when evangelicalism is mentioned. Initially used by Luther to mean a return to the true teachings of Jesus, evangelicalism, over time, underwent a semantic shift, transitioning towards becoming a movement aimed at proclaiming the message of the Bible to the entire world.¹⁰

This movement entered a systematic and intensive period of activity, especially in the early 19th century. Being a movement that spread from America, current research suggests that one in four people in America identify as evangelicals today.¹¹ Evangelical movements, in addition to America, had been rapidly expanding in England since the 1730s. Like America, England has strived to deliver the message of Jesus from the past to the present day through missionaries sent all over the world.¹² Consequently, many academic studies have been conducted on evangelism, both in the West and in our country.¹³

Reaching the path to salvation, opened to humankind by God through the death of Jesus on the cross as recounted in the Bible, is the most important goal accepted by evangelicals. For, according to their belief, just as God sent Jesus to humanity, Jesus sent those who believe in him to all parts of the world with the task of spreading the Gospel. It has been pointed out that, in addition to the systematic activities of trained individuals as a group in implementing this belief that lies at the heart of the evangelical movement, it is also important for churches to support these efforts and function as mission centers.¹⁴ In this context, systematic studies carried out to develop church activities are also included in the sources.¹⁵

Alongside its core tenets of commitment to the Bible, acceptance of Jesus' death on the cross for the salvation of all humanity from sin, and the spiritual transformation experienced by an individual through turning to God, the Evangelical movement also aims to bring about change in other people. Consequently, an Evangelical individual desires the spiritual transformation they have experienced in their own individual life for the other people they encounter, and in this context, adopts the mission of communicating fundamental Christian belief to all of humanity.¹⁶

The concept of mission originates from the Latin word "Missio," derived from the root "mittere," meaning "to send," and signifies the act of sending, referring to a task given to someone to complete.¹⁷

⁹ Jacques Waardenburg, "Protestanlık", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2007); Mehmet Katar, "Dinlerde Günlük İbadet Uygulamaları", *Dini Araştırmalar* 1/1 (1998), 59-75. See also. Abdülkadir Parlak, "Protestan Reformunun Meydana Gelmesinde Etkili Olan Toplumsal, Siyasal Ve Ekonomik Faktörler", *DEÜİFD*, LVI (2022), 7-49.

¹⁰ İsmail Vural, *Evanjelizm: Beyaz Saray'ın Gizli Dini* (İstanbul: Karakutu, 2007); Şener Faruk Bedir, "Reformasyon'dan Günümüze Evanjelik Hristiyanlık", *Birey ve Toplum* 3/6 (2013), 73-97; Ali İsmail Güngör, *Evanjelikler* (İlgi Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2016); Yasin Yaylar, *Evanjelizm ve Türkiye Planı* (Kırşehir: Ahi Evran Üniversitesi, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2011), 8-16.

¹¹ Hakan Yılmaz, "Evanjelik Hareketin ABD Siyaset Kurumundan Dinî Talepleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Oksident-Yahudilik, Hristiyanlık ve Batı Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2/1 (2020), 33-36.

¹² David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 1-2.

¹³ David Neyland Sumarauw vd., "A Theological Review Of Evangelism And Its Influence On Church Growth", *Indonesian Impression Journal* 4/1 (2025), 1097-1110; Mukondi Ramulondi vd., "Church Growth, Evangelism And Mission" (Nectamen Consume Batur, 2002); J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism* (USA: Crossway, 2014); Şener Faruk Bedir, "Reformasyon'dan Günümüze Evanjelik Hristiyanlık", *Birey ve Toplum* 3/6 (2013), 73-97; Güngör, *Evanjelikler*; A. Rafet Özkan, *Amerikan Evanjelikler* *Baptistler* (IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2023); İsmail Vural, *Evanjelizm: Beyaz Saray'ın Gizli Dini* (İstanbul: Karakutu, 2007).

¹⁴ Sumarauw vd., "A Theological Review Of Evangelism And Its Influence On Church Growth", 1100-1109. See also. Kutsal Kitap, Kitabı Mukaddes Şirketi, İstanbul 2001, Yuhanna, 1/14: Elçilerin İşleri, 1/8.

¹⁵ Sumarauw vd., "A Theological Review Of Evangelism And Its Influence On Church Growth"; Josh Schmidt - Ian Carrico, "Reset Evangelism Strategy" (Kentucky Baptist Convention, 2021); Ramulondi vd., "Church Growth, Evangelism And Mission".

¹⁶ Yılmaz, "Evanjelik Hareketin ABD Siyaset Kurumundan Dinî Talepleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme", 33; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-3. See also. Elmer L. Towns, "A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth", 1995.

¹⁷ Ömer Faruk Harman, "Genel Olarak Misyonerlik", *Türkiye'de Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri* (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2004), 25; Remzi Kılıç, "Misyonerlik ve Türkiye'ye Yönelik Misyoner Faaliyetleri", *Türklük Bilimi Araştırmaları* 19 (2006), 328; Murathan

A missionary, on the other hand, is a person assigned to fulfill a specific task, meaning someone with a special assignment.¹⁸ While adherents of various religions aim to spread their messages to others, the term "missionary" is a title specifically used for those who undertake the task of conveying the Christian faith. It was especially used from the 16th century onwards for church officials sent to different regions with the goal of Christianizing colonial territories.¹⁹ Although known as a work carried out by volunteers trained from a specific church center, missionary work is essentially, as conveyed in the Bible, a faith-transmitting activity that every Christian should participate in, according to Christians who take as their principle Jesus's expression that he sent his apostles to other nations to spread the Gospel.²⁰

Evangelicalism, as a movement that aims to spread the message of the Gospel and faith in Jesus as Savior throughout the world, essentially sees the entire world as its field of activity. Consequently, due to its broader meaning compared to missionary work and its perception as a more positive concept, Christian groups involved in missionary activities today increasingly prefer to use the terms "evangelicalism" and "evangelization"²¹ to describe their work.²²

1. A Common Practice in Protestant Churches: Baptism and Communion

In religions, actions performed with a sense of worship after belief are of fundamental importance. In the context of Christianity, worship is expressed through the concept of sacraments. Christian churches have adopted different practices regarding sacraments. Unlike the Catholic Church, Protestant churches only accept and practice baptism and the Eucharist (Holy Communion).²³

Baptism is a religious ceremony in Christianity performed as an individual's first step into the faith, involving immersion in water or sprinkling water on the individual. The washing of the body with water, which is considered to have cleansing and life-giving properties as well as providing spiritual purification, is practiced as a ritual of initiation in Christianity, as it is in many other faiths.²⁴

Communion is a rite celebrated by Christians in memory of Jesus's Last Supper. It is recounted that Jesus, by breaking the bread, said, "This is my body," and by showing the wine, said, "This is my blood," as he gave them to his disciples. According to their belief, by participating in this bread and wine ritual, those who eat and drink them will establish a spiritual unity with Jesus and achieve eternal salvation.²⁵

Keha, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Misyonerlik ve Erzurum'daki Faaliyetleri", *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 58 (2014), 74; Erdal Sezgi, "Osmanlı Devletinde Misyonerlik Çalışmaları ve Ermeniler", *Kafdağı* 7/2 (2022), 186.

