ESSAYS

The Influence of Religion on the Creation of National Identity in Serbia

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Abstract. This paper analyzes new religious values on the territory of Serbia and the creation of cultural-national model. During the nineties in Serbia the return to religion had been most popular. National homogenization due to the dissolution of the old state and creation of individual states with specific national characteristics was awakening. This phenomenon was caused by the need to establish some new and revive old values in the domain of culture, tradition and religion. Serbian Orthodox Church intimacy retreats before the rush of false believers who shift the stage of public squares into church and monasteries. Radical nationalism created a specific form of symbols and behavior. The identity of the entire nation is reduced to the dimension which equals national and religious affiliations. In this way, a desire to keep cultural, national and religious specificity turns into the fear of the deadly disease of Western culture. The paper analyzes the data of the research conducted on: the public expression of citizens' religious affiliation, the influence of religion on the creation of national identity, the instrumentalization of religion by politicians and the use and misuse of religious symbols. In addition thanks to the research we can determine the effect of creating resistance or acceptance new values that are a necessary condition for positive change and joining the European Union. In addition, the impact of politics on the creation of national identity through the Orthodox religion, which creates a new form of ideology, can be determined.

Keywords: *national identity, religion, post-communism, Serbia, Europe.*

Introduction

Serbia's modern society resembles a big pot seasoned with various cultures, religions and social values. Deep inner conflicts noticed in the inability of a Serb to define himself in relation to a community and a wider environment, result from casting aside old communist regime and the need for new values and restoring religion and tradition.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia entailed numerous changes in the society, which had various effects on Serbian nation. Separation of the republics and their transformation into states was accomplished in very belligerent and bloody circumstances In that quite aggressive period, everybody forgot the slogan – Brotherhood and unity – which, indeed, reflected the fact that ex-Yugoslavia had represented multicultural and multilingual environment where individuals and groups had lived and functioned together respecting the rights of others.

The disintegration of the old state into six new states which used to be six ex-republics within ex-Yugoslavia and hostility aroused by politicians among different cultures of once-the-same nation were the reason why every nation needed to establish its own origin, religion and culture. Hence a need to fortify and testify to the tradition of every separated nation. Former cultural pluralism retreated from the newly independent, strengthened republics which wanted their own ethnic-national identity and their own values and symbols. However, the new states, created as a product of the breakup of the multinational communist federations, in the midst of separation and war conflicts, were creating their own cultural identities by negating or discarding the identities of the others. Opposite to Christianity and the second God's commandment – Love your neighbor as yourself (Mc. 12.31) – new ideological movements headed most often in different directions. In addition, negating and underestimating somebody else's cultural identity was at the same time the main driving power behind political conflicts. Thus originated an attitude about cultural exclusivity of one's own group, often at the expense of other groups from the neighborhood[1]. So an individual within a newly created state, now in transition, with regions of ethnically mixed population, is trying to find his own identification code. As in all the ex-republics, after the period of communism, in Serbia as well the same models of establishing national, religious and cultural identity are emerging. In today's Serbia that identification code is based on religion as the essence of a national being, and it has been extremely encouraged and expressed through public communication. Thus, Orthodox religion mixed with a strong feeling of nationalism appears in Serbia as a response to the crisis of identity caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

This paper focuses on the research of public expression of citizens' religious affiliations from the1980's till today, the influence of religion on the creation of

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1 This fear is felt today among minorities that are trying to protect and preserve their own culture.

national identity, the increase of religiosity and ritual activities, intrumentalization of religion by politicians, use and misuse of religious symbols. Also, the paper analyzes several significant social and cultural trends in building the national identity in Serbia, critically analyzing positive and negative aspects, as well as the possibilities for establishing the old and developing new values in the interface with new cultures. Post-communism as a specific state of a nation is rooted in former times, still it can be interpreted as a transitional state, transition. Yet, in order to foresee to a certain extent its denouement, it is necessary to identify some elements of the old regime, its misuses and impacts on the territory of Serbia in the last twenty years.

1. The process of establishing religious nationalism and a social change

Religious nationalism is not a new and rare occurrence, nor can it be connected only with the states of post-communism. It appears in all nations which go through one phase of its existence into another, experiencing an enormous change. "Therefore, democratic constitution of people in a form of a nation has inevitably resulted in the systems of exclusion: it is a division into "minorities" and, even more profoundly, into populations that are considered indigenous and those that are considered foreign, heterogeneous, racially and culturally stigmatized"[2].

The political crisis in Serbia, which began in the 1980s and culminated in the 1990s into a bloody conflict and breaking away of the republics to form independent states, has caused the dissolution of the old state. At that time (the end of the '80s and beginning of the '90s) still on the territory of Yugoslavia, changes in the religiosity of people were gradually getting bigger. Serbia and Montenegro, which used to be extremely secular, were slowly transforming, and sociologists noticed the same influence within Serbian minorities in dominantly Catholic and Islamic environments. [3]

Sudden expression of religiosity which was growing during years was not only merely a form, but deeply tied with the awakening of national consciousness

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2 Etienne, Balibar. *We, the People of Europe.* ed. Mimica Aljosha (Belgrade: Cigoja, 2003), 36.
3 This observation is based on the results of the research conducted in 1989 by Institute of Social Sciences and Center for Political Research in Belgrade as well as the results of the research from 1989-1990 conducted by the Consortium of Yugoslav Institutes of Social Sciences on the sample of seven ex-Yugoslav republics and provinces in Mirko, Blagojevic' "The Religious Situation in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the late '80s to the Beginning". *Theme III*. (Nis: University of Nis, 2003), 412-414.
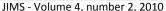
in the period of the dissolution of the old state. Increasing religiosity did not remain only in the intellectual sphere, but it also introduced ritual domain to individuals and the whole society. Although there used to be certain ritual elements in communism, regarding public demonstration (carrying Tito's photo, relay youth, Tito's photo in public buildings) the new form of ritual activity is entirely connected with religion and nationalism, paradoxically supported by the state itself in order to accomplish its political needs. This has led to the situation where religiosity within newly built national identity is closely related to broader social, typically unreligious, ideological processes.

