



UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
The scientific journal FACTA UNIVERSITATIS
Series: **Philosophy and Sociology** Vol.2, N° 6, 1999 pp. 41 - 47
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RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AND CONFESSIONAL UNITY IN CANADA AS A MODEL FOR THE BALKAN REGION

UDC:316.75:316.642

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Abstract. *The theme of my paper will be religious tolerance and confessional unity in Canada as a model for the Balkan region. This paper will cover the current attempts at inter-faith dialogue, including examples from specifically Christian sources. Various groups, ranging from the Orthodox church to Lutheranism, shall be compared and contrasted in order to ascertain what responses have been given to the problem of confessional intolerance. Furthermore, such a system will then be applied to the Balkan region and evaluated as a mostly worthwhile venture.*

Given that two of the three religious traditions in the Balkan region follow the Christian doctrine, the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches, I will provide two diverse religious systems of government within the Christian faith, the presbyterian and episcopal models, in discussing religious toleration in Canada as a model for the Balkans. Both these models are very much in effect in Canada and may have produced the confessional unity that is required for the Balkan region. Furthermore, in prefacing the discussion on church government, I will briefly discuss some major historical differences between the development of Canada and the Balkans, including basic religious attitudes of both the English and Ottoman empires, which provide certain patterns that may guide us to the understanding of today's religious problems. The discussions that take place between different traditions in Canada could have an answer in the way their churches were, and continue to be, governed, which means that an example can be made of the spirit of the presbyterian system, which could offer hope of producing similar talks in the Balkan region.

Canada began to be politically and socially organized when the influx of settlers grew in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These early settlers mostly consisted of adventurers looking for profit who soon began to build towns and later, cities. The English and French

governments understood the importance of holding on to this land and exploiting it in terms of mining and natural resources. With the increase in the hostilities and ambitions between the Spanish, French, and English empires, war was inevitable. By 1763, England secured the region of Canada, with a large French Roman Catholic minority. England did not become wholly intolerant, but used its power to assuage the French population by the Quebec Act. This Act gave the French people living in Canada certain powers, such as freedom of religious worship. This freedom could have been given, in part, because England recognized the importance of a peaceful dominion. If the terms were imposed harshly, the French would have likely rebelled. Such rebellion would have caused the already unstable situation in Canada to become even worse. Here, I find the nucleus of the development of religious toleration, which later grew, however imperfectly, between the English and the French to a state of mutual co-operation. As a result, Canada was able to persevere in its peaceful balance and produce the Constitution Act of 1867, confirming its brand of self-government.

The Balkan region, on the other hand, was occupied by the Ottoman empire beginning, most probably, in 1389. The fierce and brutal manner in which the region was governed provided no room for discussion, let alone religious toleration. One example of Turkish insensitivity can be presented by children being stolen and then raised according to the Islamic tradition, as discussed by Ivo Andrić in *Na Drini Čuprija*. Such an occupation did not end easily, lasting until the beginning of the twentieth century, with Serbia one of the only countries to regain its independence early under King Milan IV Obrenovich in 1882.¹ Moreover, Canada did not experience the destruction of two world wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) on its continent, thereby ensuring, at least to a certain degree, a state of political normality. Here, there seems to be two diverse situations, one under a seemingly tolerant English regime, while the other was subject to Ottoman occupation. In some ways, the present national differences in the Balkans are not surprising, given the region's historical development. Within a small geographical region, there are three major religious traditions, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodoxy. The question remains as to how to deal with the violent history of the land, the mutual enmity of these religious traditions, and maintain a peaceful balance all too often provoked by national pride? The answer is not easy, but can be partly given in an analysis of the development of religious political systems.

I will analyse two systems of religious government, the presbyterian and ecumenical polities. This analysis is important in providing the foundation on which Canada sustained its religious toleration and could prove useful for the Balkan region. The former was created by John Calvin (1509-1564), while the latter is as old as the Christian faith. Calvin, although he went through the process of medieval instruction, realized that the reform of religion included a reshaping and restructuring of the administrative system. Towards this end, Calvin almost single-handedly proposed and carried out the outline of the presbyterian structure, which included a hierarchy of committees and councils, instead of individuals, such as priests, bishops, and popes. Such a system made possible more discussion and included more people. These changes also included a government by the laity and was

¹ Chorovich, Vladimir. *Istorija Srba* (1-3). (Beograd: Beogradski-Izdavačko Grafički Zavod, 1989), p. 149 (deo 3).

basically an elected constitutional assembly.² The presbyterian structure consisted of four parts: the session, synod, presbytery, and general assembly.³