¹⁸ Şaban Kuzgun, "Hristiyan Misyonerlerin Türk-İslam Ülkelerindeki Faaliyetleri", *Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4 (1999), 331.

¹⁹ Mahmut Ay - Engin Erdem (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2019), "İlahiyat Terimleri Sözlüğü", 97.

²⁰ Cengiz Batuk - Süleyman Turan, "Misyonerlik Perspektifinden 20 ve 21. Yüzyıllarda Dünya Dinleri ve Mensupları", *Milel ve Nihal* 3/1-2 (2006), 137-160; <https://www.kutsalkitap.org/misyonerlik-nedir> (04.05.2024). See also. İncil: Matta, 28/19; Markos, 13/10; 16/15.

²¹ Şinasi Gündüz, "Protestan Geleneğinde Yeni Hristiyan Sağı Olarak Evanjelizm", *VIII. Kur'an Sempozyumu Günümüz Dünyasında Müslümanlar* (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2006), 51-52.

²² Şinasi Gündüz, "Misyonerlik", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2005), 30/193-199; Mustafa Erdem, *Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri ve Türkiye* (Ankara: Türkiye Kamu-Sen Yayınları, 2005), 38-39. See also. Şinasi Gündüz, "Misyonerlik ve Hristiyan Misyonerler", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi II* 1 (2002), 1-21; J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism* (USA: Crossway, 2014); Ali İsmail Güngör, *Evanjelistler* (İlgi Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2016); A. Rafet Özkan, *Amerikan Evanjelistleri Baptistler* (IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2023).

²³ Katar, "Dinlerde Günlük İbadet Uygulamaları", 59, 72-73.

²⁴ Salime Leyla Gürkan, "Vaftiz", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2012); Kürşat Haldun Akalın, "Hristiyanlığa Aktarılmış Rütüeller Olarak İsis Kültündeki Vaftiz ve Günah Çıkartma Ayinleri", *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 42 (2014), 41-76. See also. Sevinç Aksin, "Süryani Kilisesi'nde Bir Sakrament Olarak Vaftiz", *Sosyal Bilimler Araştırma Dergisi (SBARD)* 35 (2020), 194-198.

²⁵ Ahmet Hikmet Eroğlu, "Ekmek Şarap Ayini (Evharistiya) Konusunda Katolikler ve Protestanlar Arasındaki Anlayış Farklılıkları", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi XXXIX* (1999), 439-445; Kürşat Haldun Akalın, "Yunan-Roma Uygarlığında İnsan-Tanrılara Tapınma Töreni Olarak Kilise Ekmek-Şarap Ayini", *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 41 (2014), 129-159.

According to church rules, it is essential for individuals participating in the bread and wine ceremony, also known as communion, to be baptized. Those who partake of this bread and wine without being baptized commit a great sin. However, one of the church members stated that there are two types of baptism, adding: "If a person has faith in Jesus' divinity and saviorhood, then they are spiritually baptized. Water baptism is not a requirement. For example, I have accepted Christianity, I believe in Jesus, but I have not been baptized with water." As evidence for this view, the individual offered the following information: "When a person came to Jesus on the cross and told him he believed in him, Jesus said to him, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' This shows that he was spiritually baptized. I actually go to the New Birth Protestant Church, but because water baptism is a requirement there, I couldn't participate in the 'Lord's Supper.' I came here because they said I could participate in the Anglican church. The reason they don't allow it is their concern about falling into sin, because the pastor is responsible for the members of the church. They say they are being cautious because they have witnessed people coming to church, claiming to be Christians, participating in this ceremony, and then trying to profit from the church."²⁶

In Protestant churches, the bread and wine communion service differs from other churches in that the consumed bread is not considered the body of Jesus, nor is the wine considered the blood of Jesus. The prevailing belief is that it is merely a symbolic practice. Furthermore, there is flexibility regarding the frequency of this service.²⁷ At St. John's Anglican Church, unlike other Protestant churches, the "bread and wine communion," which they call "the Lord's Supper," was held every Sunday after the service. Looking at other Protestant churches, some hold it every week, while others find it sufficient to do so once a month. Here, the wine drunk to represent the blood of Jesus, who shed his blood on the cross for the sins of all humanity, is red wine. When red wine is unavailable, white wine can also be used. They stated that they follow this practice because Jesus represented his own blood with wine in the Bible. However, we cannot say that the practice is the same in all churches. Because this church is closer to the Catholic Church in its beliefs and practices, giving it a slightly more formal appearance and placing greater emphasis on rituals compared to others, it uses wine. However, there were also Protestant churches that used grape juice or even cherry juice. The bread, on the other hand, was a very thin bread, about the size of a coin, with a cross imprinted on the center, made by themselves using water and flour. Because this specially made bread is not found in all Protestant churches, a normal bread can be used for this service instead, depending on the location. Baptized Christians pray and perform this ritual by breaking off a piece of the bread and eating it.²⁸

2. The Reasons for American Missionaries Establishing Churches in Izmir

Missionaries, traveling to almost every country in the world, have also come to our country, reaching everywhere, especially certain cities. Izmir has been an important region for the Christian world since the early days of Christianity. The fact that a significant number of the first churches established in the post-Jesus era were located in and around Izmir has increased the importance of this region for the Christian world.²⁹ The missionaries, or as they are more commonly referred to today, the Evangelists, primarily focus on adapting their activities to the culture of the countries they operate in, particularly in Islamic countries and our own. It is understood that these missionaries arrive with a fundamental education about the social and cultural structure of the country. They also

²⁶ D. Kalaklı, A church member who has accepted the Christianity, 11.04.2004.