At the time of territorial disintegration of the old state and collapse of the socialistic social system, the individual national states were created, characterized by national homogenization which was based on religious affiliation. These tendencies to create ones' own national states on the territory of until-then united state found the pillar in religion, and they were established through the instrumentalization of religion, in the form of radical nationalism. Thus, religion has been transformed into ideology and has remained being misused by politicians for several decades. In those social turmoils, now already belonging to the near historical past, the year of 1990 is considered to be a breaking point. During the war, religiosity was getting stronger and it dominated as a set and continuum of features which define a certain group, community or society in relation to everything else. Newly formed groups with awaken patriarchal feeling behave according to the principle of tribal defense of the territory. In accordance with the general rules within the group, an individual is expected to homogenize into the group unity, as well as to be aware of common national, cultural and historical being. In addition, a new idea of conciliarity appears, and in its distorted form it refers to united Serbs, with awaken core values, fighting for the same goal.

However, these changes did not occur from villages towards towns, but towns as big centers of political and media power in Serbia contributed to the awakening of the tradition and religion. According to Pantic' research[4] at the beginning of the '90s desecularization occurred in two ways: 1. unreligious people were resocialized or once religious people (especially older people) returned to the same position, and 2. the young were socialized by adopting religious values, not going through the process of atheistic upbringing conducted by the state. Yet, the

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4 Mirko, Blagojevic. "The Religious Situation in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the late '80s to the Beginning". *Theme III*. (Nis: University of Nis, 2003), 417.

sociologists' insight[5] is just partial, because a complete research demands content analysis of different documents containing the phenomenon of religion (books, pictures, magazines, applications), interviews with the clergy as well as the analyses of secular literature about religious phenomenon. Therefore, from all the mentioned viewpoints just parts of different statements are deduced, as well as sectional views which take critical (positive or negative) stand towards religious phenomenon in Serbia in the last twenty years.

2. Continuum of ritualistic elements, their impact and feedback reaction

Almost for four decades the Serbian Orthodox Church had existed on the margins of social events. This position of the Church was imposed by the former, communist government which, in Serbia, worshipped the cult of the president, raised to the level of a deity. Like in ancient cultures where a ruler was a half-god and intermediary in front of the supreme being on behalf of the whole people, not that long ago, on the territory of Serbia (ex-Yugoslavia) there was the same phenomenon. Quick and easy acceptance of Orthodox Christianity by former communists is the result of the previous regime. Although religion had been strictly prohibited and undesirable, numerous ritual religious features had been applied even in the time of communism. Communist regime introduced a new cult which had identical religious features. Also, affiliation elements, most often in red color, were quite obvious on the members of the group (pioneer red scarf, red book party, red five-pointed star on caps). These elements of belonging were replaced with less snazzy symbols (cross, icon and bead**)**.

Processions with the portrait of the president on the streets of postwar Belgrade in 1948 clearly show similarities with religious rituals. The photos of the president Josip Broz Tito had a propaganda influence on people. Icons, which used to be in Serbian homes until the arrival of communists in power, were strictly banned, while a new order was to keep the president's photo. Its basic function was supported by symbolism and allegory which depersonalized a real person and set a desirable model of conduct. St. Sava's icon, the biggest Serbian educator, which used to be in every school, was also replaced with the photo of the

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5 Comprehensive research named "Changes in everyday life in Serbia during the nineties" conducted in 1999 at Institute for Social Research of Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. The sample included 1201 respondents, and a segment of the research related to religious-church complex was analyzed and published by Dragana, Radosavljevic Ciparizanovic, *Religion and daily life* (Belgrade: Institute for Social Research, Faculty of Philosophy, 2001).

president. The cult of the president was very pronounced and supported by the ideology of the ruling regime, and it also enabled authorities to control individuals.

Although religion was strictly prohibited in that period and considered to be an expression of primitive mind, some fundamental external features of religion were still practiced in the same way. There were also snapshots from the president's life (bearing likeness to a menology of saints' icons) printed as calendars etc. Having rid itself of the old communist regime, Serbia has never had again as powerful leader as the president Josip Broz Tito.

Conflicts on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia and its breakup have added to the feeling of disorientation among people. During the period of the deepest moral, financial and ideological inner conflict, a need for religion and restoring tradition was emerging. The president's photo is not an integral part of the environment (either public or private) anymore and an individual is driven by his spiritual and traditional urges. "With a strong media support, in Serbia, that wave soon turned into total fascination of the society with the pursuit of its roots, forgotten customs and the real symbols of identity"[6].

Thus, a new phenomenon emerges and it could be called epic nationalism. Consciousness about national origin, state and church unity and spiritual strength of Serbian people was awakened patterned on the Serbia in the Middle Ages. A personality cult was transferred into the sphere of a cult place – Kosovo as the center of the spirituality of Serbian people. A personality cult as a wide accepted role model of behavior retrieved before the power of the ingle cult. So the result was bonding to the geographical area as a traditional and religious center and the need to protect it from any enemy. An imaginary enemy, embodied in a person at the time of communism, hidden enemy of the regime was now an enemy of ingle (in accordance with the need to defend the home country).