The local church, called a session, is administered by a pastor, also known as a teaching elder. "The session can receive and dismiss members, examine and ordain ruling elders, and supervise the educational work of the church."⁴ In addition, session meetings must occur at least four times a year, but may occur more frequently. A number of sessions (at least twelve) together form a presbytery, or a district body, which has "legislative, executive, and judicial powers and is a kind of corporate episcopacy."⁵ The presbytery receives candidates for ministry and sanctions the call of a congregation to a minister by ordaining or installing him or her. Delegates who are sent to synods and to the general assembly are elected by the presbytery, which also inaugurates the business of the general assembly. "The questions and issues, decided higher up, therefore, are generated from the district level. If the general assembly proposes some change in government, the proposal has to be passed by a certain percentage of the presbyteries."⁶

Presbyteries in a certain geographical area make up a synod, whose duties include meeting annually to coordinate projects and facilitating cooperation among churches. The general assembly, however, is a national body made up of members elected by the presbyteries. It represents the whole church, being responsible for matters of faith and order, and also institutes and supervises agencies for education, missions, and ecumenism. "The general assembly can advise the presbyteries, but all changes in traditional documents or beliefs have to be passed by the presbyteries, and all questions of policy and items for discussion must be initiated by a presbytery."⁷ As a result, the main juridical body within this system is the general assembly, working in cooperation with the presbyteries.

Such a polity was by no means fully developed at the time of Calvin, but evolved over hundreds of years to reach the present form. No doubt, the essence of the structure was there in the sixteenth century, but took on new forms and new responsibilities as time and influence of the tradition grew and spread. I think a simple, yet effective system of checks and balances was already present within Calvin's church polity. I believe that the constructive use of the influence of the presbytery upon the general assembly provides an expression of such checks and balances. Furthermore, the logical progression from one assembly to the next also provides a coherent governing body, where obligations are understood. For example, sessions, the lower part, as well as the general assembly, the greater part, examine the life and work of the church and the agencies responsible for this life and work, so the matter is addressed from both sides of the polity. Such an example also gives rise to considerable lay participation in learned discussions. In addition, the local churches make sure that every one of their congregations are motivated towards learning and the main juridical body examines, in turn, the spirit and motivation of the local churches.

² Weaver, Mary Jo. *Introduction to Christianity*. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), p. 263.

³ I follow Weaver's outline of the presbyterian structure, which can be found on pp. 262-263.

⁴ Weaver 263

⁵ Weaver 263

⁶ Weaver 263

⁷ Weaver 263

The church, in this instance, is self-governing, which means that the Christians who belong to this tradition need to be educated so they can exercise these roles responsibly. Hence, a quite different view both as to *who* should be educated and for *what purposes*.

In the outline of the presbyterian model, there is more room for discussion, election, and the leadership is taken from the laity, instead of the clergy. The Reformed church, which uses the presbyterian system, has been one of the largest and most influential Protestant traditions in Canada, next to, for example, the Anglicans and Catholics. Such a system brought about a need for the laity to be educated, which took discipline, in order for them to govern the church. This educated attitude, coupled with the growth in discussion, provided the leaders of the various Protestant movements with an alternative to violence. The religious situation in Canada, therefore, grew out of a historical pattern rooted in the Reformation and its consequences. These consequences were not all bad, despite fierce wars, but inspired, in a way, religious freedom and an eventual need for toleration. Furthermore, such activities pushed religious beliefs, however indirectly, towards the private sphere and, ultimately, secularization. Hence, the need for voicing one's religious convictions eventually became an individual's private choice and fundamental right.

It is interesting to note that Calvin, through his doctrine of predestination, meaning God's foreknowledge of who will be saved or damned, did not want to necessarily create religious anxiety,⁸ but such anxiety pushed people into intense worldly activity, not fatalism. In addition, Calvin also discussed the duties and responsibilities of a Christian, who was to live a righteous life despite God's foreknowledge of their salvation or damnation.⁹ These duties eventually created worldly activity for, despite the fact that salvation came from God's grace as a gift, a believer needed to be educated not only in order to contribute to the presbyterian system, but also to be able to perform their everyday tasks well. When a person does a job well, be it that of a writer or a merchant, it may be a sign of grace from God towards their salvation. However, nobody knows for certain who will be saved or damned, so a person must perform his duties well throughout his life.

With the development of education among the presbyterian congregations, the accent had to be on public, rather than private or classical, instruction because the congregations supplied the leaders of the church. Thus, they needed to be educated. In other words, Calvinists, through the presbyterian system, sought to include everybody in the task of governing the church and, in the process, produce responsible citizens. Order and an increase in moral ability, therefore, were brought into the lives of Christians, which contributed to their discipline.¹⁰ Such discipline was, moreover, cultivated by Calvinism through a study in manners and academic instruction, which meant that Christians could now live in the world and perform worldly activities without being subject to its sins, provided that self-discipline was always maintained through the concentration on study.¹¹

⁸ See Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1961), Books I and II.

⁹ Calvin 214-216

¹⁰ Durkheim, Emile. *Moral Education*. (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), p. 43 (on discipline and education).

