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ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERBS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract. *The Orthodox religion, coupled with the Kosovo mythology, directly participated in creating social mentality among the Serbs, while offering, as a model of the "inner-world" asceticism, a heroic death for national causes ("for the noble cross and golden freedom") or stoic endurance of the humiliation in slavery (modeled after the Christian martyrs). The view of the future that would be deprived of suffering and humiliation assumed as its eschatological objective the "heavenly kingdom" for the former generations and the "new Serbian empire" for the future ones. Such a model of the "inner-world" asceticism, in its turn, contributed to "forsaking the world", that is, to a passive attitude toward everyday engagement in the work that would be founded upon strictly organized and rational principles. The assumption that the Orthodox Christianity, as an identifier, participated in preserving the national identity of the Serbs is correct, but it should not be ignored that there were other factors at work as well - especially the mythology that gathered around the "myth of Kosovo". Still, in the recent history of the New Age (18th-19th centuries), when the Serbs started their liberation process trying to re-connect themselves with the European civilization the Orthodox religion not only failed to contribute to the modernization processes but it was most often in conflict with them.*

The separation of the church from the state and the formation of primarily secular states modeled after the civil paradigm gave rise to a misconception that, by these very developments, religion itself has little (or no) influence upon global social movements. Along with the process of "removing" religion to the private sphere, there was a simultaneous process of industrialization and the creation of the general factory and bureaucratic climate that, in its turn, was not favorable to an immediate contact with the divine forces. Such an atmosphere was different from that of the previous epoch in which

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the working activity had taken place in the very natural environment where the impact of the divine creation could be felt at every step. Still, beside the fact that the impact of religion, starting from the seventeenth century onwards, was weakening in the public sphere, it would be rash to conclude that it should be altogether neglected. Observing the contemporary secularized societies we can notice that the religious background formed not only particular cultural dimensions of these communities but also some patterns of behavior that are manifested in various social segments. The reason for this is that, regardless of the fact that man in the modern world has different roles, some of these roles are not by all means absolutely isolated. On the other hand, the acting out of these roles is affected by particular attitudes that spring directly from the depths of the above-mentioned cultural dimensions. If we take a couple of extreme types from the sociological typology, such as the convinced believer or the atheist, we can notice, even as an impression, that their value systems as well as types of behavior in everyday life considerably differ. Still, even "the confession of atheism" cannot be freed from the "damnation of religion", that is, from its association with the confessional-religious framework that it sprang from. Namely, the cultural-historical experience of a particular community has multiple causes; therefore, the centuries-old habit of practicing a particular faith has one of more important roles to play. By exploring the Christianity through its secular manifestation it can be noticed that it makes up - along with the classical philosophy of nature and the Roman civil law - the very foundation of the Western culture that created a "new religion" of progress. By placing the man at the top of the pyramid of nature, the Christianity thus involved not only an ontological but also axiological action sphere. The man is not only the crown of the Creation, but he is also the master of all that has been created (while, in the anthropological sense, he is even ranking higher than the woman). Still, since the Christian mission implied its incorporation in various cultures, with various historical experiences, it turned out that the Christianity itself, to some extent, was conditioned and "colored" by the circumstances it found itself in. The Christianity became divided into three great branches; depending on to which of these three branches an individual or a group belongs (in a wider cultural sense), his attitude towards an active engagement and the development concept, that is, progress, is formed. Even the confessions themselves within Christianity, in their turn, reveal some differences depending on the cultural milieu in which they exist.

Unlike the Roman Catholicism, the Orthodox Christianity, in the theoretical sense, has adhered to the tradition of platonism and neoplatonism; thus, it has preserved a specific, somewhat softer attitude towards predestination and universal salvation. Hence the role of the individual in the salvation through a specific form of congregationalism (of the Christian community) takes on particular traits in the Orthodox Christianity. This particularity is reflected in the fact that, in the eschatological sense, even the earthly community (through congregationalism) can *come closer* to the ideal of the heavenly community. At the individual level, the ultimate goal of the Orthodox Christian is his attempt to become an embodiment of God, to raise himself to divinity - that is, to *come closer* to the divine configuration. It is from this fluid relationship between the earthly and the heavenly kingdoms that the Orthodox Christianity has created a particular view of man in the world. This relationship has, in fact, led to the negligence of particular forms of the secular life; besides, it has also made a defensive bulwark against "Satanist" ideas of the Enlightenment and rationalism. This tendency of "forsaking the world" that E. Benz