During the'90s some elements of public presentation were mixed in the process of uniting religious and national: cross and sajkaca (national hat), church and kingdom (state). That metonymic element promoted in public media was strengthening the national consciousness of the people but it was also used by numerous foreign media to represent Serbs as barbarians and bloodthirsty animals. While Serbia was swept by a wave of epic nationalism and the pursuit of spiritual

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6 Miroslava, Malesevic. "Christian Orthodox Religion Affiliation as a Core of National Being in Post-Communist Serbia". *Collection of Papers of the Ethnographic Institute, Volume XXII, "Everyday Culture in Post-Socialist Period"*, (Belgrade: Ethnographic Institute of the SASA (Serbian Academy of Science and Arts), 2006), 100.

roots, which were mixed and took the most weird forms, the world was in "anti-Serbian hysteria which had been exploited since 1992 by the demands for bombing Belgrade and military intervention with humanistic and moral justification"[7]. Ironically, perhaps, in accord with religious needs of the Serbs, NATO bombing in 1999 responded with an ironic name Merciful Angel.

According to Brdar, propaganda discourse, in this case anti-Serbian, works on two levels: propositive level of the discourse *describes* the world, while its pragmatic or performance level *prescribes* how to see the world, totally opposite to the way it has been presented. So for example, propositively Serbs are described as Nazis and pragmatically they are made "new Jews" prepared for exodus and extermination; it describes them as tyrants, and on the other hand it makes them victims of power technology. It presents them as a threat to the civilization and keeps them under the threat of genocide. Therefore, it is clear why the bombing in the spring of 1999 could have been done without any serious protests. [8] Serbs' greatest fear, attack on their territory, actually happened with the bombing of Serbia in 1999.

However, simultaneously, there was within Serbia, ready to defend itself from a real and imaginary enemy, anti-European and anti-American propaganda discourse. This discourse was based for many years on ethnocentrism and fear of external enemy, of neighbors, in narrow and wide territorial sense, until recently when Serbia with more and more powerful intellectual elite in public sphere has started to open itself towards the European Union. However, in spite of the efforts of contemporary Serbian politicians to change Serbian picture in the world and show interest for cooperation, the attitude of Orthodox clergy to external influence is quite wobbly. [9]

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7 Milan. Brdar. "Logics of Western Media as Logics of Power: From Case Study of Serbian Guilt to the Paradigm of Constant Enemy". *Annual of Faculty of Culture and Media, I* (Belgrade: Faculty of Culture and Media, 2009), 157.
8 Milan. Brdar. "Logics of Western Media as Logics of Power: From Case Study of Serbian Guilt to the Paradigm of Constant Enemy". *Annual of Faculty of Culture and Media* 1 (Belgrade: Faculty of Culture and Media, 2009), 166.
9 In the text "Orthodoxy and Contemporary Challenges", bishop Artemije calls contemporary challenges such as indifferentism, ecumenism and globalism fruitless dialogues and a social disease of contemporary era.
Bishop Artemije, "Orthodoxy and Contemporary Challenges", segment of lesson, February 24, 2009, on Technical Faculty in Kosovska Mitrovica, in Svetosavlje Digital Library, http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/izazovi/SavremeniizazoviEpiskopArtemije.htm (accessed March 29, 2009).

3. Expressing religiosity

Trying to explain growth of religiosity among Serbs Blagojevic[10] gives three main points which have impact on broader changes in society: restoration of religious identification, behavior and belief. Confessional (recognized) identification is the most often used indicator of religiosity in the research of religiosity and connection with religion and the Church. Also, it is one of the most important indicators of traditional bondage to religion and the Church, but of a wider social-historical context as well where traditional religion and the Church had a significant place and influence on individuals, groups and society as a whole. Thus a process of social life desecularization encompasses both the sphere of everyday life of people and public sphere, i.e. political life and state. So deprivatization of religious life in all social spheres becomes the most important factor of religious changes in the post-socialism in Serbia. In people's behavior this religious deprivatization is reflected as a readiness of an individual to express publicly his relation with religion and church.

With a comparative analysis from three important time periods, Blagojevic determines the relations of public expression of religiosity in the period between 1982 and 1999 and obtains some data that according to the research of Djordjevic (1982) 23,8% of the population declared as religious, according to Blagojevic (1993) 71,3%, and according to Radosavljevic-Ciparizanovic (1999) 59,3%. However, measuring religiosity after 1999 and under the influence of new problems in the state (especially after the bombing of Serbia) confirms that the percentage did not fall but stabilized on a very high level, even 60%[11] of the population, including not just less educated people like before, but also a better educated stratum. Religious expression did not have a direction and deeper cognitive dimension in the first decade of its growth, but as time passed it became purified and shaped in religious sense.

The events in Serbia, especially in the period since 1999, have led to the fact that Orthodox affiliation has become a key determinant of Serbian identity. Yet, no research done can precisely determine the degree of religiosity of the society because individuals have different views on religiosity, regarding the fulfillment of religious duties (for instance going to church on Sundays or once a

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10 Mirko, Blagojevic. "The Religious Situation in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the late '80s to the Beginning". *Theme III*, (Nis: University of Nis, 2003), 419-422.
11 Dragana, Radosavljevic Ciparizanovic, *Religion and daily life* (Belgrade: Institute for Social Research, Faculty of Philosophy, 2001), 102.

month). However, within this newly formed religious/national identity, three different directions of expressing religiosity can be roughly identified: 1. postmodernism religiosity, 2. fanatic religiosity and 3. believers/atheists.

