



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

WHAT THE CHURCH CAN(NOT) BE ASKED ABOUT

- THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, STATE AND SOCIETY IN SERBIA -

Belgrade, 2005

**This Study is a part of a larger Project "Religion and Society," realized
with the assistance of the Heinrich Böll Foundation**

 HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

1. The Serbian Orthodox Church and Social Issues

In March 2005, Serbian President Boris Tadić stated that “even if the Church is not a part of the state, given the political context we live in, it is certainly a part of the society and should be asked about many vital issues relating both to individuals and the society as a whole”.¹ Tadić’s view that “*the Church should be asked*” caused a considerable controversy and numerous reactions in public. Some public figures, including both the former and present Minister of Religious Affairs, agreed with him, while others (including numerous non-governmental organizations) protested such a statement, regarding it as another call for the clericalization of the Serbian society.

Such a situation reflects the state of confusion which is typical of the post-socialist societies and young democracies as regards the role and status of religious communities in the new political circumstances, including specifically the relationship between church and state. Naturally, unlike the period of socialism, the new role of religious communities in the Balkan states also enables them to deal with various social issues. However, this new role of the church in society entails a number of other, more important and more specific questions which are not so frequent in the similar context. For example, what social issues fall within the jurisdiction of the church and its constitutional framework and restrictions? To what extent are the religious communities able to deal with those problems and what capacity do they have in their solving? To what extent are the answers provided by the church relevant and topical when the current social problems are in question? What is the clerical vision of the modern society? What is the church’s relationship with civil society like: do religious communities see themselves as a part of civil society or not?

During the period of socialism, the state was unilaterally determining the nature of its relationship with religious communities. In post-socialism, the expansion of religious rights and freedoms also meant the increased responsibility of these communities in numerous areas. So, for example, if Serbia’s aim is to accede to the European Union, can the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), or some other religious community, promote anti-European discourse, thus causing confusion and divisions among the believers, that is, the citizens of that state?

After 5 October 2000, the SOC began to provide a new ideological framework for state institutions such as, for example, the army and school, thus filling an ideological vacuum that was created after the collapse of communism, on its own initiative and on an increasing scale. However, its social role, which is more important, is not clear at all. There is still much room for the activities of religious communities, which is provided for under the law (philanthropy, endowing, humanitarian and social work, etc.). On the other hand, the church is very easily politicized or politically instrumentalized not only by conservative politicians, but also by its own prelates, bishops and other high priests who often express its views in public.

¹ Cited according to *Blic Online*, 12 March 2005.

However, an even greater problem is posed by the lack of real contact between the SOC and the society in Serbia, including specifically civil society and autonomous individuals with their rights, special interests and various identities which are created by life in the modern pluralistic world. It is interesting to note that after 5 October 2000, the SOC established an enviable relationship with the Serbian state but, unfortunately, there is still no real contact with the (civil) society, as was done by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, for example, even before the collapse of communism. The representatives of the SOC refer to *people* on a regular basis, but that is almost a metaphysical category, an undifferentiated group or “mass”, which is, to tell the truth, the concept that is absolutely compatible with the ‘tribal’ character of the SOC (Rak, 2005), not to mention any more positive view on their part on civil society and its organizations and initiatives, which are often demonized in public.²

However, what are the real problems of a pluralistic society in Serbia, what interests are represented, what are the political, social, economic and cultural preferences of the citizens of this country? Such issues are not the subject of a coherent debate in the SOC, at least not officially. It is interesting to note that in its official statements there is almost no reference to the *citizens* of Serbia or to its society in that sociological sense, but mostly, almost exclusively, to *people*. To some degree, it is the question of the Church’s inability to cope with the new circumstances, which is characteristic of the post-socialist societies. On the other hand, one can observe a certain political philosophy and ideology of the SOC, which was in the background, in a specific “theatre of shadows” (M. Djordjević), for a long time due to the very fact that it was present very little in the public sphere during the period of socialism.

2. A “Symphony” Between the SOC and the State

At the very beginning of democratic changes, the SOC established contact very fast with the Serbian state, that is, the representatives of its institutions. However, the complexity of a modern society was much less understood. The concepts, such as citizenship and civil society, hardly appear in the statements of the church representatives, its media and information service, and when they appear, that is almost always in a negative context.

² For example, on 24 November 2004, the Information Service of the SOC issued a statement in response to the statement of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia that “the initiative of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Vojislav Koštunica, concerning the introduction of religious education into the educational system, represents a serious violation of the principles of a secular state”. In its response, in addition to using the archaic, medieval language, the SOC characterizes such statements by civil society organizations as “the fear of the Satan and his followers for the past six decades, manifested everywhere under the sky of the country which, only by its name, represented something that the notion of Serbia implies in the full meaning of the word” (*Novosti*, 24 November 2000).

The state and the majority church in Serbia (SOC) established, almost overnight, the relationship that was unknown to them in the past. It was the question of the church's experience with a democratic state. In the past, the SOC had to cope with an authoritarian state (and the "façade of democracy" of the Milošević type) and, before that time, with the state based on a single-party system, communism, where one ideology and one political party had a structural monopoly over the state and society; finally, before the Second World War, in the monarchy the SOC, as its state church, lived with it in a relative symphony. What is new today – and what the Church had a chance to face only in the diaspora, in the democratic countries in which it had its dioceses – is a number of open questions, such as: what is a democratic state, in general; what does the relationship between the church, that is, religious communities, and the state imply in the new circumstances; what is, for example, happening with the Serbian society today? However, with the expansion of its rights in the most recent period, the Church also assumed greater responsibilities. But, how does it see these new responsibilities in the light of the new rights it acquired in the meantime?

The SOC established direct contact with the state institutions as early as November 2000 through the request of the Holy Assembly of Bishops that religious education should be introduced into state schools as a regular subject. The introduction of religious education into schools and, at the end of that same year, granting of approval for the presence of priests in the army institutions brought many other, more important problems to light. The question of introducing religious education into state schools was not confined to the model of religious education which was proposed for the new, liberated society, in which religious communities could "breathe" more freely, have greater scope for their activities and establish much better and more equitable relations with the state. It immediately entailed a number of other questions concerning the religious rights and freedoms in a more general sense.

It is no accident that the 2001 decision on the introduction of religious education, which was confirmed by the government decree, was brought very soon before the Constitutional Court of Serbia. A number of non-governmental organizations and private lawyer's offices lodged an appeal against this decision questioning its constitutionality.³ Namely, before the adoption of the new Serbian constitution and, probably, the law on religious organizations, the decree on the status of seven traditional religious communities came into force (this status was already defined in its preamble and it was evidently aimed at establishing the continuity with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), although the status of those religious communities was not previously defined by legal acts of higher force. Consequently, something affecting religious freedoms and relations between religious communities was prejudiced: for example, if only seven religious communities have the right to

³ Popović, Ljubomir and Vitorović-Umičević, Zorica, "Referat za javnu raspravu (2003) u predmetima IU-177/01, IU-213/02 i IU-214/02", Belgrade, Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia.

organize religious education in state schools, how can it be claimed that religious communities are equal under the law and the Constitution? If they are really equal, why only some of them can realize these rights? Is that the question of discrimination as well as an injustice done to those religious communities and how will their status be regulated in the future? That is one of the problems. The other problem is the attitude towards secular state institutions, such as the state school: are the schools in Serbia still secular institutions in the tradition of enlightenment? Is state school space still “inviolable” and non-confessional; does it have some kind of autonomy, so that religious communities cannot participate in the educational process without certain changes in the relevant legislation?

Those are only some of the questions and the introduction of religious education certainly provided the motive to reflect on all that more seriously. Namely, many things became evident as regards a general relationship between church and state. On the one hand, the SOC succeeded in becoming an equal partner with the state in the educational process. The entry of the Theological Faculty into the University was also problematic in terms of the academic criteria and autonomy of the university, not to mention the observance of human rights, considering its enrolment policy according to which only Orthodox students, with the blessing of the appropriate bishop, can enrol at this faculty of Belgrade University.

