



UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
The scientific journal FACTA UNIVERSITATIS
Series: **Law and Politics** Vol. 1, N° 3, 1999 pp. 361 - 364
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Vojislav Stanovčić
POLITICAL IDEAS AND RELIGION
(Političke ideje i religija)
1-2 (370 and 359 pp.), Beograd, 1999,
published by Udruženje za političke nauke Jugoslavije, (pocket-size book)

Lying in front of us is a work of the prominent professor of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, the member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, erudite and moralist, dealing with a wealth of complex questions of fundamental importance in the field of political science, history of political doctrines, science on religion and theology. This work is a unique one in the Serbian scientific literature; prior to it, dealing in details with similar topics, was a book by Andrija Gams, a recently passed away professor of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, but which was confined to the political implications of Bible; the two books by Stanovčić widen the frame of these implications to all worldwide religions. Covered, in this connection, are Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam. The greatest attention has been paid to the Western Christianity, that is western Churches as institutions.

Of importance with such works is the basic attitude of the author towards the religion. Stanovčić is not a believer. He, therefore, does not approach the consideration starting from the dogmas of a certain religion, but from the supposition that the religion is a human creation which, like all other human creations, is subject to historical development. At the present moment of that development, Nietzsche's judgement: "God is dead" can be applied. From that point of view, of importance is only a political and ethical function of the religions, that is, whether they contribute to the political conflicts, first of all to wars, or peace, whether they serve to the improvement or regression of a man as a morally responsible being. According to Stanovčić, these functions of the religions are rather negative than positive – the so-called religious "fundamentalism" is particularly a source of unforeseeable dangers. A preventive measure, however, is not a forced atheisation resorted to by Marxism, but serious cherishing a religious tolerance characteristic of the countries of the western cultural milieu. Stanovčić is an adherent to the positive traditions of this cultural milieu as well, atop of which are restricted (free) government and the rule of law.

Book One is divided into Introduction, which together with notes, takes more than half of the book, Chapter One: Ethical and Political Teachings of the Worldwide Religions Founders, Chapter Two: Ruler's Sceptre and Bishop's Stick (The role of the religion/Church in legitimizing the power) and Chapter Three: Secular and Sacred. Book Two is divided into Chapter Four: Social Role of Myths, Symbols and Rituals, Chapter Five: Society – Culture – Religion, Chapter Six: Religious Consciousness and Modern Social Thought, Chapter Seven: Political Culture and Political Mythology and Chapter

Eight: Ideas and Law Frameworks of the Religious Peace and Tolerance. Finally, the book ends with selected references in Serbian and other languages. A mention should be made here that added to each chapter are a lot of notes, some of which are by themselves small treatises; impressing is a wealth of erudition reflected in discussing each single question. The author's approach differs in Book One and Book Two. Book One was written using a historical method, where presentation follows in a concrete manner, while Book Two appears mainly as an abstract and critical meditation. Therefore, Book One can easily be read by anyone who masters general education, while Book Two can be completely understood only by those who possess certain professional knowledge.

Surprising in Introduction is the title of one section: "The Devil and the Morals in Politics". Although the author reduces God and the gods to the contents of religious thinking, it is obvious that Stanovčić believes in the reality of the devil. Only that he nowhere explicitly says what he means by this. Instead of depicting the devil by the language of concepts, he depicts him by the language of pictures: by a series of examples from the world's literature, where, among the sources, the most prominent place occupy Marlowe's and Goethe's *Faust*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazoffs* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margherita*. Nevertheless, conceptually, the devil approaches us when he is brought in contrast to the moral views of liberalism. On the one hand, he represents placing power above all other goods, which is particularly reflected in the political amorality of Machiavelli and in the teaching on the "national cause". On the other hand, he comes forth from the moral absolutism of certain religions with, first of all, Roman Catholicism in mind, as well as theories and practices of the totalitarian states of order, the founder of which would be Plato, the Greek philosopher.

The section on the faith as an inspiration for chiliastic teachings and political utopias also attracts particular attention in Introduction. The fact is that a number of ideas of the early Christianity caused utopian projects of various religious sects to appear. In addition, of importance is the fact that the writers of utopian works featuring the pre-industrial epoch were closely connected with the Christian religion. Thomas More was canonized, Thomas Münzer was a theologian and a revolutionary, Campanella was a Dominican friar, Meillet a priest and Morelli an abbot. Although he recognizes totalitarian elements in certain utopias, Stanovčić concludes anyway: "Both the older and the newer utopian literature is inspiring... Permanently making every efforts that a human community should be created, it is, therefore, on the whole and in a vast number of individual utopias, deeply humanistically inspired, inspiring to humanistic deeds as well." It is strange that Stanovčić's detailed review on the utopian literatures misses the views of Ernst Bloch, who, based on the utopian grounds, strived to reconcile Marxian atheism and Christianity.