1. *Postmodernism religiosity* appears as a private matter of people, as a kind of belief which does not have to be in accordance with institutionalized comprehension of religion. With this type of religiosity conventional religious behavior lags behind public expression of religiosity, so quite a small percentage, especially the young, goes to church, except on important church holidays, and many do not go even then. Thus an idea of religiosity in Orthodox sense expands outside institutionalized boundaries and turns into a kind of blend of different religions and personal understanding of God. Still, this kind of religiosity can easily turn into indifferentism which basically reflects and shows lack of will to distinguish some notions in terms of religion and moral. Postmodernism religiosity is mostly evident with educated, young people from cities.

2. Fanatic religiosity is directly connected with radical nationalism. This kind of religiosity has very little to do with the essence of Orthodox Christianity and it is expressed through excessive conventional forms (women wear scarves, men wear very big crosses as personal adornment) and aggressive behavior (verbal or physical). It can be described as exaggerating one element (an unimportant thing) at the expense of the whole. So within Serbian society several organizations were formed expressing radical nationalism and religious fanatism which essentially have nothing in common with Orthodox religion. On the pretext of false Orthodoxy the representatives of this group in the most aggressive way show animosity toward national minorities, religious differences and all kinds of social differences in general. The most famous movements of the type in Serbia are the organizations *Obraz (Face), Rasionalist (Rational racist) and Dveri srpske (Serbian doors),* which publicly declare themselves to be political but not party. [12]

Religious fanatism enables potentially unsatisfied and lonely people to satisfy their instincts for group-belonging, expressing aggression and animosity toward the external. In addition, a number of stereotypes occur which shape

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[12] On the official site of Obraz there is the following text as a part of the proclamation *Who are We*: "We are political organization because we think politically and act publicly, as we think and believe that only with joint, national efforts we can overcome all the problems and difficulties befallen on us as a nation. Therefore, we see our role models in pious and honest Serbian men and women, our ancestors and contemporaries, who knew that *politics was holy and horrible service to people and state* and treated it like that." http://www.obraz.org.rs, (accessed June 15, 2009).

instinctive behavior and are demonstrated as ethnocentrism and sociocentrism. Serbian ethnocentrism has appeared through a strong feeling of belonging to the ethnic group and territory with profoundly hostile attitude to everything outside the group and fear of changes. On the other hand, Serbian sociocentrism is manifested through excessive (fanatic) attachment to the group and the feeling of addiction which are so strong that they are repressing personal wishes and needs. On the idea of sociocentrism collective ideologies were built which treat a society or collective as a superior category to individuality. So in Serbia the myth about Kosovo battle and Serbs as heavenly people was developed. It is also a paradoxical situation because Serbs lost in Kosovo battle to Turks in 1389. According to the legend, this loss was justified by the fact that Tsar Lazar swapped material kingdom for heavenly kingdom that is for Heavenly Jerusalem.

While the old country was breaking up, the state administration, especially via media, kindled religious fanatism and radical nationalism. Ex-president of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic started his political campaign on Kosovo, entering the myth zone and collecting political points. Soon other Serbian politicians were following in his footsteps, and the same model was used by the politicians of most other ex-Yugoslav republics. So called folk, showbiz musicians had an important role in the promotion of radical nationalism and religious fanatism, because they composed patriotic songs and rock musicians who tried to make remake and contemporary versions of Byzantine chanting.

3. As a third direction there are two, though quite smaller groups, which are two extremes. They include individuals who are either atheists or profound Orthodox believers. Members of these two groups rarely publicly declare their religious affiliations. Although it seems paradoxical these two extreme groups, that have distinctive individuality and build their personal inner worlds, are quite often oriented toward spiritual and intellectual improvement and act in the interest of society. Orthodox believers in accordance with Christian doctrine do not judge other people and are ready to accept changes and everything that comes from people, and atheists *mind their own business*. Anyhow, in this third group there are people with strong, personal opinions and they are often lonely. There are often artists, writers and philosophers/theologians.

Sudden, public religiosity is expressed in most different ways. Priests, who for decades had been undervalued, have become the most desirable company of many eminent public persons, but also of ordinary people. Thus, an important

concession and positive change toward the Serbian Orthodox Church was the decree from 2001 which returned religious education in state schools in Serbia. Many books were published with an aim to explain and make more understandable Orthodox Christian religion to Serbian people. The contents of these books are targeted to various social strata. So, besides philosophical, theological and scientific texts there were numerous books for mass market with an aim to educate but also with very strange purposes. Something like high and popular culture was formed within the religion. In Trebnik (a book by the Serbian Orthodox Church) from 1998, apart from many instructions for performing rituals there is *Ritual for Vehicles Consecration* saying: "Our Lord God who seat on Seraphim; you have given your wisdom to man and with your good thought you direct everything toward good; send your blessing to this vehicle and appoint your angel to protect and lead all those who travel by it…"[13].This ritual would not be so unusual if it did not mention an angel as a vehicle protector, i.e. an angel who should protect an object. Also, the same book includes *Ritual for Consecration of Every Thing* which indicates that it is absolutely possible to consecrate everything that surrounds a man, and thus to clean an object, used for some evil deed, of sin. It can be concluded that new Serbian religiosity is mostly conditional and not a true expression of religiosity and Christianity.

3.1. Icons – holly pictures

In the search of its identifying, national code, an individual wished to have something personal inside the group. Thus, it resulted in the restoration of old Serbian "forbidden" customs, including Serbian creation of celebrating a certain family patron saint, known as celebration of feast (slava). However, the main problem of Serbs came from not knowing original customs and ritual elements. Thus in order to satisfy people and their original customs, the response was semi-true, semi-invented versions of the customs, which came to villages from towns. This reversed process did not trouble anybody, because people through media learned about their partly real and partly invented and adopted national history.