The redefining of relations between state and church is also observed through the new relationship between the SOC and the Army of Serbia and Montenegro. At the end of December 2000 already, the Directorate of Morale of the General Staff of the then Army of Yugoslavia organized a round table at which it supported the ‘introduction of religion into the Army’: “It is necessary to bring military chaplains of the Orthodox faith into the Army of Yugoslavia”, because “although they are equal before the law, the religions in our society are not equal when our national culture and history are in question. In other words, they have not made an equal contribution to national culture and the preservation of the national authenticity and state independence of the Serbian people.” In this regard, they also used the terms such as “historical and cultural significance” and “continuity”, that is, certain categories which are both legal and value ones. Before long, the bishop for a liaison with the army was appointed (Porfirije). In April 2002, he led the army delegation to Chilandar. In 2004, in the monastery dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin near Čačak, the first collective baptism of officers and soldiers of a military unit in Serbia was organized.

The Army of Serbia and Montenegro (which was – probably more than any other state institution - ideologically profiled in socialism) embraced Orthodoxy, one new ideology and cultural and historical mission almost overnight. It is clear that, immediately after the October changes, a longer-term and more stable relationship was established. Today, for example, in interviews with the bishops of the SOC in some “national” journals, it is openly

spoken about a “special war” which is waged against the church and the army by new “anticlerical ideologists”.⁴

At the same time, the SOC displays the amazing lack of sensitivity to the problems of modern society and developments in inter-church and inter-religious dialogue in today’s world, failing to distinguish between the communist ideology and modern forms of secularization having their origins in European enlightenment. The anti-ecumenical stand of a great number of church representatives, which was also reflected in the readiness of the SOC to uphold the visit of the late Pope John Paul II to Belgrade, as well as rigid adherence to the fundamentals of their faith, which cannot be reinterpreted in the spirit of the new times, are only some examples of the present-day exclusivism of the SOC.

The political intention of the new Serbian Government with Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica also became evident in the procedure of preparing the *Draft Law on the Freedom of Religion, Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Associations* (in July 2004), under which the state anticipated great concessions for the Church, including the immunity of the clergy before public authorities. However, after severe criticism in public, this *Draft Law* was withdrawn from the procedure. In that document, its author defines the SOC euphemistically as *primus inter pares* relative to other religious communities, whereby it is clear that, in practice, the SOC would have the full authority to decide who has the right to worship God on its “centuries-long territory”, with the logistic support of the state. Moreover, the Serbian Ministry of Religious Affairs behaves almost like an external government “service” of the SOC. In fact, the difference between church and state in this respect is becoming increasingly less clear. The political power structures are increasingly adjusting to the religious ones and vice versa, thus paving the way for the clericalization of the society.

It is interesting to note that its discriminatory intention could be perceived from the very title of this *Draft Law*. Religious communities are classified into three categories and the text of this document shows clearly that they will not have equal rights even when they are registered. Naturally, the authors do not say anything as to whether the future Serbian Constitution will be modified in accordance with their document (i.e. whether the Constitution will also state openly and unambiguously that religious communities in Serbia *are not equal before the law*). Moreover, in the language of the *Draft Law* one can recognize theological terminology which is absolutely inappropriate for modern legal acts. The words *bogoslužbeni* (God-serving), *bogomolje* (places of worship), *sveštenoslužitelji* (servants of the church), *verski dostojanstvenici* (religious dignitaries), *žarišta duhovnosti* (focal points of spirituality), *duhovna misija* (spiritual mission), etc. come from the Orthodox vocabulary rather than from the civic one. According to that legal document, the state is obliged to provide a number of guarantees to churches (e.g. religious education in state schools), while religious communities and their officials are almost

⁴ See, for example, the interview of Bishop Porfirije entitled *Narod žedan Istinitog Boga* (The People Is Thirsty for the True God) in the journal *Evropa nacija*, No. 925.

untouchable: they are exempted from paying tax and are guaranteed immunity before public authorities.⁵ The churches in Serbia hardly had such autonomy and privileges in the kingdom.

Just as the attempts were made in the period of socialism to strengthen the process of secularization ideologically, the state and the SOC are now making concerted efforts to accelerate the process of de-secularization in Serbia, but in an equally forceful way, by making quasi-theoretical and ideological interventions (even from the ministerial level) in the fields of education and culture, as well as in public life, in general. The private world-view of the former Minister of Education, Ljiljana Čolić (now the President of the Management Board of Studio B), had to be imposed by a decree as the world-view of schoolchildren in Serbia. Namely, in the spirit of the *fundamentalist* refutation of the theory of evolution and the affirmation of creationism, the Minister of Education in the Vojislav Koštunica Government tried to eliminate Darwin's theory of evolution from the syllabi by a "private decree". At the same time, its office made a great effort to organize religious education in Serbian schools at the expense of civic education, although both of them had an equal status as elective subjects until then. This kind of "theoretical decisions" in education reminds us especially of the period of communism. So much interventionism in the field of education in Serbia was not recorded even under the regime of Slobodan Milošević, whose government, to tell the truth, was not particularly interested in education and science.

To some extent, leniency and ingratiation with the Serbian church were also observed in the previous Serbian Government (DOS). So, for example, at the reception, which was hosted by the Holy Synod of Bishops on 29 January 2002, the then Serbian Minister of Religious Affairs, Vojislav Milovanović, "submitted the report on the Government's activities during the first year of its term to His Holiness the Serbian Patriarch Pavle and members of the Holy Synod of Bishops". At the Serbian Government's reception given for members of the Holy Synod of Bishops on 15 May 2001, this Minister expressed "his satisfaction that a *symphony between state and church authority was established* after so many years" (underlined by M.V.).

One of the most recent examples of the Church's interference with the affairs of state, which resembled a cacophony rather than a symphony, was certainly the appeal of the Holy Synod of Bishops to the public on 1 October 2004, in which it was stated that "the Synod calls all political factors in Serbia not to demand from the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija to participate in the elections for the government bodies there". That same month, Patriarch Pavle wrote to Serbian President Boris Tadić and Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica appealing to them "not to demand from what remains of the persecuted and martyred Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija to participate in their elections". Koštunica answered positively to that appeal and informed the

⁵ The full text of the 2004 Draft Law on the Freedom of Religion, Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Associations is accessible on the website: www.sanoptikum.org.yu/drustvo/o_nama/pravni_akti/zakon_o_slobodi_vere.htm.

Patriarch in writing that “he has no right as the Prime Minister to ask the Serbs to go to the polls”, while Tadić still asked the Kosovo Serbs to vote on 5 October 2004. That same day, Bishop Artemije of Raška and Prizren sent an open letter to President Tadić in which he qualified his act as “a treason committed by the President of our homeland”.

Such interference of the Church with the affairs of state was not recorded since the establishment of democracy in Serbia. On the Serbian side, the SOC is still one of the leading political actors in Kosovo. In the message of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the SOC concerning the Kosovo negotiations of November 2005, it is openly warned that “the act of seizing Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia, no matter how concealed, would have, in essence, the character of occupation”.⁶ Moreover, Bishop Artemije also criticized the head of UNMIK in Kosovo, Soeren Jessen Petersen, using an unusually sharp and insulting tone. It is evident that the Serbian Government does not see any problem in the interference of the SOC with the affairs of state in such an active and biased way.

3. The New Law

The already mentioned *Draft Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations and Associations* of July 2004 was certainly an indicator of this “reciprocal love” between church and state. After 2000, several drafts of those laws were placed on the agenda and some of them also underwent parliamentary procedure. However, when the previous federal state (FRY) was transformed, the first of those drafts lost its relevance for the new state union, so that the new republican law on the freedom of religion and religious organizations was drafted. Even this draft law, which became accessible to the public in the summer of 2004, was not the subject of any special debate and the Ministry of Religious Affairs itself, which had proposed it, did not initiate any more significant debate either. However, severe criticism came from independent intellectuals and non-governmental organizations which saw in this draft law a significant shift to the clericalization of the Serbian society. On this occasion, the state, that is, the relevant Ministry anticipated a number of concessions to the Church, which it actually did not ask for. Under this draft law, the state renounces many things what a modern, secular liberal-democratic state should not do and what is not typical of it. It is the question of its stand on the clergy’s immunity, which is without precedent in such legal documents, as well as of many other issues concerning the Church’s newly acquired rights. The Church has suddenly become a public institution financed from the government budget. This is going so far that one article of this draft law stipulates that local governments are obliged to call a referendum if so requested by a religious organization. Consequently, the difference between church and state here is becoming increasingly less clear. The political power structures are increasingly adjusting to the ecclesiastical structure and vice versa, thus opening the path to the clericalization of the society.

