Svetosavlje : a Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion

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In March 2007, *The Economist* published a short article that captured the general feeling of uneasiness about what has been happening over the last two decades to the national Churches of Eastern and Central Europe. The text pointed to the problems of corruption, intolerance and the churches' retreat «into steamy nationalist ghettos, sometimes in cahoots with the new authorities».[1] It is not only the outside observers who express concern with regard to current developments in church life; the locals are often much more radical in their assessment of the situation. Given conservatism and indeed openly nationalistic position of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the most troubling development for the liberal-minded, Western-oriented local scholars/ analysts is its increasing social and political influence. The Serbian Orthodox Church is routinely cited by numerous sociological surveys as being one of the most trusted institutions at the national level. Milan Vukomanović argues that the last ten years in Serbia have been marked by the process of clericalization, i.e. the church is not simply gaining more visibility, but it is actively involved in state affairs, while at the same time its social role, which is more important, is not clear at all.[2] Another Serbian sociologist, Mirko Blagojević, in an attempt to explain this phenomenon correctly notes that in the ex-Yugoslavia «the collapse of socialism-communism and the situation of civil and international war created the general geographical and social framework in which *Orthodoxy restores its cultural dominance, institutional significance and the influence that it once had*».[3]

[1] Churches in eastern Europe. God-bothered, in: *The Economist*, March 15, 2007, 33.

[2] Milan Vukomanović, *What the Church Can(not) Be Asked about. The Serbian Orthodox Church, State and Society in Serbia* published at the website of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia ‹http://www.helsinki.org.yu/doc/reports/eng/Studija-Vukomanovic-eng.pdf›.

[3] Mirko Blagojević, Religija i crkva u transformacijama društva: sociološko-istorijska analiza religijske situacije u srpsko-crnogorskom i ruskom (post)komunističkom društvu. Beograd 2005, 385.

SZRKG, 101 (2007), 505–527

In today's Serbia religion comes up in many controversial political and public discussions. Many recent discussions about the Kosovo issue, which is essentially a matter of political decision, involve «cultural-religious» arguments. The symbolic capital of Orthodoxy is used by the nationalistic-oriented political actors in order to achieve their political ends. The Serbian Orthodox Church in this respect goes to great lengths to sustain the moral and spiritual authority that it currently enjoys by making a strong case against the liberals and stressing the significance of Orthodoxy in the national life. The external display of newly acquired or restored religiosity is visible through the revival of the idea of *Svetosavlje* which was originally coined during the interwar period by a circle of people surrounding the Archbishop Nikolaj Velimirović, whose intellectual legacy today is challenged by the proponents of civil society and values of liberalism. The canonization of Nikolaj Velimirović in 2003 led to a lengthy debate.[4] The emergence of this ideology in the interwar period and the environment in which it was coined are the key issues analyzed in this paper. Another important aspect of the current state of affairs is that willingly or unconsciously the Serbian Orthodox Church (together with its counterparts in other Central and Eastern European nations) acts or rather continues to act as a «nationalist mythmaker»:

> «In some cases and such is the case in point, nation, myth and religion are closely related. Here religious differences reinforce ethnic ones and strengthen the construction of distinct national identities. Serbia and Croatia involve two culturally similar peoples that also share much common history and territory, such that, although religious nationalism is only part of the nationalist endeavour, religion highlights ethnic and national boundaries.»[5]

The argument will be valid if applied to the pre-socialist Yugoslavia as well as to the post-socialist successor states. At the same time, the same phenomenon can be described in a different way, with the concept of «communicative memory», introduced by Jan and Aleida Assmann. According to Jan Assmann this type of memory «belongs in the intermediary realm between intellectuals; it grows out of intercourse between people, and the emotions play the crucial role in its process. Love, interest, sympathy, feelings of attachment, the wish to belong, but also hatred, enmity, mistrust, pain, guilt and shame – all of these help to define our memories and provide them with a horizon.»[6]

This paper is a case-study that analyzes the church produced responses to challenges of not only ideological and political, but also of cultural origin which the Serbian Orthodox Church faced during the first Yugoslavia. Intensive articulation of these responses resulted among other things in the creation of a distinc-

[4] About the debate surrounding canonization of Father Nikolaj Velimirović see works of Jovan Byford, e.g. Jovan Byford, Distinguishing «Anti-Judaism» from «Anti-Semitism»: Recent Championing of Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, in: Religion, State and Society, 34:1, 7–31.

[5] Vjekoslav Perica, The Sanctification of Enmity. Churches and the Construction of Founding Myths of Serbia and Croatia, in: Pal Kolsto (ed.), Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe, London 2005, 131.

[6] Jan Assmann, Religion and Cultural Memory. Ten Studies, Stanford 2006, 3.

tive ideology of *Svetosavlje* which blurred the boundaries between religious thought and nationalism as a secular political ideology and therefore presents a telling example of a complex relationship between religion and politics. Daniel H. Levine, an American political scientist, rightly stated over twenty years ago that

> «Religion cannot be isolated from social and political life: there is constant dynamic interchange between them, and influence works both ways. Political commitment and action grow from religious motives and structures; politics and social change generally create pressures and urgent needs, and provide models which spur reflection, organization and action in religion. The whole process spills easily over formal ideological and institutional limits, shaping and drawing strength from everyday expressions of meaning and power.»[7]

Although Levine's analysis focus on Latin America, his theoretical (and arguably ideological) premise that religion, first, is an important constituent of political and social developments, and second, that religion as well as politics is changing with time and it is this double change that leads to visible historical difference between the countries, regions and epochs holds valid for the Balkans.

Incorporation of religion into analysis of other political and social forces in the Modern period as an equally important power in a way contributes to the ongoing *secularization debate* and accompanying discussions of modernization and modernity. Although the paper does not directly address these issues, one of the starting assumptions for the analysis was that the process of secularization in Europe did not necessarily go in parallel with social and political modernization. Following Jose Casanova one could argue that the belief in direct causal relationship between the level of modernization and «progressive» development of a given society on the one hand and the decline of religious practice and belief on the other, which was largely informed by the European Enlightenment, is often not only shared by the majority of Europeans, but is also taken for granted by the scholars.

A few years ago George Mavrogordatos wrote that «despite the prolific literature on nationalism, and the growing literature on religion, there seems to be no general theoretical framework or systematic discussion focusing specifically on the linkage between the two [...] Most [scholars], apparently, regard this linkage as given, or as incidental.»[8] Unfortunately since that time no major theoretical break-through in this field occurred.[9] One of the rare attempts to conceptualize the relationship between the nation and nationalism on the one hand and religion

[7] Daniel H. Levine, Is Religion Being Politicized? And Other Questions Latin America Poses, in: PS, Vol. 19, No. 4. (Autumn 1986), 825.

[8] George Th. Mavrogordatos, Orthodoxy and Nationalism in the Greek Case, in: John T.S. Madeley/Zsolt Enyedi (eds.), Church and State in Contemporary Europe. The Chimera of Neutrality, London 2003, 117.