The custom of celebrating the family patron saint considerably increased the demand for icons - saint pictures. In that way the identity of an individual is profoundly connected with personal religious origin and tradition. Among ordinary

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13 Emilian M. Carnish. *Requisition*. (Kragujevac: Serbian Orthodox Metropoly Kalenic, 1998), 421.

people, the restoration of religion can be most clearly seen in the demand for religious pictures. Even Vasa Pelagic in the 19th century tried to calculate the annual costs imposed by the state and Church. He says: "The intention of this script and writer is to alert people to be more careful and aware and at least from now on to know decently and respect his majesty of human brain and rights, instead of the previous and current respect of their majesties God and Lord (…). People do not still realize how difficult, how sad and deadly is the pressure of these idols"[14]. To these objections, that used to appear before as well, the Church responded that a believer did not worship an object, but the prototype of Christ's face. [15]

Yet, an icon becomes a national symbol with a decorative purpose and function. The centuries of the battle of the Church against Iconoclasm and the final victory of Orthodoxy in the 9th century seem erased by the invasion of contemporary Serbian consumers. An icon has been devaluated and turned into home craft. An icon has become a decorative element for all sorts of occasions, from icon of Patron Saint feast to key pendants and tags for alcoholic drinks. As a piece of consumer goods for showing off, an icon has become a prestigious object and status symbol of financial power. In addition, popularity of an icon among ordinary people has degraded it into copyistic art and contemporary artists look at it contemptuously. As a response to the overall state of church art, the Serbian Orthodox Church opened Academy for Conservation and Restoration in 1993. Numerous icon-painting colonies were organized and studies about icon painting were published with an aim to educate in the field of icon painting and preserve icon's holy nature and its essence.

If we agree with the fact that cultural heritage of one nation is the best testimony of its cultural, religious and social development, then art, especially religious art is a quite fragile and valuable discipline which demands cherishing, supervision and directing. In order to avert a possibility to have an icon turned into fetish or consumer goods it is necessary to stimulate religiosity among artists and respect and understanding of all other official religions that are fundamentals of every nation and its moral values. In that way the boundaries of cultural space

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14 Pelagic, Vasa, "How much is our God and Lord" in *Elected Proceeding*. ed. Vojislav Maksimovic (Sarajevo: Light, 1990), 49.

15 As the day of victory over Iconoclasm in the 9th century Orthodox Christian Church chose a feast called Sunday of Orthodoxy which is still celebrated today. More detailed in Vladimir Lossky, Leonid Ouspensky. *The Meaning of Icons*. ed. Violeta Cvetkovska Ocokoljic, Jugoslav Ocokoljic (Belgrade: Jasen, 2008), 31.

would not be limited on Serbian spiritual space, ethical-territory-bound, but they would expand and interweave with all the other religions and cultures.

Some contemporary theoreticians do not criticize a lot the expression of religiosity through icons in public places (town halls, offices) as much as the lack of religious features of other religions in Serbia.

3.2. Patrons of churches

In the Middle-Ages Serbia it was customary for rulers to build endowments. Every ruler built at least one church or monastery and some rulers built a lot of monasteries (like King Milutin, son of Uros the First). Although in the 12th and 13th centuries only the members of the Court were allowed to build endowments, from the end of the 13th century this custom was applied to enriched noblemen, and bishops, monks and priests. Monasteries which contributed to spreading and consolidating religion among people were also important political centers. Built on significant roads, they provided the only shelter for many passengers who exchanged opinions and news from the world when they were there. Thus, monks got informed about religious and political events in the country and outside. The teaching of giving as well as the faith in the redemption for sins added to the development of numerous endowments on the territory of the Middle-Ages Serbia. The saint whom the temple was devoted became the patron's representative in front of Christ on the Judgment day. [16]

This idea is even today the main driving power of contemporary Serbian patrons. Due to the financial crisis in the state and wars some individuals who gained wealth rapidly felt a need to present themselves in the public as the patrons of the Church and its humble subjects. Church building which is steeply growing is in direct connection with the increase of the number of believers who go to church. Churches become places where some come to be noticed and providing financial support for church building becomes a matter of prestige. "That sudden rush of people in churches was usually interpreted as spiritual awakening after the time of communist repression and persecution of the Church and believers"[17].

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16 For a long time a wrong opinion was prevailing that the Middle-Ages monasteries were built in reclusive and lonely places. Vojislav, Djuric. *Sopocani*. (Belgrade: Republic College for Protection of Cultural Monument 1990), 54.

17 Miroslava, Malesevic. "Tradition in Transition: In a Search for New, "More Ancient and More Beautiful" Identity". *Collection of Papers of the Ethnographic Institute, Volume XXI,*

3.3. Politicians and public-coded expression of religiosity

Since the coup which took place in October 2000, the new secular government in Serbia has become extremely fond of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Still, politicians exploit religion for achieving personal goals, while they should contribute to establishing religious and moral values. More and more often politicians are seen in the company of high church dignitaries and in church for some holidays, as well as in various religious congregations. These events are covered by media as well. However, some members of the clergy do not think favorably about increased usage of television as desirable media. Archbishop Vitalije[18] in the article *Television as a problem of contemporary pastoring* states that there is a good side of television because it has contributed to the return to domestic ingle, he says that the devil itself has cunningly clouded our mind so that we for our own money, hard earned, buy television sets and we bring perversity, vice, crimes and madness into our homes, by ourselves.