⁶ *Danas*, 5-6 November 2005, p. 3.

In the meantime, the draft law was revised to a degree, but it is not quite clear what is going to happen in the future. In Serbia there has been no such law since 1993. In the period 1977-1993, there was the law on the legal status of religious communities, so that some more liberal experts argue that such a law is not necessary and that the relationship between church and state, based on the principles of equality and religious freedoms, can simply be defined by the constitution. In such a case, religious communities would find their place on the “religious market” by themselves. But, the mentioned draft law of 2004 was, in large measure, the indicator of that new relationship between state and church.

The post-October changes, involving the new attitude of the state towards religious communities and, thus, towards the Serbian Orthodox Church, are something that has already been seen in other post-socialist states and societies. What was specific in our case, however, was a certain state of confusion in the legal sphere, which was displayed both by the state and the church. It seems that it was not sufficiently understood what was meant by religious rights and freedoms and that they should imply, for example, both the right *to believe* and the right *not to believe*. The contemporary understanding of religious rights and freedoms means that a citizen has the right to participate in a religious service, as well as the right not to participate in it. Someone’s children may or may not take religious instruction. Consequently, the modern concept of religious freedoms implies both aspects of religious rights and freedoms: the freedom of religion and freedom *from* religion. That was clearly stated in the First Amendment to the US Constitution as early as 1971: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. However, that aspect of religious freedoms according to which someone *may not* participate in religious activities is frequently neglected: children, for example, children do not have to be present during a religious service even if it is the question of the school’s patron saint’s day. That right has not been adequately understood in Serbia or is deliberately disregarded, and this issue should be clarified in full.

If our situation is compared with that in other post-socialist countries, it will be realized that the adoption of the laws on religious freedoms in these countries preceded the discussion about the model of religious education that should be introduced into state schools. Here the decree was adopted first and then the appropriate law was drafted. Consequently, the sequence of steps was reverse and all this is not just the matter of procedure, but is also a vital issue. In this regard, there must be some consensus and public debate, say, within the educational process. The participants in such a public debate should be students, teachers, the Ministry of Education and many other actors, that is, experts on this subject: sociologists, psychologists and educators, who will help that all this is understood before making a decision. It is also important to know the impact of that decision. What is, for example, its impact on the future status of the state; whether the state will be separated from the church or not. As for our draft laws, it was stipulated that “there is no state religion” only in the 2002 version (Article 2). In other draft laws, up to the fourth version, such

a status was not defined.⁷ In all those drafts seven traditional religious communities were singled out and their continuity relative to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was confirmed. But, how many states in this territory were changed after that Kingdom? And why the continuity should be established just with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia? Why one model, which was typical of the monarchy, that is, a different system of government, was selected? Or why just those seven religious communities were singled out? The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the state in which the SOC enjoyed the status of a state church. Does that mean that the Republic of Serbia will also be constituted soon as the state with a state church? The very fact that this case was brought before the Constitutional Court of Serbia speaks about the complexity of the whole problem.

The fourth version of the Draft Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities (2005)⁸ can be regarded as an improvement over the previous draft laws only to a degree. The quota set for the registration of a religious community (it was even 1000 in the 2004 draft law!) is omitted, while in Article 5, as we have seen, it is stipulated for the first time that “religious communities shall be equal and independent of the state”. However, the new version also contains the discriminatory classification of religious communities into traditional churches, historical religious communities, confessional communities, etc. Under this Draft Law, the religions in Serbia would still be discriminated when they apply for registration⁹, while Article 24 stipulates once again that “in the performance of religious activities, the clergy shall be guaranteed full freedom, autonomy and *immunity before public authorities*”. Article 46 still stipulates the calling of a referendum at the local level if so requested by a religious community. Why the church or religious community should be above other institutions in this respect? Why the same rights are not granted to other, civic organizations and initiatives?

Insofar as value standards are concerned, it should be noted, for example, that although a more general and appropriate formulation “religious, cultural and humanist heritage” is given in the preamble to the European Constitution (without special emphasis on Christian heritage), Article 11 of our Draft Law emphasizes traditional churches in Serbia as the “carriers of European *Christian* culture”. However, the contribution to European culture by the Jewish and Islamic Religious Communities is not emphasized (Article 15-17).

⁷ In the fourth version it was only stated that religious communities would be equal and independent of the state (Article 5).

⁸ It is the question of the 2005 document, which is known as the *Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities* (Draft).

⁹ For example, nontraditional religious communities would have to submit a number of special documents for registration, including the evidence of the permanent source of income (Article 60).

In their case, the legislator only “*establishes* the continuity”¹⁰ of the legal subjectivity acquired in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The fifth and latest version of the Draft Law is still inaccessible to the professional and academic circles, as well as to the general public in Serbia. Otherwise, the whole process concerning the preparation of these draft laws is nontransparent. The new drafts are not posted on the website of the Ministry of Religious Affairs nor are they accessible in some other way. Moreover, there are indications that the representatives of the SOC participate directly in the preparation of this latest, fifth version of the Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, although this is a legal document which is proposed and adopted by *state* institutions.

4. The Attitude Towards Democracy and Secularization

From a sociological viewpoint, the late 1980s and early 1990s in Serbia can be regarded as the period of de-secularization of the society, whereby the de-secularization of society was understood primarily as a *social* process. However, in the most recent period, marked by the Koštunica Government, one can observe a certain shift to clericalization. Namely, the Church is being increasingly present in the area of public policy and state affairs. On the one hand, the state has assumed a much more cooperative attitude towards the Church than one might expect from a secular society, because secularization in our country was not only imposed through an atheist, communist ideology; rather, it is a *social* process which Europe underwent a long time ago.

In Serbia today, there is close *political* cooperation between state and church, although its citizens would probably expect from the SOC to take a stand on a number of *social* issues which are still burdening Serbia. However, some more coherent stand on social issues within the SOC is still not in sight. Its relationship with a criminal state in the past has not been cleared up either. All things considered, the SOC does not regard this as a special problem. Instead, its great problems are secularization, democratization of the society, civil sector and non-governmental organizations. When one looks at various statements issued by the Information Service of the SOC, it can be concluded that the Church regards secularization as some kind of evil which was done to the society and that it “reduced Serbia to poverty”. At the same time, it does not consider the possibility that disastrous politics, war, destruction and crime reduced Serbia to poverty, rather than secularization. In those statements, it is also said that “the disastrous effects of democracy are already felt on the body of the Serbian people”. When those statements are individually considered, it becomes clear that they contain different views of the bishops and other church representatives. At times, those statements are ambiguous and even contradictory. However, if one considers their cumulative effect, it can be concluded that it is mostly the question of demonizing civil society and small religious communities, as well as of a negative attitude towards democratization and secularization. All that can be found in the official, public

¹⁰ Note the use of the archaic, Orthodox theological term *vaspostaviti* (establish) in the text of the Law.

discourse of the SOC. In fact, all that provides guidance as to how the Church views our society and perceives the state, in general.

Like other Orthodox churches, the Serbian Orthodox Church also invokes the principle of conciliarity as the key principle of its activities, but none of those local churches have held any council of ecumenical significance since the 8th century, that is, for more than 1200 years. The Serbian Church has almost no answers to the questions of the modern world, but responds mostly negatively to that world, which it hardly understands, because it does not fit into the dogmas from the time of Constantine or Nemanja. For example, present-day Europe is increasingly more evidently returning to its pre-Constantine, pluralist roots, while the SOC is still looking at the Nemanjić state, or the Christian church from the time of ecumenical councils as its model, like the followers of Islamic Selefism, who are turning to the original caliphate.