[9] For an overview of literature concerning relationship between religion and politics see e.g. Hartmut Lehmann, Die Säkularisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation im 20. Jahrhundert. Varianten einer komplementären Relation, in: Hans-Christian Maner/Martin Schulze Wessel (eds.), Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen 1918–1939, Stuttgart 2002, 13–27.

and religious communities on the other is *Chosen Peoples* by Anthony D. Smith[10], which presents a critique of modernist approaches to nationalism and in particular their tendency to downplay the roles of religion(s) in it. By contrast Smith argues that «two of the nation's most important cultural resources and traditions are constituted by ‹ethnicity› and ‹religion›.»[11] Although Smith suggests a clear cut division of the interaction of religion and nationalism into three analytical levels («official level» of regimes, leaders and elites; «popular» level of religious beliefs and practices of the «people» or «folk»; and the third «basic» level of the *sacred foundations* of the nation constituted by four dimensions of the nation: community, territory, history, and destiny)[12] the study does not provide a working theoretical framework that would enable, for instance, an understanding of the mechanisms of the complex relationship and mutual influences of religion and national ideologies/politics in an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous society in the middle of a structural political crisis.

In spite of the lack of theoretical generalization there is a multitude of case-studies dealing with various aspects of the relationship between religion and nationalism, and religious and national identities which provide useful insights into this matter.[13] One of the curious examples of the combination of the religious and national, but also of the relationship between religious thought and political ideologies in south eastern Europe is the Romanian «Orthodoxism» of Nichifor Crainic, defined by Keith Hitchins as an original fusion of Eastern Christian spirituality combined with the fascination with the Romanian rural world. Orthodoxism was based upon the Romanian traditionalism of the late nineteenth century, but «also made an original contribution to Romanian traditionalism by placing Orthodox spirituality at the moral center of the new Romania.»[14] Owing to Crainic's philosophy, religion was brought to the forefront of debate over national character in Interwar Romania. It was only in the 1930s that Crainic displayed an interest in politics; he admired Mussolini's Italy. Back in Romania he inspired the young generation of the Iron Guard. Nevertheless, Hitchins maintains that «Orthodoxism, though it nourished such movements, never became more than a philosophy of culture and a theory of social development.»[15]

[10] Anthony D. Smith, Chosen Peoples, Oxford 2003.
[11] Smith, Chosen Peoples (see footnote 10), 25.
[12] Smith, Chosen Peoples (see footnote 10), 28–31.
[13] See e.g. Maner/Schulze Wessel (eds.), Religion im Nationalstaat (see footnote 9); Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.), Nationalisierung der Religion und Säkularisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa, Stuttgart 2006; Peter van der Veer/Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), Nation and Religion. Perspectives on Europe and Asia, Princeton 1999; Martin Conway, Building the Christian City. Catholics and Politics in Interwar Francophone Belgium, in: Past and Present, Vol. 128, Aug. 1990, 117–151.
[14] Keith Hitchins, Orthodoxism. Polemics Over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania, in: Ivo Banac/Katherine Verdery (eds.), National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe, New Haven 1995, 140.
[15] Ibid., 156.

Chronologically current study is limited to the mid-1930s; these years are of special interest for the analysis of the impact religious thought, or rather thought that was coming out of a religious community, had on politics, in particular on national politics. With the end of the King Aleksandar Karadjordjević's royal dictatorship in 1934, the Church as an institution once again had the freedom to act on the political stage. At the same time, by the middle of the 1930s, a signify-cant intellectual capital had been accumulated within the Serbian Orthodox Church, in many respects thanks to the influence of the Russian immigration.[16]

This by no means is a comprehensive account of the church history of that period, nor does it discuss purely theological questions; it captures however several important moments in religious and national/ political thought development. Church's teachings are analyzed in the wider political and ideological context and are seen as reactions to the challenges of the «outside» world. Despite the fact that the analysis largely stays at the level of ideas/narratives, this paper also deals with a certain number of important events or actions that took place at the same time and therefore cannot be omitted from the discussion. The so called «Concordat crisis» of 1937 can be taken as an example of an «action», while the reconstructed narrative of the ideology of *Svetosavlje* clearly belongs to the cluster of «ideas». The relationship between the two is a complicated one, and cannot be reduced to the «abuse of religious symbolic capital» by secular political actors. The Concordat crisis by itself is an important temporal focal point for the study of discursive practices of the Church[17], yet here it is treated as one among many instances of religion – politics interaction.

The Balkans as a historical region is (in)famous for its religious and ethnic diversity, which has been both praised and condemned by the inhabitants of the peninsula, artists, scholars, and in the last fifteen years increasingly by journalists. The violent conflicts of the 1990s contributed to the growth of interest in the Balkan region, making it ever more «attractive» for research. Religion was ascribed a prominent role in the conflict, a role, which for the most part, was not seen as a peacekeeping one. The sequence of military clashes, two Balkan wars, two World Wars, numerous coup d'états, and simply periods of political instability were the landmarks of the Balkan history in the twentieth century. The legacy and memories of these events left ineffaceable traces on virtually every intellectual activity that originates from the ex-Yugoslav states. As a result of complex historic and political processes it became possible that, during the latest conflict in the 1990s, religious rhetoric was widely used by all sides; religious mobilization was a common enterprise both in the power struggle and on the battle field.

[16] For a comprehensive overview of the history of the Russian immigration in the Balkans see Miroslav Jovinovich, Russkaya emigratsia na Balkanah, 1920–1940, Moscow 2005.

[17] For an example of an analysis of these practices see: Olga Manojlović Pintar, Još jednom o konkordatskoj krizi, in: Tokovi Istorije, Vol. 1–2, 2006, 157–171.

There are only few serious academic studies of the religious life in Serbia of the 1920s and 1930s by either Serbian scholars or by international academics. There are numerous valid reasons for the lack of sound scholarship coming from local research: it seems to be less of an important topic than a Serbo-Croatian political dispute; the church archives are not really accessible; and last but not least once you start working on this issue you are likely to find yourself in a company of either professional theologians or somebody whose religious beliefs tend to transform into radical political ones. There is virtually no professional lay discussion of the questions concerned with religion, the church, etc. from a historical perspective. Whatever is published is either a well informed and detailed but conceptually uncritical account of the developments of church life of the past centuries, or focuses on the socialist period and the most recent past.[18] The international academia has also produced a number of interesting studies concerning the relationship between religion and nationalism, as well as the church and state relationship in Serbia and other countries of former Yugoslavia. Yet, the period between the two World Wars seems to be, if not entirely neglected, but certainly under-researched.[19]

Yugoslavia: New State and Its Ideologies

The end of the First World War and the peace settlements that followed led to major changes in the state-composition of Eastern and Central Europe. The multinational Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman Empires were wiped off the map of Europe and were replaced by new nation-sates. At the same time, independent kingdom of Serbia was replaced by a new multinational Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which united Serbian territories with parts of the former Habsburg Empire populated by Slovenes, Croats and Serbs alongside with numerous other peoples. The creation of Yugoslavia, as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes came to be known later in time, was a major event in the entire Balkan region. Leaving aside the importance of the appearance of a new big state for the international relations in South Eastern Europe, its creation had a great impact on the social, political and intellectual life of the societies that now found

[18] See: Radmila Radić, Država i verske zajednice: 1945–1970, Beograd 2002. There are works that analyze the developments in religious thought from the theological/ church perspective, e.g. Radovan Bigović, Od svečoveka do bogočoveka: hrišćanska filosofija vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića, Beograd 1998. At the same time, Serbian and Croatian sociologists of religion are generally more productive than historians. Milan Vukomanović and the late Srdjan Vrcan arguably are the best scholars of religion in the former Yugoslavia.