In favor of negative propaganda which kindles aggression and fears of everything coming form the outside, is the article "Defeatists consistency", of Milorad Vucelic, ex-director of Serbian Public Television Service (during the NATO bombing of the television building where several employees were killed): "Serbia, today, does not simply defend its state territory, tradition, the Church and religion, history, it does not defend its holy places, memory of Obilic, Karadjordje and anti-fascist battle, honor, manliness and heroism, its lifestyle. It does not defend its springs, waters, agriculture, production, its script and culture, and any national characteristic. Serbia does not defend health of its nation either. Serbia does not defend itself from a crisis, it just implements the recipes for its destruction coming from paramilitary organizations such as IMF"[19]. This paranoid statement certainly does not go in favor of strengthening the self-consciousness of Serbs as a nation and their friendly relationships with neighbors and their cultures. If such a statement once served for consolidating the militancy of Serbian spirit and resisting "enemy", today it carries just a sour taste of hatred and deeper separation of people. In spite of the obvious efforts of Serbian democratic government to

"Ethnology and Anthropology: Contemporary Standings and Perspectives" (Belgrade: Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, 2005), 104.
18 Metropolite Vitalie, *Television as a problem of contemporary pastoring,* http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/Porodica/Televizija.html (accessed June 10, 2009).
19 Milorad, Vucelic, „Defeatists consistency", *The Seal 58,* April 9, 2009, available on http://pecatmagazin.com/2009/04/09/doslednost-kapitulanata (accessed June 15, 2009).

improve economic and other living conditions, he asserts that "today's potentate Serbia confirms and proves its iron consistency to give up everything that is its own, to surrender without resistance and in advance in front of everybody without a sign of combat – to capitulate disgracefully. And quietly fall"[20].

The Church is not just a place where individuals prey for themselves, for the living and the dead, but it is becoming a place of public gatherings where individuals come to be seen and noticed. That trend was supported by high political representatives. "Such conduct of public officials (burning candles, crossing themselves, kissing icons) which has not been seen here for the last fifty years, was a message to the public that the new government was breaking up with the communist, atheist and national past for good at last"[21]. Since the Middle Ages identifying state officials with saints, even the Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ was not seldom in both literature and paintings. Domentian says in *Praise to Simeon and Sava* that "both (were) the sources of God's grace**,** which quenched the thirst of their sons with God's teaching"[22]. Repeating the same historical model, epic nationalism of Serbian politicians was identified with the educational mission of Saint Sava. In addition, more often usage cleric terminology was noticeable in political speeches as well as linking events to the Church Orthodox Calendar. Presidential candidates more and more often start their campaigns on a big Orthodox holiday (most frequently Djurdjevdan – St. George Day). So something like this can be heard quite often: "Two leading democratic parties, Democratic Party and Democratic Party of Serbia celebrate the party's slava (Saint's day of Saint George) Djurdjevdan"[23] or "Instead of becoming hajduk (Serbian fighters for freedom)**,** Djurdjevdan has become autonomist meeting"[24].

Trying to determine clearly cultural space many theoreticians endeavored to lay foundation in language (speech) as the basic unit of symbolic culture. Cultural

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20 Ibid.

21 Miroslava, Malesevic. "Tradition in Transition: In a Search for New, "More Ancient and More Beautiful" Identity". *Collection of Papers of the Ethnographic Institute, Volume XXI, "Ethnology and Anthropology: Contemporary Standings and Perspectives"* (Belgrade: Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, 2005), 105.

22 Domentian, "Biography of Saint Simeon and Sava", ed. Dimitrie, Bogdanovic, *Old Serbian Biography*. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1963), 47.

23 *Messenger*, http://www.kurir-info.rs/Arhiva/2007/maj/06/V-03-06052007.shtml (accessed June 10, 2009).

24 *Messenger*, http://www.kurir-info.rs/http://www.kurir-info.rs/Arhiva/2007/maj/07/V-03-06052007.shtml. The namesake magazine was set up on Djurdjevdan in 2003 http://www.kurir-info.rs/vesti/20080506 (accessed June 10, 2009).

unit (*cultunit*)[25] as a group of people who colloquially use common language, distinctive from other languages and belong to the same state or contact group is the substantive basis of cultural integration. The idea is not a new one and creating Old Slavic language in the 9th century can be taken as a parallel. That need was based on the conviction that the language used as a means for Christian service to God became sacred and the people who can speak that language are raised to the status of the people dedicated to serve God. [26]

The Serbian Orthodox Church intimacy retreats before the rush of false believers who shift the stage of public squares into church and monasteries. So, more often politicians take the role of priests, giving sermons similar to priests'. „Such models of self-presentation which members of the political and social elite – as role-models – promote through their behavior, are spread via media on all the levels of the society and become a rule, custom, indispensable determinant of personal and collective identity"[27]. However, Bishop Ilarion Alfejev says that God should inspired theology and that it should not be a man's word but the word of the Holy Spirit spoken by human lips: „A real Christian is the one who can keep silent until the Holy Spirit touches the strings of his soul. Real theology occurs only when a human word falls silent and the word of the Holy Spirit bursts from the soul. From that moment, „a word admirer" turns into „wisdom admirer", rhetorician – into theologian"[28].
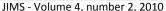
Still, deeper instrumentalization of religion and culture can be observed in the language and speech. Thus, it can be determined what a viewpoint a speaker takes when he evaluates and perceives the world he describes. In the article *Dog-Whistle Politics, Coded Communication and Religious Appeals*, Bethany Albertson talks about coded communication based on religion and especially racism in the USA. Since racism is not publicly acceptable he analyzes racist appeals in coded expressions which remain within the boundaries of politically acceptable discourse.