²⁷ Katar, "Dinlerde Günlük İbadet Uygulamaları", 73.

²⁸ R. Evans, Priest of Alsancak Anglican Church, 09.01.2005.

²⁹ Mark Wilson, "Localizing Smyrna in the apocalypse: John's Visions of the 'First of asia' - Vahiy'de Smyrna'nın Yeri: 'Asya'nın Birincisi' Hakkında Yuhanna'nın Tasavvuru", *Ege Yayınları* Smyrna/Izmir Kazı ve Araştırmaları-II/10 (İzmir 2017), 289-310.

consider the psychological state of the individuals they communicate with, following a strategic roadmap. They attempt to draw the Muslim population towards their beliefs by starting from the common acceptance points between Islam and Christianity. Individuals who have converted to Christianity play a key role in fostering sympathy for Christianity among Muslim individuals.³⁰

The primary reason American missionaries or evangelical groups establish churches in Izmir is their acceptance of Jesus Christ's words in the Gospel: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."³¹ They aim to spread Christianity throughout the world. When we asked a pastors of the New Birth Protestant Church in central Izmir, "Are you going to different countries because everyone in your home country, America, is already Christian?" they responded, "America is known as a Christian nation, but that's not actually the case. Most people are only Christians by name. When asked, they say, 'Sure, I believe,' but they don't go to church or do anything in the name of religion, much like many Muslims in Turkey." When we then asked, "So what is the reason for going to other countries? It seems that there is a need for you in your own country as well," their answer was: "Even if people in America don't live out their Christianity, many express their traditional belief when they hear the name. These people can choose to go to church one day and incorporate Jesus into their lives, but those who have never heard of Him are different. Our mission is to introduce him to those who do not know him at all."³²

The special reason for Christian groups establishing churches in Izmir is the mention of the names of the seven churches located in this region, which date back to the early spread of Christianity, and the letters sent to them in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. The fact that these churches are specifically referenced in the Bible has further increased the significance of this region in the Christian world. Particularly, Smyrna is known to be one of the seven churches mentioned in the Bible, located in the center of Izmir.³³ In addition, it is recorded in the sources that Christians involved in missionary work implemented their plans to dominate Anatolia, which they defined as the key to Asia, by advancing from Izmir.³⁴

R. Evans, a priest at the Alsancak Anglican Church and often addressed by church members as "Father Ron," in a sermon in January 2005 said that, "Protestant missionaries have been coming to Izmir for over a century and a half, and Izmir continues to be a common target."³⁵ A church member also pointed out that there are many churches in the Aegean region, particularly around Izmir, from the early spread of Christianity, expressing the view that "Christianity is not a faith that came here later; it is a faith that existed here long before Islam." The general sentiment among the Christians we spoke with in the church aligns with this perspective, and Melih Ekener, the general manager of Sat-7 Türk, which has been broadcasting as Turkey's first Christian channel since 2005, stated, "When you open the Holy Bible, almost all of it takes place in Anatolia. Because we have a 2000-year history in these lands."³⁶ Therefore, it is known that missionaries come to Turkey from many countries, especially America and England.³⁷ The text also provides information about the

³⁰ Gündüz, "Misyonerlik ve Hristiyan Misyonerler", 16.

³¹ Kutsal Kitap, Kitabı Mukaddes Şirketi, İstanbul 2001, Markos, 16/15.

³² K. Taylor, The Pastor of the New Birth Protestant Church, (25.04.2004).

³³ Mark Wilson, "Localizing Smyrna in the apocalypse: John's Visions of the 'First of asia' - Vahiy'de Smyrna'nın Yeri: 'Asya'nın Birincisi' Hakkında Yuhanna'nın Tasavvuru", *İstanbul: Ege Yayınları* Smyrna/İzmir Kazı ve Araştırmaları-II/10 (2017), 289-310. The seven churches mentioned in the Bible are: Izmir, Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, Thyatira, Laodicea and Philadelphia. (Vahiy, 1/11; 2. and 3. sections).

³⁴ Mustafa Erdem, "Türkiye'de Azınlıklara Yönelik Misyoner Faaliyetleri", *Türkiye'de Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri* (İstanbul: İslami İlimler Araştırma Vakfı, 2004), 275-276.

³⁵ R. Evans, The Priest of the Alsancak Anglican Church, (16.01.2005).

³⁶ <https://www.medyatava.com/haber/turkiyenin-ilk-hiristiyan-kanali-sat-7-turkun-genel-muduru-medyatavaya-konustu.123812> (08.04.2023).

³⁷ Özgür Yıldız, *Anadolu'da Amerikan Misyonerleri* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2022);

https://www.yeniasir.com.tr/yazarlar/erkin_usman/2013/06/22/misyonerler-icin-izmir-pilot-bolge (03.05.2024).

significance of the relevant churches and Christians through websites called Seven Churches, which refer to the seven churches mentioned in the Bible located in Izmir and its surroundings.³⁸

Information about the importance of these seven churches in Izmir and its vicinity for the Christian world can be found on their respective websites, regarding the first international meeting held in June 2021 and the second in June 2023. It appears that these meetings, held two years apart, are planned to have a third meeting in June 2025 and a fourth in June 2027. Details of the related program, which will last for a week and feature numerous Christian researchers from nine different countries as speakers, are available on their websites.³⁹

We conducted our research centered on the New Birth Protestant Church, so we found it appropriate to start by introducing this church first.