[19] About Socialist Yugoslavia see: Stella Alexander, Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945, Cambridge 1979; Klaus Buchenau, Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien 1945–1991. Ein serbisch-kroatischer Vergleich, Wiesbaden 2004. There are only few studies dealing directly with the questions of interaction between political sphere and religious communities in the first half of the twentieth century. E.g. Klaus Buchenau, *Pravoslavlje* und *Svetosavlje*. Nationales und Universales in der serbischen Orthodoxie, in: Schulze Wessel (ed.), Nationalisierung der Religion und Säkularisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa (see footnote 13), 203–232.

themselves united under one government. It was the national question that was central to most of the debates and political clashes between the national elites, who now had to re-adjust their agendas and programs to the new circumstances.

The importance of the national question in the first Yugoslavia cannot be underestimated. «No understanding of the problems faced by the first Yugoslavia or the solutions proposed to them can proceed without recognition of the crucial ethnocultural belief that underpinned the county: that the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed a single nation».[20] According to the official ideology the three separate nations were seen as constituting «the three-named people», i.e. the Yugoslav nation, and the mutual relationship of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes resembled the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity. The same was fixed in the state Constitution of 1921, generally known as the *Vidovdan Constitution*, as it was ratified on the day of St. Vitas [Serb. – Vidovdan]. (As Andrew Wachtel points out «This formulation must have seemed a stroke of genius to those who coined it, for whatever the doctrinal difference that separated Orthodox and Catholic Christians, the concept of the Trinity was familiar to all.»[21] For the sake of the living up to the idea of Yugoslav unity, politically the Kingdom was organized as a simple national state. Although theoretically the idea of a single Yugoslav nation presumed the equality of the three nations (or tribes, according to the original terminology) out of which it was composed, in practice, the Serbian parties dominated the political arena. Serbian political leaders were not ready to give up nearly a century long tradition of a «romantic» national idea and were trying to impose Serbianness upon the two other brotherly nations.

In terms of state politics it was the clash between Serbia and Croatia that presented the biggest obstacle to the normal functioning of the state. The Croats were arguing for a federalist system in some form or another, which would give Croatia a greater degree of political and cultural autonomy, while the Serbs advocated a highly centralized unitary state. The system of political centralism introduced under the 1921 Constitution secured the dominance of Serbian parties in the government, but at the same time caused dissatisfaction among all the other political actors and initiated constant political instability.[22] By 1925 it became obvious that the Parliament's work was blocked. In 1928 a shooting spree in the parliament which resulted in the deaths of several deputies, including Radić - the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party – represented the climax of the malfunctioning party politics that had been going on for over a decade. The endless political crisis and the economic depression of 1929 that severely hit Yugoslavia along with other European states did not make the negotiations between the old and the new national identities any easier. Eventually on Christmas Eve, 1929, King Aleksandar abolished the parliament and proclaimed a royal dictatorship. With regard to state ideology, the dictatorship meant the climax of the integral

[20] Andrew B. Wachtel, Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation. Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia, Stanford 1998, 69.

[21] Wachtel, Making a Nation (see footnote 20), 71.

[22] Ljubodrag Dimić, Istorija Srpske državnosti. Knj. 3 Srbija u Jugoslaviji. Novi Sad. Srpska akademija nauka i Umetnosti. Ogranak, 2001, 117.

Yugoslavism. In the «Proclamation», which introduced the new regime, the King stated that his main aim was to protect the state and national unity as well as order and discipline. A number of laws suspended those Constitutional articles in which the state was defined as «constitutional» and «parliamentary», but «hereditary monarchy» was kept. A special law suspended public political life and banned the work of societies and political parties organized according to the national or religious principle; in addition strict censorship was imposed at this time.[23] King Aleksandar went to tremendous lengths to make the idea of integral Yugoslavism work, the state apparatus was used in order to impose the idea of national unity on all citizens. In this sense the «Yugoslav idea» resembled less and less the synthesis which might come into being over time, and rather morphed into a state imposed dogma which had to be implemented right immediately.[24]

With the assassination of King Aleksandar in Marseille in 1934 the royal dictatorship ended, and a certain reanimation and liberalization of political and intellectual life soon became apparent. Although the prime minister Milan Stojadinović and his government acknowledged the need to deal with the national problems of Yugoslavia, i.e. the Croatian question, they were reluctant to change the state framework introduced in 1921. While Croatian national political forces were uniting, and the Croatian Peasant Party turned into a full-fledged national movement; the Serbian parties were still in a state of chaos and disarray. It was at this time that the Serbian intellectual and cultural elite felt the need to formulate a certain answer to the state policy of Yugoslavism and the inability of the Serbian professional political elite to address the national question. In 1937, an organization called the «Serbian Cultural Club» (SCB) was formed. The task of figuring out what political form Serbia should take and what Serbian identity meant was a difficult one even before 1918; now it was complicated by the necessary «negotiations» between Serbian and Yugoslav identities.

From the seventy founding members of the Serbian Cultural Club twenty three were professors at Belgrade University and other educational centers, including five people who had been rectors of Belgrade University during the Interwar period: Slobodan Jovanović, Pavle Popović, Vladimir Čorović, Dragoslav Jovanović, and Petar Mićić.[25] Among other members were high-ranking state functionaries, representatives of industrial and banking corporations, military generals and a number of well known artists, architects, engineers, etc. Archimandrite Justin Popović joined the Club few years after its foundation. There was no system dictating political opinions of the Club members: they belonged to a variety of political parties and held a range of political views.

The idea to create such society belonged to Slobodan Jovanović, a famous Serbian historian, intellectual and politician. According to Dragoljub Jovanović, he believed that after the creation of Yugoslavia some of the key Serbian institu-

[23] Dimić, Istorija Srpske državnosti (see footnote 22), op. cit., 137.
[24] Ibid., 142.
[25] Nebojša A. Popović, Slobodan Jovanović i Jugoslovenska država. Beograd 2003, 212.

tions were abandoned; among those Jovanović listed Sarajevo based «Prosveta», Matica Srpska, and church-school autonomies in the Prečanski region. Belgrade emerged as the only center of all national activity. The Serbs elsewhere were left unprotected, as they were neglected. Their best representatives were not members of a single government.[26]

The Serbian Cultural Club was conceived as a meeting place and a forum for those who were interested in Serbian national culture, and according to Jovanović's initial plan the organization had no immediate political goals.[27] Nevertheless, already in the very first months of its existence the Club was presenting itself and functioning as a platform for the negotiations between different Serbian political parties, as they were all concerned with the Serbian national question. Eventually it turned into an organization where Serbian national interests and demands were defined and formulated.[28]

The SCB saw its aim as reworking Yugoslavism from an abstract ideology hostile towards Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian national character into an organic unity of all national forces who would at the same time feel their uniqueness and interconnectedness. This idyllic goal was supposed to be achieved though the gradual constructive work of the respective national elites. Jovanović underlined the difference between the state and national ideologies of Yugoslavism, and therefore saw no contradiction between the claim to work towards the creation of the new Yugoslav identity, and the fact that the two immediate tasks of the Club were to preserve Serbdom and Yugoslav state unity.[29] Translated into the language of real-life policies it meant, first of all, opposition to the increasingly aggressive Croatian nationalism.

The program and ideas formulated by the Serbian Cultural Club represented just one of the many responses to the events of political life, party politics and the complex of problems the first Yugoslavia faced. The Serbian political, intellectual and artistic milieu also produced strong supporters of Yugoslavism and the Yugoslav state.[30] The variety of secular national (in both narrow and wider understandings) projects i.e. Serbian, Croatian on the one hand, and Yugoslav on the other formed the ideological milieu against which the Serbian Orthodox Church had to react, from which it sometimes borrowed ideas, and to which it finally addressed itself.