¹¹ Weil, Simone. *The Simone Weil Reader*. Ed. George A. Panichas. (London: Moyer Bell Limited, 1994), pp. 44-52 (*Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God*),

The Roman Catholic as well as the Orthodox churches never went so far as to elect members of the laity to govern the church and, as a result, the laity could have lacked the necessary education and, through education, discipline in fully knowing their religious environment. The polity of both the Catholics and the Orthodox was episcopal, a Greek word for overseer, translated into English as bishop. The episcopal system, therefore, is church government by bishops, which is based on apostolic succession. In other words, the bishops are successors to the apostles and share in the power and authority Christ bestowed on the apostles. In this way, the clergy is divided into a number of different orders: bishops possess the fullness of sacramental power, being able to celebrate all the sacraments, and usually preside over extended territories (dioceses) made up of many local parishes. Priests share in the sacramental power of the bishop in a limited way, not being allowed to ordain new priests, and preside over local congregations (parishes) within the diocese. Deacons, who have very limited powers (only allowed to preach and baptize), administer certain parishes because of a shortage of priests and work in conjunction with a supervising priest. For the most part, the episcopal system is defined by the shared powers of bishops and priests.¹² There is "a chief bishop, the pope (the bishop of Rome), whose authority extends over bishops and then on down the lines of the structure. All bishops - including the pope - are supposed to embody three of Christ's titles in their work: they are to be priests (sanctifying the church and possessing full sacramental powers), prophets (teaching and interpreting doctrine and discipline), and kings (ruling or administering their territories)."¹³ The point to be made here is that the leadership of the church is produced from the clergy, meaning that the education of the clergy is primarily important, and does not involve the laity in the process of governing.

Such a structure is certainly more restrictive, but also more authoritative than the presbyterian system that Calvin proposed. Instead of having meetings in assemblies, which sometime entail endless debates, the episcopal system has one individual (or, in the case of the Orthodox, several Patriarchs) at the top who decides matters, meaning hopefully less hassle and less time wasted. However, such a system also imposes too many boundaries because of the restrictive nature of the governing body. When the top becomes far removed from the bottom, trouble inevitably happens. However, the Orthodox churches have a slightly different conception of church government than the Catholics in that their clergy is allowed to marry, hence their division between the black (celibate) and white (married) groups. It must also be noted that the bishops, the leaders of the various Orthodox churches, are chosen only from the black or celibate clergy, never from the white or married, meaning that, as in the Catholic model, the leadership of the church is recruited from celibate priests, not the laity.

It is important to remember that such an examination does not necessarily argue against the polities of Catholicism or Orthodoxy, but simply tries, in part, to theoretically describe and present the heart of religious development as produced within Canada's cultural make-up. The notion is not to change existing religious practices, but to make them more accessible to the individual layperson. Such access will produce more ideas, bring about

discussing "that school tasks should develop the power of attention" (p. 44).

¹² I follow Weaver's analysis of the episcopal system, which can be found on pp. 260-261.

¹³ Weaver 260

more debates, and give a fresh perspective to old problems. In other words, the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought about denominationalism, a division of Christianity into many more parts, mostly in Western Europe. Through the centuries, in order to deal with denominationalism, the churches in Canada had to either discuss their differences, which was helped by church government models such as the presbyterian one, and come to some kind of an agreement or bring about more strife and religious division. With enormous lay access to various governing bodies that Christians enjoy in Canada, the ideas for development and religious toleration come, perhaps, at a faster pace. Nevertheless, it should be noted that such access lacks, for the most part, a fierce sense of national pride, which helps to sustain a sense of over-all confessional unity and observes religion as not being enclosed within national borders. History, in this respect, can be looked on as a teacher and guide, instead of as a source of division. By observing the way religion is governed in Canada by certain Protestant groups, despite the issues concerning separation between church and state and the growing power of secularism,¹⁴ the Christian churches in the Balkan region can not only understand and venture beyond their differences, but also infuse the spirit of democracy and equal bearing into the lives of ordinary believers. Such believers will do more to change, if necessary, the existing religious environment than all the governments put together.

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¹⁴ Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 107.

RELIGIOZNA TOLERANCIJA I KONFESIONALNO JEDINSTVO U KANADI KAO MODEL ZA PODRUŠJE BALKANA

Srdan Gligorić

Tema mog rada biće religiozna tolerancija i konfesionalno jedinstvo u Kanadi kao model za područje Balkana. Ovaj rad će pokriti tekuće pokušaje međuverškog dijaloga, uključujući primere iz hrišćanskih izvora. Različite grupe, od ortodoksne crkve do luteranizma, biće poređene i suprotstavljene da bi se procenili odgovori dati na problem konfesionalne netolerancije. To će biti primenjeno na područje Balkana i procenjeno kao veoma zahvalan poduhvat.