3. The New Birth Protestant Church

When we ask which churches in central Izmir can be defined as Protestant and Evangelical, the ones that come to mind are the New Birth Protestant Church and some other churches we have identified as being connected to it. The New Birth Protestant Church is located in the area known as Kordon in Izmir, while the other churches are situated in different central districts of Izmir, such as Alsancak, Bornova, Buca, and Karşıyaka, which are somewhat distanced from each other. We limited our study to these Protestant churches in central Izmir. This research was conducted based on observations made during visits carried out particularly between 2003 and 2005, as well as information available on the websites of the relevant churches.⁴⁰

3.1. Establishment of The New Birth Protestant Church

Today, one of the most active missionary groups in Izmir is the community that calls itself the New Birth Protestant Church, which was founded by American missionaries and began its activities in Izmir approximately ten years ago, as of 2005. This group, which defines its goals as “a new church consisting of administrators and members,” has been growing by adding new activities every day over time and has now become one of the most active communities in Izmir in terms of both membership potential and activities. As a result of an agreement between the administrators of the New Birth Protestant Church and the administrators of the Anglican Church named “St. John The Evangelist Church,” located across from Alsancak Station, they began holding Sunday services and other religious ceremonies there starting in June 2001. Thus, the Anglican service was held between 10 AM and 12 PM, followed by a gathering in the large hall at the back of the church, where tea and coffee were served along with various refreshments for conversation. In the afternoon, from 1 PM to 3 PM, the Protestant service was conducted, and similarly, conversations took place in the hall at the back of the church afterward. The Anglican service was conducted in English, while the services of the New Birth Protestant Church were held in Turkish. The Turkish service attracted more interest from some Turks compared to the English one, ensuring their more active participation in this group. However, there were also those who came to the church to improve their English and participated in the morning English service. Additionally, the best way to practice was during the conversation segment after the service. Almost all of the Anglicans who held the morning service were English, while most of the members of the New Birth Protestant Church who held the afternoon service were American. This place was a venue where Christians from America, England, and other countries could come together, making it possible to engage in dialogue with each of them.⁴¹

According to their own statements, in April 2003, due to a financial dispute that arose among them, the New Birth Protestant Community moved to an apartment on the sixth floor of a business

³⁸ <https://www.sevenchurches.com/> (17.03.2024); Tunca Varış, *The Seven Churches of Asia Minor (Anadolu'daki İlk Yedi Kilise)*, Skylife, Şubat, 2000, ss. 99- 105.

³⁹ <https://www.globalmyrnameeting.com/tr/> (17.03.2024).

⁴⁰ https://www.Protestankiliseler.org/?page_id=693 (18.04.2024), <https://izmirProtestan.org/> (05.05.2024).

⁴¹ K. Taylor, The Pastor of the New Birth Protestant Church, (15.02.2004).

building on Cumhuriyet Boulevard in Konak. It is known that this apartment was previously used by the Light Church. As the number of its members increased, the Light Church moved to a larger space, and thus the New Birth Protestant Community relocated here, acquiring an independent building of their own. The worship hours in the new building of the New Birth Protestant Church have been set from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Just like at the church in Alsancak, weekly prayer meetings are held here on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM. Additionally, except for Mondays, the church's doors are open to visitors every day of the week from 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM. With their new space, the New Birth Protestant Church has now become a more comfortable and self-sustaining church. As of 2005, the church had a regular congregation of about thirty to forty people, and this number could reach seventy to eighty or more during special days and programs.⁴²

3.2. Founders of The New Birth Protestant Church and the Structure of the Church

The main group that constitutes the church and organizes its activities is an average of fourteen American Christians. Among these core members, four are pastors - who prefer to use the term "pastor" rather than "priest". This is because while "priest" is perceived as an intermediary between God and people, "pastor" means shepherd, and just as Jesus was a shepherd to those who believed in Him during His time, pastors see themselves as shepherds who protect, care for, and serve their congregations. Two of the pastors are married, and along with their spouses, they take on the task of explaining and promoting Christianity, alongside five missionaries and three individuals who teach English at the church, all of whom are part of the church's main structure. While the others have been in Turkey for an average of ten years, these English teachers are typically recent university graduates who come to Turkey for a three-year period. Therefore, these English teachers share responsibilities with new members who arrive every three years. Of course, it is not possible to clearly delineate the duties of these individuals. Someone actively involved in church activities may also teach English when needed, and those who teach English can also take on active roles in church activities. Generally, the pastors have received theological education in America -three of them have done so- but there are also Turkish individuals who have received adequate training in Christianity. The other missionaries who organize church activities have university education in various fields and have also participated in theology courses at church schools in America.⁴³

Christians who are affiliated with the church are required to regularly attend weekly Sunday services and as part of their faith, they are required to donate one-tenth of their income to the church, called "tithe." A donation box is generally passed around among those attending the service towards the end of the service, and after everyone has put their tithe in it, it is brought to the pastor. Afterwards, prayers are said that God will bless this money and ensure that it is used for good works for the church. Considering that the rent of the building, the cost of concerts and other organized programs, the money for distributed photocopies and booklets, the cleaning and kitchen expenses of the church, occasional trips to different cities, etc., are all covered by the church, it can be seen that these collected tithes serve as a resource to cover the church's expenses. Moreover, the payment of salaries for pastors and church staff is a separate issue. A pastor we interviewed stated that he received the income to meet his financial needs from the church he was affiliated with in America. It is noticeable that other church employees are in similar positions.⁴⁴

⁴² N. Brunson, The wife of A. Brunson, who plays an active role in the administration and operation of the church, (21.03.2004).

⁴³ B. Taylor, D. Mah, N. Young, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (04.07.2004).

⁴⁴ K. Taylor, Pastor of New Birth Protestant Church; T. Shewey, A University of California student who came to New Birth Protestant Church through a student interaction program between Ege University and the University of California, (11.07.2004).

3.3. Worship

The Sunday services at the church begin around 10:00 AM with readings from the Holy Scriptures (Torah, Psalms, Gospel), accompanied by hymns sung with guitar and other musical instruments, the pastor's sermon, and a blessing prayer. The communion service, referred to as "The Lord's Table," is also conducted during the service, involving bread and wine. Participants can follow the hymns displayed on a screen and track the scripture passages read by the pastor in the Holy Bible provided to them by church members. Additionally, after the pastor's blessing prayer, those church members who wish to can pray aloud. At the end of the service, the pastor says, "Let us wish peace to one another," and almost all attendees shake hands and say to each other, "Peace be with you," as they exit the service hall.⁴⁵

At the end of the meeting, refreshments such as cake and cookies are offered in this hall, which serves as both the exit and the main entrance of the church. During this time, participants have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with different individuals. Those who are visiting the church for the first time can ask questions about Christianity to both the pastor and other church members. After the conversation, those interested can attend the church class that starts at 2:00 PM to gain more knowledge about Christianity and the teachings of Christ. One of the church's responsibilities is to train its members to be well-versed in Christianity and to assign them to necessary roles when needed.⁴⁶ These courses are two-tiered, with the first phase lasting an average of twelve weeks and taught by a Turkish pastor, while the second phase, which lasts about six weeks, is conducted by American pastors. Those considering becoming Christians are required to take these courses first. The process of transitioning to Christianity for an individual typically takes about a year with these courses. The topics covered in the classes are provided to participants in photocopy form at the end of the course. Upon completion of the courses, a baptism ceremony is planned for those who accept the transition to Christianity. With the completion of the baptism ceremony, the individuals are considered Christians.⁴⁷