[26] Dragoljub Jovanović, Političke Uspomene, cited it Nebojša A. Popović, Slobodan Jovanović i Jugoslovenska država, 213.
[27] Ibid., 214.
[28] Ibid.
[29] See: Slobodan Jovanović, Jugoslovenska misao u prošlosti i budućnosti. Predavanje održano u Srpskom kulturnom klubu na dan 4. decembra 1939. godine, Beograd 1939.
[30] For a detailed account see Wachtel, Making a Nation (see footnote 20).

The Serbian Orthodox Church in Interwar Yugoslavia: Institutions and the Church-State Relationship

The institutional position of the Serbian Church, and particularly the change in its status after 1918, is of vital importance for the understating of the ideological program the Church created. Although, there is no doubt that the making of Yugoslavia with all its institutional, social, cultural, political, etc. consequences can be taken as a starting point for the discussion of the Serbian Orthodox Church's national program, it is important to remember that the Church had produced a well-articulated national narrative already in the nineteenth century.

It has been correctly observed by many students of Balkan nationalism that religious identity and church institutions had a great impact on the formation of modern national identities since the nineteenth century.[31] Being no exception to this rule, the Orthodox Church played an important role Serbian nation-building throughout the entire nineteenth century. In an independent Serbia (first as a principality, later as a kingdom) the Serbian Orthodox Church enjoyed the status of the dominant/ state church, and was careful to preserve this state of affairs.

With regard to religious developments and church life, the change of the state borders after the creation of the new state in 1918 was of great significance. For the Serbian Orthodox Church, the unification of the Serbian lands in one state meant that finally six previously not closely connected church jurisdictions could now be united under one body, i.e. the Serbian Patriarchate under the rule of the Patriarch of Belgrade, which was proclaimed in September 1920[32]. Despite the fact that the unification of the church was long-awaited event and the result of several decades of longing and hope, it did not run entirely smoothly.[33] It also raised a number of important questions that had to be quickly resolved.

For the most part, such questions concerned the church-state relationship, the legal status of the church within the new state framework, as well as the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the other religious communities officially recognized by the state. As of 1918, Orthodox Christianity was no longer the single dominant religion of the overwhelming majority of the population[34], nor

[31] See e.g. Nationalism and Religion in the Balkans since the 19th Century (IX, 7–50), in: Peter F. Sugar, East European Nationalism, Politics and Religion, Brookfield 1999.

[32] Prior to 1918 there were three independent church bodies: Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kingdom of Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, and Serbian Orthodox Metropoly in Sremski Karlovci in Vojvodina. The other three enjoyed different degrees of autonomy from the Constantinople Patriarchate: Orthodox Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian Orthodox Church in Southern Serbia and Macedonia, and Bukovina-Dalmatian Metropoly.

[33] The unwillingness of the clergy of previously autonomous church organizations, in particular those in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sremski Karlovci, to submit to the centralized system ruled from Belgrade, which contradicted their long tradition of «national» autonomy and self-government resulted in the delay in creation of working and stable system of local eparchies. (Radmila Radić, Država i verske zajednice, 1945–1970, Beograd 2002. Vol. 1, 20.)

[34] According to the census of 1921 the Serbs made a little less than 40% of the total population of Yugoslavia, together with other Orthodox peoples (Macedonians/ Bulgarians, Romanians and Vlachs) their numbers amounted to almost 45%, versus 39% of Catholics and 11% of

did it enjoy a privileged status, at least not according to the 1921 or 1931 Constitutions. In 1919, equality of all religions was granted by a special Proclamation issued by Regent Aleksandar; the 1921 Constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and ensured that all religions recognized under the law would enjoy equal rights; the same was repeated in the 1931 Constitution.[35] The law provided for the complete freedom with regards to various religious communities' internal affairs; and forbade all confessions and their representatives from using their power in order to achieve political ends.[36] Although there was no single state church any more in the Kingdom, the Church was not separated from the state. Religious education at school was first made optional (1921), but later was introduced as a mandatory class (1929/1933). The 1931 Constitution introduced a certain degree of state patronage over religious communities. Radmila Radić observed that misunderstandings between the state and the religious communities were caused by the government's attempt to put churches under state control, e.g. agrarian reform applied to church lands.[37] In this respect the biggest clash between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Yugoslav state over the signing of the Concordat with Vatican, can be seen not just as the expression of the Orthodox Church's feelings of animosity the towards Catholics/Croats, but also as a demonstration of Church's general unhappiness with state policies.

Serbian Orthodox Church, Yugoslavism and Serbian national question

The complexity of the task to reconcile the views of the Orthodox Church on Serbian national identity with the new state-driven ideologies of an integral or synthetic Yugoslavism is responsible for the ambiguity of both the language used by the Church representatives and the position the clergy took concerning their political involvement. During the two decades following the creation of Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church followed the developments of political life, especially in parliamentary activity, with a feeling of strong distaste. Under these conditions, the church, i.e. significant numbers of both lower and higher clergy assumed the task first, of excluding the clergy from the direct involvement in party politics (which was a matter of serious debate among parish priests); and second, of developing new ways of exercising influence over society that would keep the flock within the bounds of the Orthodox church and, more importantly, to find ways of securing the place of Orthodoxy within the national and state ideology.

The following analysis will focus on several issues: the participation of the church as an institution in political life, the instrumentalization and appropriation of religious teachings by political actors to suit their own needs, and lastly the conceptual relationship between religion and secular nationalism, as it should not be reduced to the above-mentioned (ab)use of religion, e.g. for mass mobilization purposes.

Muslims. (Ivo Banac, The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, Histroy, Politics, Ithaca/London 1993, c1984, 49–58.)

[35] Radić, Država i verske zajednice (see footnote 33), 21.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 35.

Church and Politics, Politics and Church: The debate over priests' open and direct participation in the country's political life revealed that several well-defined opinions on this matter were present among the ranks of the lower clergy. It is symptomatic that the debate took place in 1935, right after the end of the royal dictatorship, when the political involvement of religious institutions became an urgent issue. Those who argued against the idea of priests being involved in politics supported their position by arguing that the primary task of priests is to remain above earthly activities, which are filled with greed and evil, and insisting that a priest should focus instead on being a good pastor to his parish.[38] Those who disagreed with this viewpoint maintained that although, yes, indeed, present day Yugoslav politics were full of corrupted emotions, it was the task of the clergy to fill it with good morals and lead it towards brotherly love, faith and respect.[39] Drenovac also uses a historical argument to support his claim. According to him, it was the task of the Orthodox Church to take part in political life, as it had always been the leader of the nation, or «the soul of our nationalism». Given the author's belief that anyone who «loves this country, who is a nationalist must not be indifferent towards politics», the claim that the time for action had come seems to be a logical conclusion to this line of reasoning.[40] The birth of the grass-root spiritual «movement of God worshipers» [Serb. – bogomoljci/ bogomoljački pokret] in the early 1920s followed by its rapid expansion in the 1930s proved that the later opinion was shared by a large group of people.