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25 Antonjina, Klosovska, *Sociology of Culture*. (Belgrade: Cigoja, 2001), 55.
26 Dimitrie, Obolenski, *The Six Byzantine Portraits*. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1991), 24.
27 Miroslava, Malesevic. "Tradition in Transition: In a Search for New, "More Ancient and More Beautiful" Identity". *Collection of Papers of the Ethnographic Institute, Volume XXI, "Ethnology and Anthropology: Contemporary Standings and Perspectives"* (Belgrade: Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, 2005), 114.
28 Alfejev, Ilarion, "Theological Literacy in 21. Century", segment of lesson, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. ed. Ljubomir Kostic, in Svetosavlje Digital Library, http://www.svetosavlje.org/bilbioteka/Teologija/AlfejevTeologija.htm (accessed June 20, 2009).

He defines coded communication as a language with special meanings for a demographic subgroup, from the viewpoint of listeners and not speakers. Stating a number of examples of using religious terms in politicians' speeches (Bush, Clinton) he says that in the USA there is no law against the usage of religious language in politics. Also, he says that religious language does not have to be always misused or persuasive. However, due to the fact that in the USA there is religious variety, coded religious (or some other kind of) language enables politicians to communicate directly to the like-minded. Also it meets all sorts of needs: a need for belonging and a need for differentiation.[29]

In that way a coded racist speech is conducted, within the boundaries of general acceptability, it communicates to the target group. As a religious speech always has a certain extent of epic and lyric, when it is not recognized, it will always stronger affect all its listeners subconsciously.

4. The meaning of Orthodox Religion and contemporary society

New cultural-national phenomenon, established on the ideological matrix, was in the service of the state in its first stages. Reviving past, cherishing Serbian Orthodox tradition, language and cultural heritage, which in the beginning, was strongly supported by media, triggered desirable (aggressive/protective) demeanor, as the time was passing it turned into scientific battlefield. Today this battlefield is still a place where Serbian sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and theologians wage a war for and against religion and its instrumentalization. Although the influence of Orthodox religion on creating national identity cannot be denied, there are numerous discussions about whether its effects are positive or not, at the moment and in the long run. In the context of the turbulent and unstable state of the whole society turning to religion has a much deeper meaning. This process has a wider social-historical context where traditional religion and the Church used to have powerful impact on an individual and society as the whole. This direct connection between religion and the awakening of national consciousness tells about establishing the forgotten relations with tradition, cultural origin and religious features of the ancestors.

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29 Bethany, Albertson, "Dog-Whistle Politics, Coded Communication and Religious Appeals", Princeton: *Center for the Study in Democratic Politics*, *University of Chicago & CSDP, Princeton University*. http://www.princeton.edu/csdp/events/Albertson053106 (accessed June 3, 2009), 3-7.

Church role in human society finds its justification in the texts of *the Bible*. It refers to the unity between the celestial and terrestrial church in the body of Christ. Believers in church, where they grow learning about God (Col. 1.10), become in communion with Christ, in the community of the Church, which is composed of angels, saints. Also, the Church has a more profound meaning than just one of a pedagogic Christian role. Through the Church as a community where religious ritual practice is performed, religious believes are spread as essential points of the dogmatic core of institutionalized religion.

In the text *Orthodoxy and contemporary challenges*, bishop Artemije[30] says that all the problems oppressing and torturing Serbian people are at the same time the problems of Serbian Orthodox Church. He has noticed that the consequences of the long reign of communism and wars are reflected in the segments of people's lives, that is, on biological, economic, mental and spiritual level. Thus a fall in birthrate, with the economic crisis and poverty, estrangement from God and atheism and psychological weakness and neurosis have completely debilitated Serbian nation. However, according to him, a much bigger danger lies in the Church. He mentions a fad among certain clergymen from the bottom to the top of Church hierarchy to follow secular trends in all the issues. He criticizes them for forgetting often canon principles and rules, left by Holy Fathers as a measure of life and behavior.
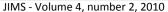
Bishop Artemije says that the evil of indifferentism appears as a disease which first infects the highest classes of a society and like an epidemics and craze it spreads on the masses, today more easily thanks to mass media. Blaming the evil of ecumenism, that "unites plenty of heresy under the common Christian roof" for hatching the idea of globalism, he talks about the new Western ideology, trying to impose itself on the whole world. "Regardless of the nation they come from, the faith and religion they belong to, supporters of globalism have a task to relativize, and then satanize their past: their ancestors, national and religious affiliation, grandees, ideals, theirs, and not foreign"[31].

However, there are numerous concessions which in a strange way try to

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30 Bishop Artemije, "Orthodoxy and Contemporary Challenges", segment of lesson, February 24, 2009, on Technical Faculty in Kosovska Mitrovica, in Svetosavlje Digital Library,
http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/izazovi/SavremeniizazoviEpiskopArtemije.htm (accessed March 29, 2009).
31 Ibid.

follow "positive" changes in the world. So Alfejev mentions one (out of many examples of) adjustment of liturgical texts according to the contemporary norms: "Relatively recently the Roman Catholic Church has decided to remove all the so-called 'anti-Semitic' texts from the service on Good Friday. Several members of the Orthodox Church have initiated talks about the revision of Orthodox services in order to make them more adjusted to the contemporary standards of political correctness (…) Modern rules of 'political correctness' require different interpretation in order to adjust not only church services, but Christian faith to modern trends"[32].

If in the first years the Church did not pay much attention to the intrumentalization by the state for political purposes, today the Church more and more criticizes those kinds of behavior and values that are opposite to Christian doctrine. Still, it can be seen from many theological texts that there are debates within the Church itself and development of different movements which inhibit unification of the Church and forming one common attitude to the external environment.