In the church's meeting room, there is a bookshelf where visitors can freely access books in English and Turkish. This bookshelf, available for the benefit of visitors, contains not only substantial volumes but also small pocket-sized books that cover specific topics, as well as single-page brochures. Depending on the interests of the visitors with whom conversations are held, books related to their inquiries are provided from this collection. Among the periodicals, it is also possible to find their newspaper titled *Kapsam* in this bookshelf. This newspaper, published in the format of a political, current affairs, and cultural journal, includes sections on faith-related topics, news, tourism, contributions from readers, women's issues, and information from your lawyer. Additionally, information about the publishing house, newspaper subscriptions, and the address and phone numbers of a church operating in Istanbul are also available here for those who wish to access them.⁴⁸

Children who come to church with their families have also been considered. The children are entertained and educated about the Christian faith through activities such as playing games, singing hymns, praying, and listening to religious stories in a room prepared for them by the pastor's wife. In cases where there are many children, they are divided into two groups according to their ages for activities. It has been observed that displaying the drawings and other works created by the children,

⁴⁵ A. Tam, K. Watson, M. Chu, T. Wang, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (19.07.2004).

⁴⁶ M. Taylor, N. Young, S. Yu, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (25.07.2004). See also. Matta, 28/19.

⁴⁷ D. Kalaklı, M. Kalaklı, The Turkish church members who attend church classes and have accepted the Christianity, (18.04.2004).

⁴⁸ C. Johnson, K. Lai, M. Chu, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (11.07.2004).

based on the stories and information shared with them, on the walls of their room and showcasing these works for their families to see at the end of the service provides a special morale boost for the children.⁴⁹

3.4. Other Activities in the Church

When the church is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the service held on Sundays, but church activities are not limited to this. Home meetings, which have a significant impact on strengthening the bonds between members and the church, are also held. These meetings, organized by the founding members of the church every other Thursday evening, are attended only by women, taking into account the cultural structure of Turkish society. During these meetings, a passage from the Bible is read, and discussions are held on that topic. Looking at the church members, we see that the majority are young people. Therefore, alongside religious activities, events such as concerts, seminars, film screenings, and trips are also organized to attract their interest. Concerts, seminars, and film screenings are mostly held on Saturdays. In organizing these activities, holiday periods are preferred, considering the participants' circumstances, which is why these activities increase during the summer.⁵⁰

During the summer months, a group of students from America comes together with Turkish students, mostly from Ege University, as part of a program. Those who come to Turkey through the church are students studying in various departments at the University of California, Los Angeles, and some are graduates. Although they are from different branches, it is noticed that they mostly study in the fields of sociology and psychology. While they explore Izmir and its surroundings and learn about what they are curious about regarding Turkey and the Turkish people, the Turkish students have the opportunity to improve their English through the dialogues they establish with these American students, whom they meet continuously for a month, and learn about America and Americans from them. In addition to this cultural exchange of knowledge, the same situation occurs with respect to faith, within a framework of mutual tolerance. Within the scope of the programs, if Muslim students wish to go to a mosque to worship, the visiting Christian students wait for them or tour the mosque in the meantime. Muslim students also go to observe the church service on Sundays if they wish. On Saturdays, trips are organized to Izmir and its surroundings, and students exchange ideas. The visiting students largely express their satisfaction with seeing the places to visit in Turkey in various ways. During the weekdays, more time is spent at the café called "Good News," which belongs to the New Birth Protestant Church, where different activities are held. In this program called "English Club," which is based on the mutual interaction of foreign and Turkish students, English lessons focus on the nuances of speaking the language, idioms, and certain patterns in conversation in the mornings, while in the afternoons, lessons on American culture provide Turkish students with insights into American culture.⁵¹

The cafe opened by the New Birth Protestant Church, located near a small park in the Bornova district of Izmir, is named "Good News," which means the word "Gospel." It is primarily used as a venue for programs planned by the church. Additionally, this cafe offers English lessons, internet services, and the sale of hot and cold beverages outside of the summer season. It is a pleasant environment that can be preferred by those who come to benefit from internet and computer services, as well as by those who wish to chat with friends. The music played in the café consists of Turkish or English songs and church hymns, which are played as soft background music, allowing visitors to comfortably converse with their friends. The staff at the café have indicated that this venue

⁴⁹ N. Brunson, The wife of A. Brunson, who plays an active role in the church, (25.04.2004).

⁵⁰ M. Taylor, N. Young, S. Yu, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (25.07.2004)

⁵¹ C. Johnson, K. Lai, M. Chu, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (11.07.2004).

has been operational since 2003.⁵²

According to the statements of the officials in the churches we visited as part of our study, these churches generally had a fundamental working principle. This principle involves the establishment of a new church reaching a certain membership level and a person being elevated to the position of pastor to manage the services, after which the founding member of the church moves on to another region. In this way, Christianity spreads through the churches opened in different areas. To strengthen the newly established church community, former members also provide support. This principle is documented as a missionary principle first applied by Paul.⁵³

4. Other Izmir Protestant Churches Related to New Birth Protestant Church

4.1. St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church

The Evangelist Aziz John Anglican Church serves predominantly English-speaking Christians living in Izmir. Located in a prominent building in the center of the Alsancak district, the church operates under the name "St. John the Evangelist Church." The Anglican Church is the main Anglican Church in Izmir, known for its architectural structure and history. It is recognized as one of the forty-two churches affiliated with the Diocese of Gibraltar, authorized by the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁵⁴ The Anglican Church, also referred to as the Church of St. John the Evangelist, has a presence in Izmir as a Christian community that dates back over four hundred years. It was established in 1625 by the English Levant Company.⁵⁵ Next to the church, there is also the building of the British Consulate. According to the information available in the sources, this building was initially used for a time as a priest's room. The church land is among the lands that Sultan Abdulhamid donated to British citizens in 1898.⁵⁶

The Evangelist Aziz John Anglican Church is distinct from other Protestant churches in Izmir both in its structure and its activities. However, it also holds a special significance as it has embraced the New Birth Protestant Church, particularly during its early formation period. The New Birth Protestant Church conducted its Sunday services and other activities here for approximately a year and a half.⁵⁷ Therefore, after providing a brief historical overview, the practices of this church will first be conveyed.