This movement supported and directed by Nikolaj Velimirović, one of the twentieth century's major Serbian Orthodox thinkers was a reaction to the constantly changing social environment and was particularly preoccupied with the growing secularization of society. It consisted of numerous local organizations that saw their aim as the moral resumption of the nation through their faith in God and evangelical work.[41]

In 1921 in an article called «Do not push them away» Velimirović urged the parish clergy to have a more friendly stance towards the movement which was at that time lacking any sort of organization and structure. He wrote admiringly about this grass-root, sincere and naïve religious movement that had emerged from the Serbian country-side. At the same time the archbishop would have preferred the movement to exist rather in the urban spaces than in the rural areas, as it was more likely that the country-side would imitate the town, instead of the other way around[42], which is an interesting point given the general «common-people» oriented rhetoric of Velimirović and his close associates. Slijepčević noted at one point in the mid-1930s that «the city degenerates and kills all great

[38] Dušan K. Petrović, Sveštenik i politika, in: Hriščanska Misao, 1935, No.5–6, 3–6.
[39] Nikola V. Drenovac, Sveštenik i politika, in: Hriščanska Misao, 1935, No. 8, 11–13.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Monah (A monk), Pokret Bogomoljca, in: Glasnik Srpske Pravoslvane Patrijaršije, 1922, No. 16, p.258.
[42] Nikolaj Velimirović, Ne odbacujte ih. Jedna napomena sveštenicima, in: Glasnik Srpske Pravoslvane Patrijaršije, 1921, No. 17, p. 273.

movements that are born among the people. And in our country it was from the common people that all great movements and great men have come. The salvation of the country will also come from the people».[43]

The practical activities of the Serbian Church did not necessarily meet the theoretical position it took concerning the issue of its (non)involvement in politics. The movement of *bogomoljci* underlined the need to develop the Church's social work, to increase the level of popular piety, etc, which occupied the members of the movement in the 1920s and early 1930s. By the middle of the 1930s though, the situation had changed, the movement had already acquired a certain degree of organization and its spiritual leaders developed a more articulate political program. It still remains unclear whether the members of the Evangelical movement lead by Velimirović massively joined Dimitrije Ljotić's *Zbor* (a fascist-type Serbian political movement that was marginal in the 1930s but became rather prominent during the Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia) at the end of the 1930s; nonetheless, there is no doubt that the membership of *Bogomoljci* and *Zbor* considerably overleapt. Among those with «duel membership» were Dimitrije Najdanović and Djoko Slijepčević, both of whom actively contributed to *Svetosavlje* in the early 1930s as well as to other theological journals.

The problematic circumstances of political life were not the Church's only source of concern. The church continued its permanent struggle against the constant secularization of society and increasing neglect of religion, which the church perceived as an indisputable evil. In other words, the Church regarded contemporary society as being overly secularized or even de-Christianized, and not that social development was indeed going in that direction. As this article will demonstrate, religious rhetoric proved to be a successful means of mass mobilization, something that casts a shadow of doubt on the idea that Serbian society in the Interwar period was truly highly secularized.

Traditionally, modernizing and secularizing ideas were seen as the cultural product of the West, i.e. Europe, the interpretation and evaluation of these ideas depended on different individual's political, cultural and philosophical views. Often «Europe» and the «West» were used rather as labels than as indicators of concrete social, political or cultural spaces. The Serbian national realm had its own «West» – Vojvodina – up to 1918 the territory of the Habsburg Empire in Southern Hungary that after the First World War became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This Habsburg territory with its center in Novi Sad played the role of the external political and cultural center in the Serbian nation-building process from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the positive impact of the Vojvodina Serbs on the national development was generally accepted and undisputed, not everybody was entirely happy with all its aspects.

Djoko Slijepčević, a Serbian church historian, who in the 1930s was a young member of the circle of the disciples of Nikolaj Velimirović, and an active contributor and editor of several church periodicals, wrote in 1936 about the gulf

[43] Djoko Slijepčević, Inteligencija i narod, in: Hriščanska Misao, 1936, No. 1, p. 2.

that existed between Serbian intelligentsia and common people. According to Slijepčević this perilous spiritual divide of the nation had its origins in the second half of the eighteenth century. Those Serbian intellectuals that were educated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the spirit of Enlightenment rationalist philosophy, noted Slijepčević, brought these ideas to Serbia, and were «the first to introduce alien elements into the Serbian people's soul».[44] Slijepčević claims that the corruption of the nation began at the moment when certain elements in Serbia began to worship the West. His argument here has the distinctive touch of populism, as he explicitly contrasts corrupted cold-hearted urban intellectuals whose conscience had already been obliterated with the people of the countryside among whom moral principles of worthiness were still alive.[45]

The ideas expressed by various people affiliated with the Serbian Orthodox Church can by no means be treated as a homogeneous trend of thinking. As any other big institution, the Church was subjected to a great diversity of personal opinions and views. However, concerning the national question, i.e. the Serbian/Yugoslav question, the Orthodox Church maintained a relatively coherent view. Yet, the understanding of the national question underwent considerable changes over time; although it has kept certain features intact, e.g. the significance of Orthodoxy for Serbianness, its history and essence. The other side of this coin was the question: What is the place of the Orthodox Church and what should it be in the future with regards to national life and development? These issues were intimately connected with the problem of Yugoslavism and various understandings of Yugoslav identity.

In 1934 *Pravoslavlje,* one of the many theological journals published an article by D.J. Vasić, a priest, under the title «Orthodoxy and Our National Future». Vasić formulated the question that was bothering many of his colleagues:

> «Now, after the great wars of liberation, and after national unity has been achieved, in this new situation, we the Orthodox people, are facing a new question: Will Orthodoxy exercise an impact upon the building of our future culture and to what extent? Will our people continue to go on their way through history beneath the wing of Orthodoxy? Will Orthodoxy be a factor as important for the national future, as it used to be for the national past?»[46]

Preoccupied with immediate organizational and institutional problems, church officials did not address extensively the problem of Yugoslavism in the 1920s, however as the national problems of Yugoslavia became more evident by the middle of the 1930s, the reflections on the Yugoslav idea found their way into the clergy's writings.

In 1935 Dimitrije Najdanović, a church intellectual, a disciple of Velimirović and a close collaborator of Dimitrije Ljotić, published an article expressing his views regarding the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the creation of Yugoslav identity and political entity, and consequently his personal understanding

[44] Slijepčević, Inteligencija i narod (see footnote 43), 1.
[45] Ibid., 2.
[46] D.J. Vasić, Pravoslavlje i nasa budućnost, in: Pravoslavlje, 1934, No.1, 8.

of what they meant. The article answered a wide-spread claim that the Serbian Orthodox Church should omit the word «Serbian» from its name, as it infringed upon the Yugoslav unity, the promotion of which was thought to be the ultimate goal of the official state ideology. Najdanović built his argument on the already well-established narrative of the sacrifices the Serbian nation (and the Serbian Orthodox Church) had made for the common cause of Yugoslavism. The usual substitution of the martyrdom of the Serbian nation by the martyrdom of the Serbian Church is present in his argument: «Any of its [the Serbian nation's] sacrifice is in the first place the sacrifice of the Orthodox Church, which has created and nurtured Serbdom, preserved it, and filled it with the morality of Piedmont self-sacrifice.»[47] Najdanović pays lip-service to the official understanding of Yugoslavism, saying that it is about «the cultural synthesis of the healthiest elements of the experience, capacities and the spirit of the three peoples [Serbs, Croats and Slovenes], the apotheosis of their virtues».[48] At the same time he makes it quite clear, without stating it directly, that Orthodox culture is superior to other cultures, and that it is the Orthodox Church who should lead the national struggle.[49]