5. The Testamentary Pattern

In Serbia today, one can also observe among younger generations a rather evident abandonment of the model of a pluralistic society, which is actually the product of enlightenment, as well as the shift to a monistic, archaic, “testamentary” pattern, which is probably best evidenced by the document of 15 February 2004, which is known as the *Draft Načertanije of the National Programme of the Serbian Youth for the 21st Century*. It is the question of the document which was proposed and adopted by the Serbian Youth Assembly (on the Transfiguration Day in 2004). One of the leaders of this Assembly, Branimir Nešić, presented the *Načertanije* at the Spiritual Academy entitled “What Will We Have to Stand up with Before Karadjordje...”, which was held at the Trade Union Hall on the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin. The participants were also the representatives of the SOC, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović and retired Bishop Atanasije Jevtić, together with the army representatives and the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Srpska. The *Draft Načertanije* has 13 points¹¹: “Item 1: Svetosavlje (the teachings of Saint Sava) must enter all pores of our being and make it worthy that we can call ourselves Saint Sava’s descendants... Item 3: The Serbian householder must be resurrected... Item 9: The well-organized parish shall have an unlimited influence on social reality, up to political authority”, etc. According to this document, which is also supported by the SOC, the future of the Serbian state should be based on the “Svetosavlje, Kosovo testament, reassessment of the hitherto Serbian culture, education and history, relations with others, creation of the elite, preservation of the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet, restoration of the Serbian village, patriarchal family, parish community, church-people’s assemblies, democracy and monarchy”.¹²

The ten-point Proclamation of the First Serbian Orthodox Youth Assembly, which was held at the Belgrade University, on 6 December 2001, entitled *The Testamentary Gate – the Position of the National Youth*, was written in a similar tone. In continuation, we give the full text of this document:

¹¹ For more detail see the article by Jelena Tasić in *Danas*, 16 February 2004, p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

1. The foundation of our entire endeavour is belief in God and the Serbian Testament is the way in which we act through that belief.
2. The highest ideals of the Serbian Testament for us are, in addition to Saint Sava, Saint Simeon the Myrrhflowing and Saint Prince Lazar, Saint Nikolaj Žicki and Saint Justin Ćeljski; all other saints and heroes from our past are here in order to inspire us and encourage us in the defence of our Homeland.
3. Our aim is Elevated Serbia, which will be able to unite all Serbs wherever they are thanks to its spiritual elevation; in our struggle for that aim we are only allowed to use the God-blessed means of love, justice and chastity.
4. We do not divide our national, anticommunist and monarchist forces on the basis of the events from the Second World War; we pray for the peace of the souls of all those who gave their lives for the Homeland, in such a way as we are advised by Saint Nikolaj Žicki.
5. We propagate uncompromising anticommunism and recognize the communist skill in putting on new ideological-party masks.
6. We do not depart from the spiritual vertical of Serbian history: God-King-Householder, and believe in the lasting value of the householder's world-view.
7. We do not hate other people, we love ours; we do not hate other faiths, we love ours; we do not despise anything that is someone else's, we cherish what is ours. Whatever is noble in others belongs to us, Christians – said Saint Justin the Philosopher as early as the 2nd century.
8. The defence of the faith and nation is the defence of civil rights and freedoms, the defence of each individual personality, because the “new world order”, based on the worship of the “golden calf” and anationality of the new globalistic elites, will be more totalitarian than all other totalitarianisms taken as a whole, since it will attack one's personality and the family by using all possible means – from media idiotization, through the propagation of the right to perversion, to totalitarian technotronic control over the life of each individual.
9. In contrast to the extra-testamentary history of the Serbs from Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić, through Svetozar Marković and Jovan Skerlić, to Dobrica Ćosić and the New Age, we emphasize the cultural history of the Serbian Testament from Saint Sava and Saint Stefan the Tall, through Lukijan Mušicki and Njegoš, to Saint Bishop Nikolaj Žicki and Saint Justin Ćeljski.
10. We do not trust our thoughts and muscles, we trust the Living and True God, the God of Justice to Whom our national anthem sings.¹³

¹³ Source: www.dverisrpske.com/sabor/proglas.htm. Published in: Lukić-Vuković, 2005, pp. 214-215. *The Second Letter to Haralampije*, or the Studenica Declaration of the Serbian Youth Assembly, issued on 6 May 2003, was also written in a similar spirit (Lukić-Vuković, 2005, pp. 215-217).

At first glance already one can observe the eschatological-Messianic tone of this “Serbian testament” in which, in an artificial and archaic manner, a dualistic and Manichean division of Serbian history into testamentary and extra-testamentary one has been made. Testamentary history includes all Serbian saints, from Saint Sava, Saint Simeon and Prince Lazar to the holy Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović, while extra-testamentary history includes Serbian enlighteners, such as Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić, as well as so-called “New Age ideologists”, “new ideologists” or “new atheists”, who are criticized in similar statements on an increasing scale.¹⁴ In this proclamation of the national youth there is also no departure from “the spiritual vertical of Serbian history”, based on the God-King-Householder model, which has metaphysical-political connotations.

In their public appearances, the representatives of the Srpski Sabor Dveri organization, which acts with the blessing of the Serbian Patriarchate and organizes public forums at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, with the support of the journal *Pravoslavlje* and the Information Service of the SOC, advocate “the formation of the Orthodox public opinion”.¹⁵ Moreover, like one-time social realists, they also advance ideological views on art: “To be meaningful, art must have the Orthodox dimension” (Lazić, 2005).

6. The Attitude of the SOC Towards Religious Pluralism and Ecumenism

The revival of a monistic testamentary pattern at the beginning of the 21st century, as well as the principle of conciliarity, which is also observed by the current Koštunica Government (the term “concentration government” and the like correspond to such a concept of government) is the result of abandoning the modern pluralist model of society, which is the legacy of European enlightenment. It is no accident that, in such a context, the most severe criticism is levelled just at Serbian enlighteners, such as Dositej, or pluralist and Europe-oriented “new ideologists”, “eurowhiners“, “New Agers”, independent intellectuals and activists in non-governmental organizations. In a metaphysical and apocalyptic tone, the views of those “New Agers” are rejected as non-Christian, anti-Christian, globalistic, western and even pro-communist. There is no doubt that the concept of a pluralistic society which is, as opposed to the archaic notion of conciliarity, supported by those “anti-clerical ideologists”, anticipates political, social, cultural, as well as religious pluralism as the legacy of enlightenment and a modern liberal-democratic state.

Insofar as religion is concerned, it is necessary to distinguish among *theological* religious pluralism (which refers to the views on the truthfulness and authenticity of other religions), *social* religious pluralism (relations in the society with the religious “other”) and *public* religious pluralism (the attitude of

¹⁴ See, for example, the six-point Proclamation of Srpski Sabor Dveri of 5 October 2005, which is the answer to the appeal of a group of Serbian intellectuals, “For a New Political Action“, which was published on the eve of 5 October 2005.

¹⁵ The First Orthodox Journalists’ Council at the Theological Faculty in Belgrade.

the state towards religious diversity and plurality, including the ways in which their presence in the public sphere is regulated).¹⁶ Plurality, as the state of affairs, does not necessarily imply pluralism, as a positive attitude toward such a state of affairs. There are religiously plural societies in which the idea of religious pluralism is not widely supported. Moreover, there are plural societies which do not see any problem in the theological and social pluralism of religions, but the states themselves impose legal restrictions under their laws on the freedom of religion and status of religious organizations. We have seen, for example, that all post-October draft laws on religious communities in Serbia recognize only seven religious organizations as traditional or historical ones, while all others have to undergo the registration procedure. Such a policy towards religious communities is based on the tradition of the prewar monarchy and the role and place of the SOC as a state church in that political system.¹⁷ Today, under the influence of the SOC and its lobbying with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the democratic *Republic* of Serbia has accepted the continuity with an absolutely different state with an absolutely different system of government.

The church and state restrictions with respect to religious pluralism on the domestic plane are also accompanied by a negative attitude towards ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue at the regional and international levels, in principle.

As early as 1995, for example, the Diocese of Raška and Prizren of the SOC published the book of Hieromonk Sava Janjić *Ekumenizam i vreme apostasije* (Ecumenism and the Age of Apostasy).¹⁸ As his first motto, Janjić cites the following passage from the epistle of the Basil the Great: “We are standing up for our common Tradition, for the wealth of the healthy faith we have received from the Fathers”, and then, in the first sentence already, he presents quite an exclusivist view: “There is a small number of people in the world today who know and believe that *only* the Orthodox Church has preserved the authentic image of the God-Man Christ and the wealth of His teachings” (Janjić, 1995: 5, underlined by M.V.). In the next sentence he also says that “*our* Church,

¹⁶ See: Moe, 2004.