The Anglican Church, unlike other Protestant churches, has some characteristics that are closer to Catholicism due to its greater emphasis on rituals.⁵⁸ In addition to the importance placed on sacraments, it is also a grand church in terms of architectural design. While other Protestant churches are recognized for their architectural simplicity and the modesty of their interiors, the Anglican Church features visual representations related to the Christian faith, particularly images and figures of Jesus and Mary, prominently displayed inside. At the entrance of the church, to the right, there are two rows of pews, and at the end of these pews is the pulpit where the service is conducted, along with the communion table. Meanwhile, in the center on the left side of the church entrance, there is a baptismal font⁵⁹ shaped like an oyster shell. This baptismal font is not found in Protestant churches in Izmir. It is also the only church among the Protestant churches in Izmir where the service is conducted in English, as eighty percent of its members are foreigners.⁶⁰

⁵² K. Taylor, The Pastor of the New Birth Protestant Church, (25.04.2004).

⁵³ Gündüz, Misyonerlik ve Hristiyan Misyonerler, s. 17.

⁵⁴ <https://www.visitizmir.org/tr/Destinasyon/12946> (03.03.2024).

⁵⁵ <https://kulturenvanteri.com/tr/yer/st-jean-evangelist-anglikan-kilisesi/#17.1/38.437012/27.147291> (03.03.2024).

⁵⁶ <https://www.izmirdergisi.com/tr/turizm/inanc-turizmi/2893-baptistlerin-kutsal-mekani-st-john-kilisesi-1> (03.03.2024).

⁵⁷ R. Evans, The Priest of the Alsancak Anglican Church, (16.01.2005).

⁵⁸ For detailed information, see. Stephen Neill, Anglicanism (London, 1958); J. W. C. Wand, Anglicanism in History and Today (London, 1961).

⁵⁹ Brigitte Pitarakis, "Bizans Konstantinopolis'inde Kilise, Ev ve Günlük Hayatta Din", *Büyük İstanbul Tarihi* (İstanbul, 2019), 5/72.

⁶⁰ Ali Erbaş, *Hristiyanlık'ta Reform ve Protestanlık Tarihi* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2007), 112.

In Protestant churches, the person leading the service is called a pastor, while in the Anglican Church, they are referred to as a Chapter. Additionally, the religious official in the Anglican Church wears a ceremonial robe that is different from those in other Protestant churches, featuring a large cross emblem. In other Protestant churches in Izmir, pastors conduct the service in their regular everyday clothing. The church members greet all visitors with a warm smile and show interest in them. Considering their attitude, it is believed that nearly all members who come to our country with the aim of spreading the Christian mission have received basic training in human psychology. After all, their primary goal was to ensure that the Muslim community they are part of has a positive impression of them. Bringing their interlocutors closer to the Christian faith was seen as a future objective.⁶¹

During our visit to the church, a Christian gentleman expressed his surprise by saying, "I have been coming to this church for ten years, and this is the first time I have seen a woman in a headscarf enter here." This statement indicated that headscarf-wearing Muslim women did not frequently come to this place. We had received similar reactions from many people we met both at the Anglican Church we first visited and at other Protestant churches. Although our headscarves drew attention to us, it did not lead to a negative attitude towards us. We sincerely expressed our desire to get to know them better and stated that, due to our field of work, we would strive to maintain an objective stance in our activities as much as possible. Thus, efforts were made to gather information about the beliefs, worship, lifestyles, and activities of people within the church environment through interviews and discussions.⁶²

As we have observed, those who come to the church are generally individuals who are curious about the interior of the church or how the service is conducted. These individuals are largely those who visit the church just once. Additionally, there are others who come here for different reasons, such as those who arrive on the recommendation of friends or those who, after trying every other option due to a desperate illness, decide to visit the church as well. For example, on a Sunday when we were at the church, we learned that a person who came after the service asked the pastor for holy water for their sick son. The pastor informed the visitors that they do not provide holy water from the church, but if they wish, he could pray for them. Therefore, although there are rarely individuals who come to the church to request holy water for their sick relatives or to have a ritual known among the public as a priest's spell performed, church officials have stated that they only assist such requests through prayer and do not meet their expectations in the way they desire. Those in this group are also one-time visitors. It has been noted that those who continue to visit the church for a longer period are often individuals who come through a relative or a friend.⁶³

During the weekly Sunday service, a printed program is provided to participants by an attendant at the entrance. The Bible and hymnals are located in two sections of the church, where attendees sit in long rows to follow the service. The service begins with hymns that express the divinity of Jesus and prayers to Him, followed by a sermon from the pastor. During the service, a church official circulates with a donation box to collect contributions from those attending. At the end of the service, in addition to a communal prayer, special prayers are also offered for those who wish to receive them.

At the end of the service in the Anglican church, attendees move to the spacious hall at the back of the church. This hall, where people can enjoy tea, coffee, and refreshments while chatting, opens up to a garden where children can run and play. Church members are quite tolerant and engage in a dialogue that is free from argument, answering visitors' questions about Christianity. Those who wish can also attend the prayer meetings held every Wednesday evening. Celebrations on special

⁶¹ M. Taylor, N. Young, S. Yu, Students who came to the New Birth Protestant Church through the student interaction program held between Ege University and the University of California, (25.07.2004).

⁶² A Turkish church member who has accepted the Christianity, (07.03.2004).