On the other hand, the Church attitudes to religious nationalism are also wobbly and divided. Alexander Shmeman (2007) in the text *Greek religious nationalism*[33] talks about nationalization occurring inside every individual Orthodox Church and the existence of "Russianism", "Hellenism" and "Serbism". Taking Greece as an example he states that one of the targets of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to stop individual churches to identify with nationalism is paradoxical because he is for the Greeks a representative and symbol of their nationalism. "Ecumenical precedence becomes Greek precedence (…) For the Greeks, who have gradually become victims of identifying "Byzantine" with "Greek", with national and even ethnic role of Byzantineism, every endeavor at establishing political and ecclesiastical independence outside the Empire by Slavs, or Arabs, Romanians – meant almost automatic danger for "Hellenism", an attempt to destroy the Greeks and their precedence within Orthodoxy"[34].

32 Alfejev, Ilarion, "Theological Literacy in 21. Century", segment of lesson, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. ed. Ljubomir Kostic, in Svetosavlje Digital Library, http://www.svetosavlje.org/bilbioteka/Teologija/AlfejevTeologija.htm (accessed June 20, 2009).
33 Shmeman, Alexander, "A Meaningful Storm", ed. Amfilohie Radovic, *Theological Review IV*, Belgrade: Archiepiscopal of Belgrade-Carlovac, 2007. http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/Izazovi/Smeman.html. (accessed march 10, 2009).
34 Ibid.

Conclusion: the state and Church today

Today in Serbia, the Serbian Orthodox Church has an important place in public but also in political life. The Church as one of the most influential national institutions has a huge support of the current state authorities and broad media promotion. "At the same time, Serbia (and the state community SOC) is a secular state, where the separation of church and state is regulated by the current Constitution"[35].

As atheism trend has weakened, political parties tend to include religious contents in their programs and political offers. As every party has a certain number of religious supporters, there is always a risk of not inconsiderable consequences for the electoral success of a party.

However, religion as a political fact in post-communist society is not only connected with negative omens and occurrences. There is also a need for unifying people and stabilizing social soul. On the other hand, sociocentrism strengthened by the misuse of religious symbols and values creates cultural space which becomes seismographically sensitive to any kind of external influence. A concealed enemy appears outside the group and becomes a target of certain animosity. The ideology of radical cultural pluralism stimulates cultural-ethnic minorities to see themselves as separate, independent entities within one state.

Salvation might be in forming ethnical multicultural society through the existence of different cultures which are identified by ethnicity/nationality of its representatives. If cultural pluralism is defined as recognized cultural diversity in multicultural environments associated with the values of tolerance, understanding other cultures and intercultural communication, then in Serbia ethnicity can be derived from the common social-cultural model. That would also be the most successful and objective social fact and model that would make it possible to achieve the conditions in the state for respecting cultural, national and religious differences. Cultural democracy stirs cultural diversity, but above all it stimulates individuals to take active part in cultural life. Once, in old Yugoslavia, many families of different religious affiliations visited each other for religious holidays. After many wars, that is being noticed again in Serbia, though with weak echoes it gradually bodes the return.

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35 Miroslava, Malesevic. "Christian Orthodox Religion Affiliation as a Core of National Being in Post-Communist Serbia". *Collection of Papers of the Ethnographic Institute, Volume XXII, "Everyday Culture in Post-Socialist Period"*, (Belgrade: Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, 2006), 100.

Today, Serbia as a multiethnic and multiconfessional community officially declares its firm orientation towards European integrations. State leaders have been contributing to the constitution of modern, democratic, civil society and its values that are in fact in accordance with the essence of Orthodox Christianity. Although some theoreticians in Serbia are wondering how it is possible that these two, seemingly totally opposite principles exist at the same time, the answer is perhaps in the very core of Christian respect for different beings and their cultures. Today the ideology of ethnic nationalism is retreating before the term of conciliarity which encompasses all nations and national minorities in one state. In support of this statement on 27th April, 2006 National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia passed the Law on churches and religious communities. [36] The main provisions of this law are freedom of religious denomination, prohibition of religious discrimination and limiting the expression of religious freedom.

However, cultural identity developed under the influence of religion and nationality can also be developed through critical reflection of culture. Thus, identity becomes a dynamic category which achieves its stability through the constant review of the state. It is an individualistic category of belonging to a group, which involves a certain feeling of belonging but also freedom of choice and shifts of identity. If the separation and formation of the state of Serbia in turbulent years was determined by national radicalism and the instrumentalization of religion, today these tendencies debilitate under the influence of other factors which are primarily connected with the strengthening of the awareness that we need cooperation with other European countries.

However, inside the European Union there are numerous unsolved issues like formation of individual national identities. Malesevic says that "the increase in the number of groups within the (European) Union which build their identity on religion and ethnicity, resistance to European integrations expressed in some parts of expectations, tell that the idea of "Europe without boundaries" and a new identity construct which is supposed to arise from that idea, still remain an open question. [37] The function of contemporary Serbian culture can be defined as an

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36 "The Law on Churches and Religious Communities". Clause 1, 2 and 3. *Ancillary Herald RS XXXVI*, in Svetosavlje Digital Library,
http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/zakoni/zakon-o-crkvama.htm (accessed June 15, 2009).
37 Miroslava, Malesevic. "Christian Orthodox Religion Affiliation as a Core of National Being in Post-Communist Serbia". *Collection of Papers of the Ethnographic Institute,*

attempt to homogenize national society, but also as self-fulfillment and functioning interwoven with other existing and imaginary communities. Defense of national interests is not focused on strengthening sociocentrism anymore and fear of enemy, but it strengthens the awareness that national interest can be defended only if there are good relations with neighbors and cooperation with other states and respect of the rights of all the forms of social and religious affiliation and expression.

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