¹⁷ In Article 14 of the Draft Law on the Freedom of Religion, Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Associations (i.e. in its second version of July 2004), for example, this continuity with the kingdom is explicitly formulated: “By establishing the continuity of the legal subjectivity and status acquired in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia under this Law, the status of church and religious community as a public organization shall be enjoyed by: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community, the Catholic Church, the Jewish Religious Community, the Slovak Evangelical Church a.v., the Christian Reform Church and the Evangelical Christian Church, a.v.”

¹⁸ Father Sava Janjić is a protosyncellus who is also well-known outside the ecclesiastical circles due to his religious as well as political activities in Kosovo, as one of the associates of Bishop Artemije. Due to his talent for informatics, Father Janjić is also known among computer enthusiasts as a *cybermonk*.

which is also called the One, Holy and Catholic (conciliary) Church is *the only one which has the right to call itself Orthodox* (*ibid.*, underlined by M.V.). And then: “*There is no doubt that the True and Only Church founded by the Lord is just the one which is impeccably preserving Christ’s truth.* In the turbulent history of Christ’s Church there were many attempts to adjust the word of the Gospel to the fallen, sinned man, to *reinterpret* the Gospel, but the Church has succeeded in preserving its chastity, *unspoiled by the spirit of this world, and it has always been and will always be alien to this world and this century.* Therefore, traditionalism, which has a rather negative connotation nowadays, is one of the most important attributes of the Orthodox Church (*ibid.*, underlined by M.V.).

It is hard to imagine that any bishop of the SOC would now challenge the above mentioned view. It shows clearly the typical exclusivism of the SOC, which never questions its tradition and its interpretation of that tradition, while at the same time challenging all alternative interpretations in Christianity. Moreover, in his polemics against ecumenism, the author claims that “the basic aim of the ecumenical movement is the REINTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIANITY or, in other words, the total destruction of Orthodoxy” (Janjić, 1995: 95). Consequently, what is at work here is some kind of *hermeneutic exclusivism and hegemonism*, which derives its strength from the belief that everything that is not Orthodox is essentially wrong or, in other words, it is a heresy. And the greatest danger to the Orthodox Church comes, according to Janjić, from the “panheresy of ecumenism”. However, the author pits against that “panheresy” his view which is no less totalitarian: “the unity of all people is possible only in the Orthodox Church” (*ibid.*).

These views are based on the work of one of the two greatest modern Serbian Orthodox theologians whose legitimacy is never called into question. That is Awa Justin Popović, who calls the leading ecumenical organization – the World Council of Churches – “a heretical, humanistic and anthropolatric assembly consisting of 263 heresies, each of which means spiritual death”. He also holds that this organization is “nothing else but the revival of godless idolatry” (Janjić, 1995: 16). According to Janjić, ecumenism reinterprets Christianity in the spirit of the “New Age” and, “thus, opens the door of the Church to all other heresies and novelties” (Janjić, 1995: 7). For this reason, apart from Europe and the West, Eastern Constantinople has also “fallen into the heresy of ecumenism” (Janjić, 1995: 87).

In the SOC today, there are, in general, at least two dominant views on ecumenism. The first is this extremist view that ecumenism is “panheresy” and that heresy is everything that is not Orthodoxy, which could be related to the zealous prevention of the Anglican service in the chapel of the Serbian Patriarchate on Christmas in 2002. The second view holds that there is scope for the development of ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church and, possibly, with some other traditional religious communities in Serbia (e.g. the Evangelical Church and the Reform Christian Church). However, the openness to small religious communities is rare, almost non-existent, even in the Church’s more liberal circles. Those are mostly evangelical protestant

denominations which are publicly discriminated and proclaimed sects or a satanic influence from the West by the SOC and, as of recently, by the state.

Insofar as the Muslims and Jews in Serbia are concerned, one can also occasionally hear anti-Jewish and anti-Islamic discourse from the extremist priests' and bishops' circles. The non-governmental organization Civic Initiatives from Belgrade brought charges against Bishop Atanasije Jevtić due to his racist anti-Islamic speech in Valjevo in the summer of 2004¹⁹. Let us mention one more example of anti-Islamism in Serbia. Apart from losses in human lives and the new exodus of the Serbs from the province, ethnic violence in Kosovo and Metohija, which broke out on 17 March 2004, resulted in the destruction of a great number of Orthodox churches and other sacral buildings of historical value. The next day (on 18 March), these tragic events in Kosovo triggered an absolutely inappropriate, irrational and violent anti-Islamic reaction in several cities in Serbia. The first result of that retaliatory act was the burning of mosques and other sacral buildings of the Islamic Religious Community in Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad. In addition to religious buildings, offices and libraries of the Islamic Religious Community, invaluable cultural and historical monuments were also destroyed. Moreover, a few days after the destruction of the Belgrade and Niš mosques, the management of the Military Museum in Belgrade, on Kalemegdan, ordered the destruction of nišans from the 15th and 16th centuries, authentic and very rare tombstones in the Balkans which date from the Turkish period. Consequently, one military institution in Serbia and Montenegro also participated in the vandalistic acts of a group of destructive, mostly younger citizens in Niš and Belgrade.

In this case, it was not only the question of inter-religious intolerance but, in particular, of the indifferent attitude of the state institutions and judiciary towards the acts of inter-religious hatred and violence. After the burning of the Islam-Aga mosque in Niš there was no hearing before the competent court for 15 months. Out of eleven indicted five did not appear at the fifth and last hearing. Their lawyer explained that those were young people who had to sleep a little longer in the morning, so that the court should have taken this into account when scheduling the morning sessions. What we have here is the total disregard of the institution of court, as well as the proverbial inefficiency of our judiciary. In the meantime, the trial was finished, but the indicted were not punished as they deserved: eight of them were sentenced to 3-5 month imprisonment and two were acquitted. Therefore, it is no wonder that, after the pronouncement of the verdict, the indicted were singing: "Death to Muslims!"²⁰ As for the Director of the Military Museum, it is only known that he was removed from that position, but it is not known whether a criminal or disciplinary action against him was initiated.

Unfortunately, such a conduct of the competent institutions is in conformity with the general condition of the Serbian society, including ethnocentrism and

¹⁹ This speech was published by Belgrade's weekly *Vreme* in the article "Justin je fino mirisao" (Justin Smelled Fine), 15 April 2004, pp. 24-25.

²⁰ *Danas*, 27 July 2005, p. 3.

a great social distance vis-à-vis other national and religious communities. According to the latest UNDP Human Development Report for Serbia²¹, the greatest social distance is kept vis-à-vis the Muslims/Bosniaks (31.3%) and Albanians (41.4%). In 2004, even 46% of the inhabitants of Serbia would not agree to the building of a mosque in their place of residence, while 23% had an ambivalent attitude towards this. Consequently, only 30% would agree to have a mosque in their city.²² Ethnocentrism is especially pronounced among the young people aged 20-23. It is symptomatic that the distance towards atheists is also unusually high: even 30% of citizens would be against the marriage with an atheist; 25% does not want atheists to educate their children, while 15% would not associate with them!

During the 1990s as well as today, anti-Semitism in Serbia was especially evident at the public forums and in the proclamations issued by paraecclesiastical organizations and some political parties, in private publishing, statements made by some priests and bishops, as well as through the concrete activities of hooligans who write anti-Semitic graffiti or desecrate Jewish graveyards and other buildings of religious and cultural significance in Serbia. However, in Novi Sad, in November 2005, incidents and violence were also provoked by the organized neo-Nazi group National Guard (Nacionalni stroj). The authorities responded rather quickly in the case of their intrusion and violence at the Philosophical Faculty in Novi Sad and at the concert of KC Gradilište, but the pronounced sentences were just symbolic once again. Namely, their violence was not qualified as a criminal offence, but as a disciplinary one. They even received indirect support from Milorad Mirčić, an official of the Serbian Radical Party and the President of the Republican Assembly Security Committee. Namely, for the intrusion of 25 neo-Nazis into the Philosophical Faculty, he condemned, in the first place, Professor Milenko Perović who organized that anti-fascist forum.