⁶³ R. Evans, The Priest of the Alsancak Anglican Church, (16.01.2005).

occasions can be learned about through announcements posted on the church door in advance, and anyone interested is welcome to participate.⁶⁴

As of today, according to the information available on internet pages, members of the Izmir Protestant Church, which has been operating at a different address in Izmir since 2001, have started holding their services at this Anglican Church in Alsancak since 2023. Since the Anglican Church conducts its own service in the morning, the members of the Izmir Protestant Church have reported that they gather in the evening to hold their Sunday services.⁶⁵

4.2. The Church of Light

The Church of Light has been established in Izmir by Protestant Christians in recent years and it is also the first international church in the area. The church's founding and operation are primarily led by two families; one American couple, Chis and Claudia, and one German couple, Helmut and Judith. The men from these families have been appointed as pastors by the church. These families settled in Turkey in 1993. Initially, they held Sunday services in their homes, but as new members joined, they felt the need for a space outside their homes and moved to a hotel in central Izmir. After operating there for a while, the group relocated in November 1996 to a 250-square-meter apartment on the sixth floor of a business building on Cumhuriyet Boulevard in Konak. Due to the increasing number of members over time, they moved in April 2003 to a 700-square-meter apartment in a business center in Alsancak.⁶⁶ The Church of Light has a congregation of about one hundred and forty people, with approximately half being foreigners and the other half being Turkish. The foreign members come from fifteen to twenty different countries, including some who live in Izmir and others who are tourists visiting Izmir for a temporary period.

The founders of the Church of Light, which holds a certain influence in the Alsancak district, have announced on their website that they are providing services to their members with a new church in the Karşıyaka district. They noted that Sunday services at this church are held at 12:00 PM and that the church doors are open to everyone. Additionally, it was stated that the church is open to visitors from 1:00 PM to 6:00 PM on Mondays and Fridays.⁶⁷

Since they define themselves as an international church, they initially conducted their services in English, which was a common language. However, with the increase in participation from Turkish members, they began to hold services in both English and Turkish. The first Turkish individual was baptized in a plastic children's pool at the church in the autumn of 1996 after converting to Christianity. Following this event, they stated, "Even if it was a small flame, it grew over time, and the number of people converting from Islam to Christianity steadily increased." They express their purpose as "to convey the sovereignty of God to the city of Izmir and its surroundings, to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to provide an international church service that will inspire the community towards a spiritual awakening." They also emphasize that they embrace everyone, regardless of nationality, culture, social status, or religious background, and that they do this for the glory, grace, and power of God.⁶⁸

They take special care of each individual who comes to church, as well as children who come with their families in rooms prepared for children. In rooms designed for children grouped by age 0-4, 5-8, and 9-13 years old children participate in activities such as painting, playing games, singing hymns, and praying, in addition to receiving lessons on various religious topics. This practice, which we also see in other Protestant churches, is adjusted based on the size of the church and the number of

⁶⁴ K. Taylor, The Pastor of the New Birth Protestant Church, (25.04.2004).

⁶⁵ <https://izmirprotestan.org/> (05.05.2024).

⁶⁶ <https://isikkilisesi.org.tr/hakkimizda> (24.02.2024).

⁶⁷ <https://www.lighthouseizmir.org/> (05.01.2025).

⁶⁸ <https://isikkilisesi.org.tr/hakkimizda> (24.02.2024).

children.⁶⁹

4.3. The Buca Baptist Church

The transition process that Izmir experienced in the early XVII. century from a small and quiet settlement to an international port city resulted in the settlement of foreign families here. The English, who were a dominant force in trade during that period, also found certain areas of Izmir suitable for their families and established themselves there, building churches in these regions. The Buca Baptist Church is one of these historic churches. Constructed in 1834 by immigrant families as a chapel, or a small village church, it was opened under the name All Saints English Protestant Church. The current church building was erected in 1866 on the site of this chapel, following a cross-shaped plan. The Rees family, one of the prominent financiers of the church, imported the roofing materials from the Welsh region of England via railway. The church houses one of the four known handmade organs in the world, dating back to 1912. The Rees family recorded on the organ that they donated this organ to the church in 1922 as a token of gratitude to God for not having any of their family members die in World War I. Until 1961, the building was used as a church, after which it was transferred to the Buca Municipality. The original colored stained glass windows from the church were also moved to the Alsancak Evangelist St. John Anglican Church in 1964. After 1991, the building began to be used as the Buca Culture and Arts Center, and as of 2001, it was returned to the Protestant community, allowing it to be used as a church once again.⁷⁰

According to their own statements, they are a community that held the first Turkish-language service in Izmir on December 25, 2000. This service, conducted at the Old English Church in Buca, marks the starting date of the church's activities that continue to this day. Since that date, the church building has been used under the name Buca Protestant Baptist Church. The church reached its current form following restoration work in 2004. According to the members, it is currently the only officially licensed Protestant church operating in Izmir.⁷¹

Most of the members of this church were previously Muslims who later converted to Christianity, while the proportion of foreigners is about three percent. It has an average congregation of around forty to fifty people. During our visit to the Buca Baptist Church in 2005, when we asked one of the members, "What distinguishes you from other Protestant churches?" they replied, "The most significant difference that sets us apart from other Protestant churches is our opposition to infant baptism. Because, in our view, every child is born without faith, and when they reach an age where they can make their own decisions, they are baptized if they choose to accept the Christian faith." This does not mean that all Protestants perform baptism ceremonies for their newborns; only Baptists postpone this process until the child grows up. In fact, all Protestant churches in Izmir agree that baptism should be performed according to the individual's own will. Additionally, a person we spoke with at the Light Church expressed that rituals are not important for Protestants, but the essence is what matters, saying: "When I have a child, I will have a small ceremony at the church for the pastor to bless and pray for them, but I will not have a baptism ceremony. They will grow up in this church and will be baptized whenever they wish. If someone wants to have a baptism ceremony for their baby, they can do so; there is no objection to that."

⁶⁹ A member of The Church of Light, (15.08.2004).

⁷⁰ <https://www.buca.bel.tr/Buca-Hakkinda/16/Protestan-kilisesi/tarihi-yapilar.html> (25.02.2024); <https://www.bucabaptist.org/blank> (28.02.2024); https://www.tripadvisor.com.tr/Attraction_Review-g298006-d10212408-Reviews-Buca_Protestan_Baptist_Kilisesi-Izmir_Izmir_Province_Turkish_Aegean_Coast.html (29.07.2024); <https://www.visitizmir.org/en/Destination/12080> (05.01.2025); <https://izmir.ktb.gov.tr/EN-242289/saint-john-the-baptist-church.html> (06.01.2025).

⁷¹ A member of The Buca Baptist Church, (12.09.2004).