Also, religion, discussed in Chapter Three, represents a basis for the state power legitimacy, offering legitimizing formulas. But, those formulas extremely differ from religion to religion. As an example for that extremity of particular mention are the formulas of Hinduism and Islam. In the old Indian community, the most important law monument (document) of which is the Manu Code, legitimacy of the power is provided by one social class (caste), Brahmins, which had the responsibility of morally directing the community, but they were forbidden to directly take part in the acts of power. That division of roles between the priests and the king bears the elements of "social pluralism" as well. On the contrary, the Islamic cultural milieu feature close power-to-religion

reciprocity. Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam, introduced, at the same time, a new, monotheistic religion pretending it to be the only worldwide religion and created a unique Arabic-Moslem state. In addition, regulating duties of believers to lead a holy war (jihad) against the unbelievers, he made Islam – at least dogmatically – one of the most militant among the religions. Faith, law and politics make in it an unbreakable unity: "The Islamic religion offers legitimization for the purpose of achieving religious regulations by means of power and law system." The consequence, on one side, is that "Islam... has legitimized that power which had forces to sustain itself, i.e. to sell itself" and, on the other side, that the Islamic law system most likely results in a "totalitarian society". But, the author is of the opinion that "regardless of the contents, religions can hardly become universal instruments of legitimacy"; that effect is reserved only for the instruments developed by the secularised Western culture, and namely for "democratic procedures such as elections, agreement, participation..."

It goes without saying that this discussion covers questions of political culture and mythology as well. Religion is a field and determinant of the culture. At the same time, a myth precedes a religion, and those were only the three akin religions of the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity and Islam that broke ties with it. But driven from the religion, the myth has cast anchor in the political consciousness. The attitude of the author towards the political myth is a negative one as well. Although the myth had a legitimizing function in the past, it is obsolete and harmful nowadays: "In spite of the matchless progress of science and development of technologies, the 20th century is witnessing an enormous spread and domination of the mythological consciousness over huge masses of people. This has taken huge proportions and monstrous forms with tragic consequences." Political culture is, on the contrary, something unavoidable, and it is just here and now that we appear as the observers of and participants in the conflicts between the positive, democratic and negative, authoritarian political culture. "The outcome of that epochal conflict considerably depends on the fact how much we will succeed in cherishing democratic political culture. Educational process and teaching system should play a great role." In addition to the governing political cultures, there is today a multitude of subcultures, which are particularly reflected through the so-called tribalism and those religious sects carrying within themselves theocratic tendencies as well. Unfortunately, the work lying in front of us cannot provide us with an answer to the question what a political culture is. But, isn't it – if abstracted from the religion and the myth, on one side, and the mere custom (convention), on the other side – the same as the political morals is, primarily the political morals of a nation? If it is so, and if, consequently, the conflict of the political cultures is the conflict of the political morals, then we cannot claim that one of them must retreat before the other, as we can neither require that one religion must retreat before the other, say Islam before Buddhism, etc. Here, a question is imposed shouldn't the principle of tolerance, we are striving for to be applied among different religions, be widened to the relations among different political cultures as well? Here, the political pedagogy and andragogy could treat a certain negative phenomenon, for example, the Balcanic cult of a leader-superman or the North American cult of violence as an absence of the political culture in general, i.e. unculture.

An objection to this book could be made which we consider to be a question of principle, and which also concerns the phenomenon of culture. The author seems to agree that it is only one, the Western cultural milieu, that originates from the Christianity. But,

the most prominent historian of culture, Arnold Toynbee, whom the author frequently quotes, speaks yet of another cultural milieu (literally society or civilization) the birth of which was given by the same religion – it is a cultural milieu of the Christian Orthodoxy to which the Serbian people belong on the whole or partially as well. For, it is upon the fact whether there is one or two Christian cultural milieus that our judgement depends on both Christianity and ourselves.

Finally, an objection on account of the publisher. There are a lot of impermissible technical errors in this valuable and inspiring work, which could be eliminated if a proofreader or reader were engaged.

Milan Petrović