During the early 1990s, under conditions of war and nationalist euphoria in Serbia, anti-Semitism was first revived in some political and religious circles. It was the question of the so-called “new left and right” (JUL, Radicals), as well as the clero-nationalist, Ljotić and Nedić movements in present-day Serbia. The former were the loudest as regards “the world conspiracy against the Serbs” and hegemony of the new world order (*TV Palma, Velika Srbija*), while the latter are known for a number of articles in the journals such as *Logos* and *Pravoslavlje*. So, for example, in its issue No. 16/1994, Šešelj’s *Velika Srbija* published *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, while on TV Palma the Jews were accused of being “murderers and criminals” (David, 2000: 33). Those TV programmes propagated “theories” that present-day Jews (Ashkenazi) are actually “false Jews” and descendants of the Khazars, a Turkish tribe which converted to Judaism, while the Serbian Jews were requested to apologize for the actions of the US Administration, including the bombing of Yugoslavia (David, 2000: 33)! The Dean of the Philological Faculty in Belgrade, Professor Radmilo Marojević, even wrote that “in Serbian culture and science there is the fifth column of the world’s Judeo-Masonic project”. In *Logos*, the journal

²¹ The results of this research were published in the daily *Danas*, 3-4 October 2005, p. 16.

²² *Ibid.*

published by students of the Theological Faculty of the SOC, it was claimed that there was “a planetary Jewish conspiracy against Christian Orthodoxy, especially against the Serbian people and Russia” (David, 2000: 33). In one issue of *Pravoslavlje* in 1994, a member of the Serbian National Renewal called the Jews “the worst people that deserves despise” and regretted that there was no inquisition any more (Gredelj, 1999: 161). After publishing the article *Jevreji ponovo razapinju Hrista* (The Jews Are Crucifying Christ Again), the editor of this journal was removed from that position. However, this did not prevent hooligans to write graffiti at the Jewish cemetery and on the synagogue, such as: “Death to Jews!” and “Long Live Adolf Hitler!” (David, 2000: 33). A long time ago, researchers observed a correlation between anti-Semitism and one’s authoritarian and antidemocratic political orientation (Mihailović and Mihailović, 1969: 257), which was especially suitable for the creation or revival of various pseudomyths, as well as for ethnic, racial and religious intolerance in Milošević’s Serbia.

Unfortunately, in Belgrade’s book shops one can still find copies of the new editions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (2001), while in some of those book shops in the centre of the city the paraecclesiastical publisher Dr Ratibor Djurdjević distributes anti-Semitic pamphlets from his edition *Judaica*. Some of those pamphlets are entitled *Centuries-Old Malice: How Is Britain Secretly Governed by Judeans; The Conspiracy of Conspiracies: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion Before the Court in Berne; Enemies of Mankind: The Hidden History of Judean Criminals; Holocaust: The Dogma of Judaism* and the like. Over 140 titles of this kind were recorded only in Belgrade.²³ It is not known whether the SOC ever condemned the publishing and distribution of this literature in which the identity and historical memories of members of a “traditional” religious community in Serbia are again attacked in the most morbid and monstrous way, in the Ljotić style.

8. The Attitude Towards Europe and the West

Apart from pronounced anti-ecumenism, as well as intolerance against small religious communities, the SOC also emphasizes the fear of the destruction of the “true faith” through open resistance to the secularization of the modern world, especially the western one. Instead of initiating a dialogue with that world, the SOC decides for the official condemnation of secularization. So, for example, the programme of *de-secularization* of the Serbian society has recently been announced from a high position in the hierarchy of the SOC – the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral. Moreover, in November 2000, the Information Service of the SOC announced that “secularization reduced Serbia and its people to poverty... As for the democratic system, its bruises on the body of the Serbian people are only now becoming evident”. Consequently, the SOC does not see any problem in destructive and suicidal politics, which it also supported wholeheartedly during the war years. On the other hand, the imposition of a certain *programme of de-secularization* as a new political ideology, with the government’s assistance, resembles very

²³ *The interview of Filip David for the radio broadcast Peščanik on Radio B92, 11 November 2005.*

much the period of communism and its utopia that secularization and atheism could be imposed.

The views of Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović on the secular and “de-christianized” West and Europe are well known and are often cited by historians. Today, however, those views are uncritically repeated in the books and at the public forums of the leading bishops of the SOC, such as Atanasije Jevtić, Artemije Radosavljević and Amfilohije Radović. Even more moderate bishops also tend to such exclusivism relative to the West. In his book *Savremeni svet i Pravoslavna crkva* (The Modern World and the Orthodox Church), published in 1993, Bishop Ignjatije Midić says with resignation that “Christianity in the West ceased to exist as the Church: it has become an ideology, a set of ethical laws”. And in “Pravoslavlje i Evropa” (Orthodoxy and Europe), the Bishop says that “the real reason why the Orthodox people should aspire to integrated Europe” is, neither more nor less, the possibility “*to influence a change in the modern European world-view. All of us are aware* (underlined by M.V.) that Europe, that is, the modern western civilization founded by Europe in which all of us, the Orthodox and others, participate, is undergoing a severe crisis” (Midić, 2003: 39). Midić gives several reasons why, in his opinion, Europe is in a crisis and states that the crux of the problem, at least in the spiritual sphere, lies in “the appearance of nihilism in Western philosophy”. The other problem lies, believe it or not, “in the expansion of the freedom of personality” (Midić, 2003: 46)! Here is how that is explained by this contemporary Serbian theologian:

“Nihilism is becoming an unavoidable companion of freedom which is often forced to renounce itself, so that we can release ourselves from its fatal embrace (according to J. Zizioulas). On the social plane, the uncontrollable freedom of the other is becoming dangerous for society, for community, because freedom is inevitably threatening the existence of the other by its contents. Behind the aspiration of the West to control the entire world lies the fear of the other and his freedom” (*ibid.*). Here is the way out and remedy for that “illness of the West”: “For the recovery of the modern society, it is necessary to point to the original interpretation of the eschaton, that is, the authentic Christian interpretation of eschatology, since Christian ontology originates from it. *We have no more reliable guide for this than the Liturgy of the Eastern, Orthodox Church*” (*ibid.*, underlined by M.V.).

In the same collection of papers in which Ignjatije’s text was published (*Hrišćanstvo i evropske integracije*), the theologian Vladan Perišić poses the question: “Does Europe need Christianity?”, and answers: “Let us eliminate everything that is Christian from Europe and then take a look at the remaining poetry, literature, architecture, painting, music, philosophy and European culture and civilization, in general. What will we see? Only: a) brutal barbarism, or b) arrogant egotism or, probably, a miserable union of these two (Perišić, 2003: 123). Accordingly, there is nothing left from ancient Greece and Rome, the Islamic and Jewish civilizations in Spain and their poetry, philosophy and architecture, not to mention the legacy of enlightenment, which has been largely profiled as an anticlerical view.

The term *ecclesiastical fundamentalism* could probably be the most appropriate for describing the view of this author, which is expressed in continuation: “Even those who do not like to hear this must be informed that *Europe is not the measure of Christianity, that is, the Church* (which is the same because, let us not forget – *Christianity exists only as the Church*); on the contrary, *the Church is the criterion of Europe*. Whether Europe and the so-called ‘European values’ will survive not only in history, but will also be extended into the eternity... depends on whether they will conform to the Church” (Perišić, 2003: 124). Consequently, Perišić views Europe only as *ecclesiastical* Europe, while the values that have been embodied in its Constitution by the European legislators (humanist and cultural heritage, as well as the heritage of other, non-Christian religions) should probably refer to those “so-called European values”, which the author calls into question in advance.

Bishop Grigorije of Zahumlje and Herzegovina, the successor to the “throne” of Bishop Atanasije Jevtić, holds that the West and Europe request from the Serbs to renounce their identity: “The people from the West expect us to be pragmatic and lose our identity or say that we are Bosniaks for clothes, shoes and food. But, such expectations are an absolute illusion” (Vučetić, 2005: 13). This is also followed by the usual lament of the Serbian bishops, enhanced by the recognizable “Masada complex” when the fate of one’s own people is in question: “We are again threatened as the people, because we feel that we are requested to renounce ourselves. As if it was told to us: ‘Give up yourselves – your identity, history and culture and we will then consider whether we will accept you or not’ (*ibid.*).