Najdanović makes a curious rhetorical move while talking about the non-involvement of the Orthodox Church in politics, something that he claims to be an undeniably positive characteristic that the Church possesses. For example, he claims that intrigue and petty-politics are not in the spirit of the Orthodox Church, clearly unlike that of the Catholic Church; at the same time he sees the role of the Orthodox Church in the building of the free Jugoslavism to be just «a prologue to Serbian Orthodox messianism, whose first aim is the spiritual liberation of its brothers from European cultural influences, from the vain, deadly *Kulturträger* and western spleen, fiction and lies.»[50] Applied to the sphere of national politics such a statement can easily be understood as a call for Serbian cultural domination and hegemony. Thus, although denying any political commitment of the Church and opposing the need for it, Najdanović argued for a national belief system in which «Orthodox values» would be dominant. Despite his (and others') claim that Serbian Church is not taking part in politics, Najdanović makes a strong case in favour of «orthodox activism». Among other things he maintains that the «superiority of Orthodox thought, if it is not materialized into a force, a movement, a blow» will turn into something abstract and in vain.[51] We can see therefore an open «call for action» coming from church activists like Dimitrije Najdanović taking place in the middle of the 1930s.

[47] Dimitrije Najdanović, Jugoslovenstvo i crkve, in: Hriščanska Misao, 1935, No. 7, 2.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Dimitrije Najdanović, Udruženim snagama, in: Hriščanska misao, 1935, No.1, 4–5.
[50] Najdanović, Jugoslovenstvo i crkve (see footnote 47), 3.
[51] Najdanović, Udruženim snagama (see footnote 49), 5.

The Year of St. Sava, Svetosavlje, Sacralization of Nation, and Nationalization of Religion: Besides *Bogomoljci* many clergymen were occupied by the issues of how to bring people back into the church. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, a significant growth in the number of periodicals published by various groups and societies of theology students, professors and clergy in many different places in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia can be observed.

The climax of these publishing activities occurred in 1935. This was the year of Saint Sava, the so-called S*vetosavska godina* when the kingdom of Yugoslavia celebrated and commemorated the 700th anniversary of the death of Saint Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the patron saint of the Serbian nation.[52] Throughout the year, various events were organized by the state authorities, the Serbian Orthodox Church as well as by different societies, clubs, etc. The press was flooded with publications devoted to the life and deeds of Sava. Numerous academic and publicist texts reflected on the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the main national saint. Given the amazing multitude of texts that addressed topics connected to St. Sava, it is not surprising that the absolute unanimity regarding what exactly Sava should be remembered and praised for in the first place was lacking.

Vjekoslav Perica maintains that «historically the most relevant church-led myth-making in Yugoslavia began with a sequence of grand religious festivals and commemorations held between 1939 and 1941. These events expressed the ethnic churches' disillusionment with the Yugoslav idea and state, and called for a better future to be achieved, the clergy believed, by returning to ethnic roots and identities».[53] In fact, the church «campaign» started a few years earlier, right after the end of the royal dictatorship, with the *Svetosavska godina* of 1935.

Despite the fact that St. Sava was one of the central characters of Serbian oral culture, religious tradition and national epic, his cult in its present form can be traced back only to the early nineteenth century. Bojan Aleksov has rightly noted that in Serbian nationalism, the cult of St. Sava had the function of «representing and reproducing powerful images of a national Golden Age, of national reconciliation and unification, and of martyrdom for the Church and the nation».[54] It is characteristic that St. Sava's name was borrowed by Serbian ideology / religio-philosophical trend of thinking – *Svetosavlje* – which represents one of most curious, yet not totally unique, responses to the challenges of Yugoslavism, Yugo-

[52] Born in 1169 St. Sava (prior to becoming a monk on Mount Athos in Greece he was called Rastko) was the third, youngest son of Nemanja, the founder of the first medieval Serbian dynasty. Among many great deeds Sava is remembered and praised for are the establishment of Serbian monastery on Athos, and most of all the activities in securing a state of autonomy (autocephaly) for the Serbian Church whose first archbishop he became when he returned from Athos to Serbia. Upon his death he was canonized together with his father, Nemanja, and remains to the present day to be one of the most respected, praised and loved saints in Serbia. In the late sixteenth century the relics of St Sava were burned by Sinan Pasha on Vračar hill in Belgrade, where now stands the St. Sava Cathedral.

[53] Vjekoslav Perica, The Sanctification of Enmity (see footnote 5), 135.

[54] Bojan Aleksov, Nationalism in Construction. The Memorial Church of St. Sava on Vracar Hill in Belgrade, in: Balkanologie, Vol. VII/2, December 2003, 47.

slav state, secularization, as well as Western European modernist and anti-modernist influences. As an ideology centered on the figure of St. Sava, which praised his real or imagined spiritual, cultural and political heritage and made a strong argument in favour of the significance and indispensability of this legacy for the Serbian nation, *Svetosavlje,* is the focal point of my analysis.

The defining manifesto of the *Svetosavlje* ideology «Nationalism of St. Sava» was delivered by Nikolaj Velimirović in 1935 as a lecture at Kolarčev University during a week dedicated to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. In this lecture, which was published later the same year as a separate brochure, Velimirović discusses how St. Sava had created the Serbian church, the Serbian nation and basically laid the foundations of the entire Serbian national culture.

The main argument is as follows: since Sava was the founder of the Serbian national church, he was also the creator of Serbian nationalism.[55] By «Serbian nationalism» the archbishop meant the ultimate results of the activities of Sava in building Serbian nation.

> «This nationalism of Sava encompasses the national church, the national dynasty, the national state, the national education, the national culture, and the national assertion. The national church forms the basis and the center of the nationalism of Sava. The church acts as a spirit that resuscitates the entire national organism, by illuminating it, inspiring it, and uniting it by the one faith, one hope and one love.»[56]

Hence, it is the national church, embodied in the person of St. Sava that is given all the credit for the creation, maintenance and survival of the Serbian nation. Naturally, the definition of the national church is of outmost importance for this argument.

The national church, in Velimirović's interpretation «means an independent church organization with the central authority coming from the nation /people and directed to the nation/people, with the national clergy, national language and national traditional expression of its faith. In opposition to such a national church stands a non-national or international church, with its center outside the nation, with the clergy coming from everywhere, with a foreign language and with the unified, uniform expression of its faith. What is more natural and wholesome? With no doubt, it is the national church.»[57] Clearly, Velimirović contrasts here the Serbian Orthodox Church (or as a matter of fact any Orthodox Church) to the Roman Catholic Church, which is more centralized. The hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church was not unique to Velimirović's thinking. The animosity towards the Catholic Church, which in the Yugoslav context primarily meant the Catholic Church in Croatia, was shared by a vast majority of clergy and common people in Serbia. These hostile feelings reached their climax in the period of 1935-37 during the so-called Concordat crisis.

[55] Nikolaj Velimirović, Nacionalizam Svetoga Save, in: Mirko Đorđević (ed.), Srpska konzervativna misao, Beograd 2003, 60.
[56] Ibid., 58.
[57] Ibid., 58.

Problematic as it may be from today's perspective, the emphasis on the role of the Orthodox Church in nation-building since the very beginning of the existence of both the nation and the church was a generally accepted claim in Serbian historiography, philosophy, etc. in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The debate between the proponents of the «Orthodox» view and those who preferred a secular/modern path to development for Serbia mostly focused on the questions directed towards the future, not the past. As already stated above the point of disagreement was the level of influence exercised by the Church.