4.4. The Buca Jesus Christ Community

Another Protestant church in Buca is The Buca Jesus Christ Community, which operates on the ground floor of an apartment building on Buca Tax Office Street. The most remarkable aspect of this church is that it is run by a South Korean group. The settlement of South Korean families in our country and their diligent execution of church activities here is seen as a clear expression of their commitment to their mission. While most of the members here are from South Korea, there are also a small number of Turkish members. The membership is around thirty to forty people. Like other churches, there are Sunday services and other prayer meetings held here, but their times are slightly different. For example, while Sunday services at other churches start at 11:00 AM, here they take place at 1:30 PM. Weekly prayer meetings are held as in other churches, and the church is open for visitors every weekday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The community here is also a Protestant, evangelical church with connections to other churches, which is the subject of our article.⁷²

4.5. The Karataş Church

The Karataş Church was established in the 1980s, according to the accounts of its members. Initially named the Izmir Jesus Christ Community, it operated as a home church until 1994. After that, it moved to the ground floor of an apartment in the Konak/Asansör neighborhood. They also use the basement, which is accessed by an internal staircase. According to their statements, it is the first Protestant church established in Izmir. The founding members are a group consisting of both foreign and Turkish individuals. After its establishment, while some foreign members returned to their countries, others remained here. The current membership potential is around one hundred and fifty people, and the proportion of foreign members is about five percent. According to their own statements, the founding members, after being convinced that the system would run well, left to contribute to the establishment and development of different churches. While checking in from time to time, they handed over the church activities here to Turkish members. This practice is observed in all the churches within our research, but it is more noticeable in this church. At the beginning of the service, hymns are sung while the children are in the lower level where the service is held. When the sermon is about to begin, the children go upstairs to the activity room designated for them. At the end of the service, attendees go upstairs to have tea and have the opportunity to chat in a warm atmosphere. Weekly prayer meetings are also held here, just like in other churches.⁷³

4.6. The Karşıyaka Love Protestant Church

The most recently established Protestant church is The Karşıyaka Love Protestant Church.⁷⁴ This church, which its members state was opened in 1990, holds its services in a small room within an apartment. It is the smallest space among the Protestant churches operating in Izmir. The number of members is between fifteen and twenty. A German individual serves as the pastor, and more than half of the members are foreigners. At the end of the service, we asked the pastor a question while speaking with him: "How do you define yourself? Do you say, 'Yes, I am a missionary,' or do you feel uncomfortable being called a missionary?" The pastor mentioned that the term is misunderstood in Turkey and then opened the Bible to read a passage where Jesus said: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."⁷⁵ He continued by saying, "We are simply trying to fulfill this word of Jesus. Our aim is the spread of the gospel; we are messengers of the gospel."⁷⁶

5. The Current Status of Protestant Churches in Izmir

This study was conducted on the situations and activities of Protestant churches in Izmir between

⁷² A member of The Buca Jesus Christ Community, (21.11.2004). See also. Ali Erbaş, *Hristiyanlık'ta Reform ve Protestanlık Tarihi* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2007), 112.

⁷³ <https://www.karataskilisesi.com/>; A member of The Karataş Church, (13.06.2004).

⁷⁴ <https://www.hristiyanitirki.com/forumlar/izmir-kilisesi/> (06.05.2024).

⁷⁵ Markos, 16/15.

⁷⁶ The Pastor of The Karşıyaka Sevgi Protestan Church, (17.10.2004).

2003 and 2005. Today, while the activities of the relevant churches have continued, new ones have been added. The most famous of these has been the Resurrection (Diriliş) Church. During our visit to the Resurrection Church in the Alsancak district of Izmir, church officials stated that this church was opened in 2010 by A. Brunson, the pastor of the New Birth Protestant Church, and that Brunson had been managing this church for approximately eight years. This church was officially converted into a church foundation building in 2018. During our visit, according to the statements of the officials present at the church, Brunson has also united all Protestant churches in Izmir under the umbrella of a foundation. The church officials here mentioned that there are approximately forty churches operating under this foundation that unites Protestant churches as of 2023.⁷⁷ It is known that, in addition to structures that are clearly identifiable as church buildings, there are also groups conducting church activities in any house or apartment. Furthermore, it is noted on their websites that the headquarters of the Protestant Churches Association is located in Izmir.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Izmir is one of the leading cities in Turkey in terms of both its level of development and population density. This city has been and continues to be an important center for Christians from past to present. Therefore, Izmir is regarded as an important region by adherents of both faiths today. In fact, when considered as a center where both faith communities live within a framework of tolerance, Izmir emerges as a principal city that showcases Turkey's richness in terms of diverse cultures, values, and beliefs.

If we were to make an assessment of the churches and their activities in Izmir, the influence of Christian groups coming from abroad, especially from America, can be seen in the establishment and development of evangelical and Protestant churches in Izmir. It is understood that the Protestant churches in Izmir, whose numbers have been gradually increasing since the 2000s as a result of the ongoing activities of church members, have recently adopted a more systematic working method by gathering under the umbrella of a foundation. Almost all of the Protestant groups operating outside of historical church buildings were initially established as house churches and moved to independent buildings as their membership numbers increased. These churches are managed by a group of administrators in the form of a pastor and a board of elders.

The activities in the church are not limited to Sunday services but are also supported by other social and cultural activities. The cultural structure of the Turkish people and individual psychology are taken into account to maintain strong bonds among members. The founding members of the church aim to appeal to the spiritual world of individuals by emphasizing the mystical aspect of Christianity, avoiding theological debates about the faith. Since the majority of those participating in the church services are Turkish, the language used in the services is generally Turkish, although services may also be conducted in different languages depending on the congregation's situation. In addition to the Sunday services, different activities are also held at the church. In this way, the commitment of those who come to the church to the group is strengthened. Basic information about the Christian faith is conveyed to church members and visitors through books, newspapers and magazines as well as small booklets and brochures.

The Turks have had a very tolerant approach towards different cultures and beliefs as a state policy during both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. The Turkish people have been hospitable towards people of different beliefs throughout history. Every believer has the right to live and convey their beliefs wherever they want in the world. Our duty is to approach other believers with respect and maintain our commitment to our own beliefs and values. Therefore, the presence of the relevant churches in this city, without aiming to harm the unity of the state and the nation, not

⁷⁷ A member of The Resurrection Church, (16.07.2023).

⁷⁸ https://www.Protestankiliseler.org/?page_id=693 (18.04.2024).

only shows the current level of civilization in Izmir but also adds a different color to the city. As a result, Izmir will continue to host everyone with tolerance as one of our cities that possesses a unique motif from the past to the present.

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