In that latest resistance of the SOC to Europe, secularization and democracy, some authors in Serbia also tend to recognize its step towards the establishment of a state church. It is interesting to note that very soon after the October changes the representatives of the Office for Religious Education within the Serbian Patriarchate stated that “the state should protect its substance and the nation and, to that end, it should proclaim Orthodoxy a state religion or, in other words, our state should be verified as an Orthodox state” (Brkić, 2000: 8). As for other religions, they would have the right to exist, but would not have the same rank as Orthodoxy and would be registered only if “they are not satanic” in the view of the SOC (*ibid.*).

In Serbia today, there is a very pronounced tendency towards the clericalization of the society both in the ecclesiastical and some political circles. At the same time, that is also resistance to democratization and, naturally, to Europe, which is often manifested by emphasizing the anti-European view, from that of Nikolaj Velimirović to that of Atanasije Jevtić, who speaks, for example, about our “eurowhiners” (i.e. those who strive for Europe) and always wins applause for that at his forums (Byford 2005: 18).

At the same time, civil society and non-governmental organizations, as well as ordinary citizens wishing to be a part of present-day Europe are severely criticized and demonized:

“Here the Church opts for a monistic pattern which reminds us strongly of the time of communism and - regardless of the fierce condemnation of that communist legacy in the ecclesiastical circles – that is the same authoritarian pattern and model, only the ideology is different. In fact, the priests, like retired Bishop Jevtić, face the believers, that is, ordinary citizens, with a senseless and harmful dilemma – whether to be Orthodox or a European Serb, thus forbidding them to manifest the multitude of their identities. Moreover, these priests present Orthodoxy in the wrong way, in some autarchic and primitive form, thus betraying their spiritual mission in the modern society and demonstrating that they are not up to their task. In such discourse, for example, the struggle with Europe is often reduced to the primordial struggle between God and Devil which is for Mr. Atanasije Jevtić, judging by his forums, the most decisive battle of our times” (Vukomanović, 2005: 25).

At the forum, which was organized at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the Belgrade University, on 2 December 2004, by the paraecclesiastical organization Srpski Sabor Dveri, which has been acting as of late under the auspices of the journal *Pravoslavlje* and the Information Service of the SOC, Jevtić presented the “Serbian problem” with Europe in the following way:

“That what they serve to us as a multiethnic, multicultural, multi-, multi-society... As if we are crazy, as if they underestimate us and think that we are stupid. Well, that underestimation of common sense by that which is called modern Europe is intolerable. When they tell us: choose between Kosovo and Brussels – gentlemen, I am returning you the tickets for your Brussels, leave us in our mud to drown ourselves, but leave us alone” (Forum, 2004).

Bishop Filaret of Mileševa was also speaking in the similar spirit at the consecration of the foundation for the church dedicated to St Marina the Great Martyr in Lazarevo near Zrenjanin:

“We had and still have the best presidents. We have the best generals and the best people with the heart, spirit and faith. Therefore, I, the Bishop of Mileševa, also believe that you will build this church in a year and that you will not allow that its building lasts longer than a year. For you have faith and you have the face, courage and bravery which many of them wish to destroy, but cannot kill Christ, God and Saint Sava in us. I promise you, as the Bishop of Mileševa, fifteen tons of cement for building this holy temple. I appeal to the deputies to buy cement... we are following Christ and Saint Sava, our saints and enlighteners, and not the Serbian swindlers and Serbian traitors who betray us today on every corner. And what will we do in Europe? My White Angel was in Europe a long time ago. America is about two hundred years old and my angel is from the 13th century. This is why we have been driven into a corner... because we believed every trash from the West, as well as domestic one that appear as the true saviour of the Serbian people, but that was not so. The true saviour of the Serbian people is the Serbian Church” (Pudar 2005: 16).

9. The SOC and War Crimes

During the period of five years, which passed after the 5 October changes, it was expected that the Church would manifest its ethical position on the immediate past to a much greater extent, considering the political weight that was undeservingly attached to it, as well as the fact that this is just the field in which religious communities are the most competent and, thus, are expected to voice their opinion in public. The central problem here is the attitude towards war crimes and the criminal legacy of the Milošević regime. In view of the fact that one unjust society was inherited, this had to be of special significance for the Church, because it is the question not only of a legal dilemma, but also of a serious moral one. What is, for example, its position on injustice in the society and the fact that many people became rich under suspicious circumstances and that they profited from the war? That is one of the questions which every religious organization should answer. However, the Church keeps silent. On the other hand, there is much talk as to what should be recommended to the Prime Minister or President concerning the Kosovo elections, how Serbia should look like in the future, on what principles it should be based.

The role of the SOC in the wars of 1990s was very controversial, to say the least. That is probably best seen from various official and semiofficial statements issued by the Church at that time. On the one side, there were appeals for reconciliation, prayer and the termination of the war and conflicts. In 1991, when the war in Croatia was already waged, Patriarch Pavle, for example, met twice with Cardinal Kuharić. In 1992, all three leading religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the SOC, the Roman Catholic Church and the Islamic Religious Community) issued an official statement, that is, an appeal for reconciliation. Some foreign analysts say that this is something without precedent in the history of relations between religious communities, that there are not many examples that the representatives and leaders of religious communities established any contact during the war, let alone that they officially called the faithful for prayer and reconciliation, that is, for forgiving which is, after all, the church mission.

However, there was also a number of different official statements (e.g. at the level of bishops' conferences), especially in 1993 and 1994, when the war in Bosnia was well underway. In these statements one could recognize an attempt at continuing the war and keeping the conquered territories and towns, as well as see the resistance to peace plans, in addition to some other participants in this conflict. That was the case with the Vance-Owen Plan in 1993 and the plan of the Contact Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994, when the Bishops' Conference of the Serbian Orthodox Church issued a statement from which it was clear that the conquered territory was treated like some kind of patrimony. There should be no withdrawal from that territory and when even the deputies of the Republic of Srpska were also prepared to do so, one could observe the Church's much more militant position. Thus, all previous appeals for peace and the cessation of hostilities were overshadowed by the statements which were *de facto* trying to block the peace process.

During 1993 and 1994, the persons who were indicted or already sentenced by the Hague Tribunal, such as, for example, Biljana Plavšić, were mentioned by high representatives of the SOC in superlatives. So, Metropolitan Amfilohije called Biljana Plavšić “the new Kosovo maiden”, while Radovan Karadžić was also referred to as some hero. Even in 2005, he still persisted in his view that the late mother of Radovan Karadžić, Jovanka, was “Mother Jevrosima and the mother of the nine Jugović brothers” (Tasić, 2005).

Consequently, those are, at least for some representatives of the SOC, the persons of great significance. At that time, the Church was more inclined towards the Republic of Srpska, because it was evidently disappointed by Milošević’s defeatism. The Republic of Srpska was glorified as the “new Serbian Piedmont” and Radovan Karadžić and Biljana Plavšić as those who were following in “the footsteps of Saint Lazar”, as it was put pathetically. That was a consistent policy which resulted in horrible crimes and ethnic cleansing, so that after the war there was not one mosque left in the territory of the Republic of Srpska. And when an attempt was made to rebuild such an important mosque as the Ferhadija in Banjaluka in 2001, there were incidents and scandals, which were not condemned by the Church. Consequently, one could observe here that the conduct of the SOC was rather consistent.

The SOC “sobered up” to a degree in 1996, after it was realized that the state jurisdiction over a certain territory did not have to coincide with that of the church and that the church jurisdiction could be retained even if the state had no jurisdiction over that territory. Those territorial claims, which are usually characteristic of the armies in conflict, were also displayed by the SOC during the war. At the time the Patriarch met with Cardinal Kuharić and called for reconciliation, he also wrote to Lord Carrington asking that a part of the territory of the Republic of Croatia should be united with the homeland, that is, with the Republic of Serbia, because it was populated by the Serbs. That *territorialistic* orientation of the SOC was certainly the result of its organization which is based on the territorial principle, although it is also a national church. The dioceses behave like fiefs over which the bishops exercise sovereign authority and if such a fief finds itself in the territory of a new state, which was recognized by the international community in the meantime, then this turns into the world’s historical question. At the same time, the fact that the monastery of Chilandar is located in the territory of another state, Greece, which was not a part of the former Yugoslavia, has never posed a problem.