To nobody's surprise Velimirović persistently argued for the closest possible ties between the nation and Orthodoxy, which also implied the existence of the intimate connection between the state and the church. In the same 1935 lecture the archbishop remarked that the fact that in many European nations the church was separated from the state represented evidence of the crisis he saw Europe going through. He called this decision of European intellectual and political leaders an «action of desperation».[58] Those representatives of the Serbain elite who saw these European developments as positive were, according to Velimirović , severly mistaken, as that was not progress, but nothing but despair.[59] This line of reasoning led Velimirović to make his most criticized statement:

> «Hence we see in these Western states an unbridgable gap between the intelligentia that is at pain because it does not believe in anything and the people that want to uphold its faith. Thus, respect should be paid to the today's German leader who being a simple craftsman and a person from the people saw that nationalism without faith is an anomaly, a cold and unsecured mechanism.»[60]

Despite its common and frequent usage, *Svetosavlje* remained to be a rather loosely defined concept throughout the entire Interwar period, although the ideas that it stood for were always clearly recognizable. In 1937 Danilo R. Medan in an article with the promising title *The Contours of St. Sava's Ideology and its Meaning in the Past and Today* made an attempt to sketch the main points of this peculiar ideology. The easily understandable part is the claim that *Svetosavlje* as an ideology was created by St. Sava through his life and teaching; and that ever since it has had the most profound impact upon Serbian nation. According to its proponents, this ideology was inspired by and based upon the principles of Eastern Christianity. *Svetosavlje* was considered to be «the beginning and the base of the national culture, which has been developing on the foundations of Orthodoxy», Medan continues by saying that «All our cultural and educational currents are inspired by St. Sava's ideas.»[61] Therefore, Serbian national culture and national character are Orthodox in their nature.

[58] Ibid., 63.
[59] Ibid., 63.
[60] Ibid., 63.
[61] Danilo R. Medan, Konture Svetosavske ideologije i njen značaj u prošlosti i sadašnjosti, in: Svetosavlje, 1937, No. 1, 88.

Being a very complex ideology *Svetosavlje* had many different aspects: sometimes a pan-Slavic idea (in its Orthodox form) was also seen as a part of this ideology. The more difficult and confusing part of *Svetosavlje* is its relationship with the Serbian national idea, and as a matter of fact, any national idea in general. Despite the explicit statement about the Orthodox foundations of *Svetosavlje* it was said to have «mission and character for all of the Humanity», i.e. it was suppose to transcend national boundaries. Klaus Buchenau remarks that in this regard *Svetosavlje* resembles the integral Yugoslavism of King Aleksandar, as it also had claims of supra-national character, while keeping traditional Serbian iconography.[62] By the proponents of *Svetosavlje* St. Sava was seen as the first Serbian nationalist, but not a chauvinistic or intolerant one. «Through *Svetosavlje* the Serbian racial element sank into Slavic element, and the latter into an evangelical or all-human one. In this way the unique and harmonious entity was created, in which component parts still keep their racial characteristics».[63]

The formulation of the *Svetosavlje* ideology clearly shows that nationalism as an ideology and practice is not limited to the sphere of professional politics and secular high culture. It also demonstrates how nation can acquire characteristics of a sacred entity, and how the discursive boundaries between national and religious communities can be effaced. In this sense, Serbian case fits a larger pattern of European development of the Interwar period, when many nation-states developed similar close ties between nation and religion, or nation and confession.

The year of St. Sava with its abundance of publications triggered the appearance of several distinct narratives of the life and deeds of St. Sava; these narratives partly reflected different stances towards the Orthodox Church and religion in general that were present both in the narrow Serbian debate and the wider Yugoslav context. This is not to say that opinions on this matter had never been heard before, but prior to 1935 they were rather a number of loosely connected individual statements than a clear pattern of thought which became well represented in the public sphere.

The basic opposition in the interpretations of Sava's historical and cultural significance occurred between those who saw him as primarily a statesman and those who emphasized his activities as a religious figure. Since both opinions had firm ground to be based upon, the stumbling block was the question of what St. Sava's main virtues were. Some of the Serbian clergy were unhappy with the fact that Sava was increasingly seen as a political figure, and a national hero, at the expense of downplaying his Christianity. This basically meant a discursive argument over the question of what is more important: the foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church by Sava and his efforts to bring it to independence from the Greek hierarchs, or the Christian virtues he was representing and promoting by his life and deeds?

[62] Buchenau, *Pravoslavlje* und *Svetosavlje* (see footnote 19), 214.
[63] Medan, Konture Svetosavske ideologije (see footnote 61), 89.

Apart from the Serbian Orthodox Church many secular intellectuals, artists and writers contributed to the glorification of Sava as a national hero and his commemoration in the mid-1930s. Miloš Crnjanski, one of the leading Serbian writers and poets of the Interwar period published a book in 1934 under the simple title *Saint Sava*, in which he told the story of Sava's life and praised his diplomatic success in the field of strengthening the Serbian medieval state[64]. The critical reaction of the Serbian Church followed almost immediately: already in early 1935 Dj. Slijepčević published a detailed and critical review of Crnjanski's work in *Hriščanska Misao*. Among other things Slijepčević was very displeased by the author's emphasis on Sava's nationalism rather than his religious piety. Slijepčević underlined Sava's ability to combine work on the creation of the national state with his being the «spiritual reviver» of the nation and above all Christ's missionary."[65]

Yet another contributor to *Hriščanska Misao* argued along the same lines, this time in a response to a polemical article published in the Zagreb based *Nova Evropa*. There is no doubt that Milutin Devrnja's harsh response to Stedimlija's text had many supporters among not just Serbian clergy, but also general public. Devrnja strongly opposed claims of *Nova Evropa*'s journalist that St. Sava was a powerful statesman, genius diplomat and politician, but had no connection with the true Christianity.[66] Apparently views similar to Crnjanski's and *Nova Evropa*'s disturbed the clergy so much, that few months later Devrnja published an article «On the True Understanding of the Personality of St. Sava» in which he continued to argue against over-emphasizing Sava's political and state successes at the expense of forgetting his spiritual experiences as a monk in Hilandar and his being «a great Man of God, and of great religious and moral character»[67].

Thus the Orthodox Church, or at least some of its clergy, sincerely tried to bring to the light religious and moral arguments in the discussion about St. Sava. One of the conclusions they drew from the debate was that the Church had no more time to waste and that it should act in order to help the people and fight the corrupting de-Christianizing and secularizing influences that resulted, for example, in the misinterpretation of the character of St. Sava. The solution to this problem was seen in better self-organization of the church, establishing and supporting local societies, etc. Roughly at the same time, the Serbian Church became more interested in and supportive of the grass-root movement of the God Worshipers, which was emphasizing exactly these issues.

In 1932, a group of theology students in Belgrade set up a journal under the name *Svetosavlje* which published both the writings of students and their professors from the Theology faculty as well as other departments of Belgrade University. The «core-group» of people involved featured Djoko Slijepčević,

[64] Miloš Crnjanski, Sveti Sava, Beograd 1934.
[65] Djoko Slijepčević, Review on Crnjainski's Sveti Sava, in; Hriščanska Misao, 1935, No.1, 14.
[66] Milutin P. Devrnja, Sava M. Stedimlija o Sv. Savi, in: Hriščanska Misao, 1935, No. 2, 12.
[67] Milutin P. Devrnja, Za istinsko shvatanje ličnosti Sv. Save, in: Hriščanska Misao, 1935, No. 5–6, 20.