Here mention should also be made of the views that came to expression in certain texts. In the collection of papers entitled *The Lamb of God and the Beast from the Bottomless Pit*, Atanasije Jevtić poses the question as to the character of the war waged in Bosnia and Herzegovina and then says that it was the worst of all possible wars and, in the next few sentences, expounds his theory on this subject. He concludes that it was the defence war for the Serbs and then, in the next sentence, that it was actually a heroic war from the viewpoint of the Republic of Srpska. However, it is clear that these two statements are not compatible and that the dominant view is the one that justifies the war, without entering into the genesis of war crimes, as well as other crimes and consequences of the war which are still felt.

Unfortunately, such concern shown by the Church in the case of Slobodan Milošević in Scheveningen, General Lazarević or the late mother of Radovan Karadžić cannot be seen when many other important issues in Serbia are in question. It is clear that in the circles of the SOC, the Hague Tribunal is regarded as an evil, as something directed against the Serbian people. In fact, it is the question of the total ignorance of its significance for the punishment of war crimes.

One of the latest examples of the controversial role of the SOC in the past wars was the case of Hieromonk Gavriilo from Šid. Where makes some priests to bless the warriors wearing uniform and weapons? Isn't the church the place where every faithful soul meets in private, without the Kalashnikov over his shoulder, with his spiritual shepherd, confesses to him and asks him for a blessing? That would be a more appropriate way in which a soldier may ask his spiritual shepherd for advice before going off to war, while the latter – when providing him with spiritual guidance and blessing him – should dissuade him, in the Christian way, from doing any evil. However, this is not what the entire world could see and hear on the video recording which was shown at the Hague Tribunal and then in the domestic and world media. The members of the Scorpio unit, who were blessed by Hieromonk Gavriilo from the Privina glava monastery on that video recording, committed a war crime against the Muslims captured near Srebrenica soon afterwards. What is also disturbing here is the fact that the Church did not find it necessary to announce itself on this occasion for a longer period. With the greater rights in the post-socialist period the church's responsibilities are also greater. The SOC issued its official statement only after more than ten days": "Lord, do not let it happen again!", whereby it soothed, only in part and too late, the resignation of all those who had seen that moving video recording of the execution of Muslims in Srebrenica and had asked themselves what connection the SOC could have with the crime. As a rule, the representatives of the SOC do not comment and interpret their official statements from the assemblies, that is, their public statement, thus putting the citizens and believers in Serbia in an absolutely passive position.

10. Fundamentalism in the SOC?

Even outside its Balkan context, Orthodoxy has always insisted on the view that was formulated by John of Damascus as early as the 8th century: "We do not change the everlasting landmarks which our fathers have set, but cherish the tradition just as it has been handed down to us" (*On Holy Images*, 11, 12). This return to the Tradition (with the capital T), the conciliary origin of Christianity with which the unbroken continuity is established, represents one of the major principles of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as of other Orthodox churches in the world. This is where the *traditionalism* of the SOC is reflected the most.

However, one should also add quite a specific characteristic of Serbian Orthodoxy – one imaginary concept of *Svetosavlje*, which was framed in more recent time and became the ideology of the leading Serbian theologians and

the Church as late as the 20th century. The projection of some golden Christian past before the schism, the “Kosovo testament” and the myth of Saint Sava, accompanied by the myth of Saint Sava, resemble, on the one side, Sunni Selefism and, on the other, the Shiite cult of Caliph Ali and the myth of Karbala, i.e. the historical defeat that turned into heavenly triumph in the religious tradition (Dejzings, 2005, pp. 221-234). In this context, it should also be noted that, at the end of the last century, both branches of Islam displayed pronounced *fundamentalist* tendencies.

Let us turn our attention to several typical characteristics of fundamentalism which are mentioned in modern literature about this phenomenon:

1. The return to the fundamental principles, to the origin, to something that was in the beginning and was corrupted later on.
2. Hegemonism and exclusivism in interpretation: fundamentalism is against hermeneutic pluralism, because it leads to cognitive and value relativism; instead, fundamentalism perseveres in dualistic rhetoric and the philosophy of Manicheism (We-They, God-Devil, Friends-Enemies, etc.).

The essential feature of fundamentalism is its resistance to the pluralism of interpretation, regardless of whether religious or non-religious phenomena are in question. Hermeneutic monism appears as the path to sectarian integrism and exclusivism. However, rigid adherence to only one possible interpretation of a phenomenon, regardless of whether it is the question of religion, politics, history, science or some other sphere of the human spirit, may turn a certain hermeneutic problem, under specified conditions, into a serious political, police or military problem (Vukomanović, 2001: 127-139).

3. Resistance to secularization and the rejection of a secular world-view; in that sense, the tradition of enlightenment poses a special challenge to and is the enemy of any fundamentalism; fundamentalism also gives its response to the challenges of modernism.
4. Fundamentalism is the product of a political, social and economic crisis, or a response to a crisis situation.
5. In an ideological sense, the fundamentalist ideas are directed against science, although, in a practical sense, fundamentalism often takes advantage of modern science and technology.
6. The spirit of ecumenism, dialogue and tolerance are alien to fundamentalism and are usually its greatest enemies.

In his paper “Fundamentalizam – cilj ili sredstvo” (Fundamentalism – the Aim or the Means), in which he lists a greater number of those characteristics, Ljubiša Rajić emphasizes one more important characteristic of religious fundamentalism: “the political programme based on religion, whose true aims are outside of it” (Rajić 2003: 55).

Resistance to secularization, enlightenment, ecumenism, religious and social pluralism, as well as the more recent attempts to impose the SOC as authority in the field of science represent, as we can see, some of the recognizable characteristics of religious fundamentalism. Truly, in this respect the Serbian Church is not lagging very much behind the New Christian Right in the United States, its creationism and literal interpretation of the Bible. On the other hand, the role of moral mind-guards in Serbia is now being increasingly performed by various paraecclesiastical organizations, under the auspices of and with the blessing of the SOC, such as *Obraz*, *St Justin the Philosopher* and *Srpski Sabor Dveri*, in addition to the young followers of the priest Žarko Gavrilović, who beat up peaceful protesters, advocates of homosexual rights, in Belgrade's streets and squares. At the same time, there is still the vow of silence in the SOC as regards child abuse charges.

Apart from the West, secularization and modernization, the problem for some theologians of the SOC is also posed by the advancement of science, especially of social sciences dealing with religion. In his book *Isus Hristos u mraku istorijske kritike* (Jesus Christ in the Darkness of Historical Criticism), the Orthodox theologian from Chicago, Predrag Samardžić, calls, for example, our sociology of religion "one of the affiliations, sections, that is, sects" of the Marxist-atheistic ideology and says: "In the conclusion of this reflection it can be stated that we have the university sect at the state university in whose survival it is invested mostly by those who act against it. In whose name the state university of a democratic state supports the propagation of a sect that is definitely anti-Christian?" (Samardžić, 2004: 2005).

Such a view is met with approval by the Serbian bishops, such as Irinej Bulović and Atanasije Jevtić, who spoke very affirmatively about Samardžić and his book at one of their forums held at the end of 2004.²⁴

Finally, that new fundamentalism of the SOC could also be viewed as the product of the crisis, or its response to the crisis situation that was created after the suspension of the reform and political and economic transition of the Serbian society, which was initiated by the Zoran Djindjić Government. After the tragic wars of the 1990s, the Church manifested again its militant and philetistic position, ranging from the scandalous speech of Metropolitan Amfilohije at Djindjić's funeral to the direct public defence of the indicted of war crimes (who are, at least in some clerical circles, still treated as patriots and heroes). Here mention should also be made of the Church's phobia of facing the question of responsibility for war crimes (which makes it abhor international institutions, such as the Hague Tribunal, to an even greater extent), as well as its proverbial reservation and unreadiness to initiate a more productive dialogue and reconciliation with other religious communities in the Balkans within various ecumenical organizations and initiatives that encourage such meetings.

²⁴ This forum was held at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of Belgrade University on 25 November 2004.

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