Vasilije Kostić and Vlajko Vlahović; the group was influenced by their older colleague Dimitrije Najdanović and through him by Nikolaj Velimirović, at that time already a bishop and a well-respected theologian.[68] As can be easily seen from the journal title the members of the editorial board subscribed to the idea of *Svetosavlje*, at the same time they highlighted questions that were not particularly discussed by Velimirović himself, e.g. the social role the Church should play. The editorial statement in the first issue of the journal read: «Svetosavlje is our distinct, truly devoted service to the man through Christ. And that is our unique goal.»[69]

In terms of political and cultural nationalism Najdanović and Velimirović may be seen as the most radical proponents of the *Svetosavlje* idea. The journal supervised by them gradually grew to be more nationally exclusive, and politically involved. Some of the most curious ideas presented on the pages of the journal are those related to the issue of irreligiosity of Serbian intellectual elite, as well as to the problem of the shrinking of the Church intellectual elite. One of the contributors remarked that in Serbia intelligentsia learns about Orthodoxy from the national songs and poems and through reading Dostoyevsky, which «is enough to inspire, but is not enough to incorporate»[70] intellectuals into the religious community. In general the journal was arguing for more active participation of the Orthodox intellectuals in the ideological struggle in Serbia and Yugoslavia on the one hand, and against such ideologies as fascism and communism on the other.

Conclusions

As the paper has shown, the Serbian Orthodox Church actively reacted to the political and social changes that took place in Yugoslavia in the two decades after the First World War and tried to adjust to the new realities of multinational and polyconfessional state, which was going through rapid modernization process. This applies equally to the steps the Church made as an institution, and the intellectual responses articulated by the clergy independently of the steps taken by the hierarchs. The two nonetheless, were strongly connected, and in this sense the emergence of the ideology of *Svetosavlje* should be seen as both the result of the Church's intellectual and discursive practices, and at the same time as a reaction to the developments in the sphere of national politics that did not belong to the immediate Church context.

Two basic issues that the Church dealt with were first, the degree and form of Church's and clerics' political involvement; and second, the place of Orthodoxy and religion in general Serbia and Yugoslavia. These two problems were intimately linked, as given the problematic landscape of national relations within Yugoslavia, participation in politics primarily meant taking part in national poli-

[68] Djoko Slijepčević, Istorija Srpske Crkve, in: Beograd 1991, Vol. 3, 17.
[69] Naša reć, in: Svetosavlje, 1932, No. 1, 2.
[70] Priest Jovan (Rapajić), without title, in: Svetosavlje, 1937, No. 1. 41.

tics, either through direct intervention or by creating and supporting a way of thinking, which eventually could lead to certain political results. The emergence and eventually political success of the Serbian Orthodox Church's national project became possible in many respects due to the specific political circumstances of the first Yugoslavia. The clash between Serbian and Croatian national elites, the imposition from above of the ideology of integral Yugoslavism and last but not least, the mere existence of a multinational and polyconfessional state constitute the general framework in which the intellectual phenomenon was born and developed.

The Serbian Orthodox Church had to mobilize its resources in order to secure its position of supreme authority in Serbia, and to some extent in Yugoslavia, which meant both the struggle against increasing secularization within Serbia, but also against rivalling Catholic Church, and for the exclusive state support. Given the importance of the national question it is not surprising that the Serbian Church formulated its own national project, which tied the Serbian nation to the Orthodox Christianity on the conceptual level. One of the national project's peculiar characteristics is its ambiguous relationship with politics.

Svetosavlje is not just an ideology that places Orthodoxy at the heart of Serbian nationalism, as it is usually portrayed in secondary literature on this period. It rather is a sophisticated intellectual construct, which has the traits of the *sacralization of nation* on the one hand, and the *nationalization of religion*, on the other. The first aspect has a more theological character and derives from the long Biblical tradition of connecting the nation and the sacred. In this sense, one can agree with Adrian Hastings and other scholars who emphasize the link between Christianity and idea of «chosen people» which influenced the development of modern European nationalisms.

«Nationalization of religion» belongs rather to the sphere of the political, which may explain why it is much more visible in both academic discussions of the phenomenon and also in its contemporary interpretations. The tendency to regard religion to have developed a special form characteristic of the given nation was not a Serbian innovation. Neither was the idea to link national and religious identities. Similar developments were known to many European nations roughly at the same time. To give just one example, Ricarda Vulpius has shown in her recent studies that Ukrainian nationalism, especially in Galicia, was closely linked to religion; furthermore despite apparent advance of secularization even today religious issues remain to be tied to the politics.[71] Similar developments

[71] Ricarda Vulpius, Nationalisierung der Religion. Russifizierungspolitik und ukrainische Nationsbildung 1860–1920, Wiesbaden 2005; Idem, Der Kirchenkampf in der Ukraine als Beispiel für Sakralisierung der Nation und Nationalisierung der Religion (1917–1921), in: Schulze Wessel (ed.), Nationalisierung der Religion und Säkularisierung der Nation (see footnote 13), 101–118.

could be seen also in the Czech lands, where sacralization, secularization and re-sacralization of Jan Hus cult provide an interesting analogy to the South-East European tendencies.[72]

Svetosavlje as a way to conceptualize Serbian nation and Serbian Orthodoxy did not necessarily presuppose active l involvement of the Church in the political life, let alone the participation in designing state policies. Nevertheless, in the circumstances of a bitter national and political struggle, an interpretation of Serbian identity based on religious identity was inevitably translated into political terms and provided an intellectual and, one could argue, spiritual basis for a number of Serbian politicians. In this sense, *Svetosavlje* can and should be read as a political project. It is important to note, that it was through the articulation of this ideology that the Serbian Orthodox Church gained much of its significance as a political force and was able to have a direct impact on the decision-making process on the state level; therefore once again making religion a political issue.

Once religion gained significance on the national level, political leaders were able to build upon the results of religious mobilization to achieve their own ends. That was the case with the initially grass-root evangelical movement of God Worshipers that joined in the late 1930s political movement of Dimitrije Ljotić. Thus, although the clergy argued for «Orthodox activism» in order to first, raise the level of religiosity of population and second, regain the sympathy of Serbian intellectuals, this activism turned out to be much more political that it was originally implied.

Ambiguity was characteristic of *Svetosavlje* also regarding its relationship to Serbian nationalism and Interwar Yugoslavism. *Svetosavlje* clearly regarded Orthodoxy to be an essential part of Serbian national identity, at the same time emphasizing the universal values of Eastern Christianity, and in particular of its Serbian variant. The conflict between universalism, or one could say ecumenicalism, of Orthodoxy and strong adherence to the ideas of nationalism is the long-lasting one. Its roots can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when modern nationalism began to develop in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire.

One could argue that it is precisely this ambiguity of the language and the message *Svetosavlje* had, which enables it to be so popular in present-day Serbia and to win support of a significant part of the population. It can also explain why both the Serbian Orthodox Church and some of the Serbian politicians subscribe to this idea, as it meets the expectations of both the clergy and the nationalists.

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[72] Martin Schulze Wessel, Die Konfessionalisierung der tschechischen Nation, in: Heinz-Gerhard Haupt/Dieter Langewiesche (eds.), Nation und Religion in Europa. Mehrkonfessionelle Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt/New York 2004, 135–149.