considers one of the weaknesses of the Orthodox Christianity can be traced back to the earliest days of Christianity through Byzantium up to the present day. Regarding this particular relation to the world, the Orthodoxy can be said to owe a lot to the isichastic movement and its outstanding thinkers. As early as the fourth and fifth centuries, there were "attempts made by the Orthodox spiritual teachers to unite 'isichasm' (contemplation in prayer) with the Biblical understanding of the history whose basic elements are the Fall, the Salvation and the Future glory... and when the Orthodox Church canonized the Palama (in the 14th century), it confirmed its allegiance to these truths and it openly rejected the doctrinal and moral principles that make up the basis of modern civilization, starting from the Renaissance" (J. Mayendorf 1983:28, 136). While in the West, at that time (later Middle Ages), there was an ongoing separation of theology from philosophy and science, that is, the formation of a separate domain in which the thought could move (relatively) independently of the Christian principles - in the East there was an insistence upon the fact that the intellectual activity (especially philosophy) could not and must not forsake the Christian vision of the world and of the life (both in anthropology and in cosmology). This process of the rigid Christianization of the intellectual sphere was present on the Orthodox territories since the early Middle Ages (Justinian abolished the Academy of Athens in 526) till the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, even after the creation of the secular states in which the faith was restricted to the domain of the "spiritual health", the Orthodox Christianity did not give up its embittered fight against various forms of rationalism and modernization. This can be further illustrated even by considering a climate that pervaded the monasteries. While in the Roman Catholic Christianity the monasteries were regarded as places in which a variety of scientific research found its firm standpoint, the Orthodox Christian monasteries rejected every form of secular science while insisting upon the liturgy and the mystic contemplation, that is, the contents bearing no traces of the worldly "vanity."¹ Despite an evident fact that the Balkan peoples were lagging behind the other European peoples (due to many centuries of having been enslaved by the Turks), the Orthodox Church not only failed to work upon general enlightenment, but it also represented one of the greatest strongholds against the ideas coming from the West, namely those that advocated the secularization of the state and of the education while promoting the enterprising spirit. On the other hand, though Russia (as the largest Orthodox country) did not share the evil fate of the Balkans regarding the Turks, the conflict between "the sacred and the secular" was no less intense. Still, though much can be said about prominent similarities, an evident fact should be kept in mind: that each of the Orthodox nations had its own way of development that has been conditioned by numerous factors - anthropological, cultural, historical, etc. - and therefore, regarding these factors, the position and the role of the

¹ "Otherwise, not even in recent times has the Orthodox monasticism given any encouragement for advancing the theological science. The monasteries have remained a common place for exercising practical, liturgical and meditation worship. When the Greek theologian Eugenie Bulgaris (1716-1806) undertook, in the early nineteenth century, the foundation of a theological academy on the Atos mountain - in order to introduce the spirit of the theological research into the Atos monasticism - he met with a fierce resistance of the monks, as testified today by the ruins of the great academy building that was set fire to by furious monks of Atos." E. Benz, *Duh i život istočne crkve*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1991, p. 92

Orthodox Christianity turned out to be different. Moreover, even some differences emerged in parts of the same nation regarding the importance and the role of religion, in this case, of Orthodox Christianity. Therefore, in studying the Orthodox Christianity of the Serbs, care has to be taken about specific social-cultural and historical circumstances in which it exerted its influence. Thus, it has played, in particular spheres and given historical situations, either a positive or negative role, of course, depending on the established value system, that is, on the views gained from particular historical perspectives.

After a few centuries of its rise, the Serbian medieval state, in which Christianity played a dominant role, suffered a military defeat followed by a political break-down (its nobility destroyed and so did the hierarchy that the power and the state government were based on). In such circumstances even the spread of the Church influence was, if not altogether prevented, at least limited and pushed to the margins. The remembrance of the "glorious Empire" and the tragedy of its destruction by the "infidels" created in time a special kind of mentality whose impact we are not free from even today. In such circumstances the dream about liberation and the hero-martyr morality took place of the enterprising ethics that, in certain parts of Europe, began to emerge starting from the late Middle Ages. In the eschatological (or, on the other hand, philosophical-historical) sense the choice seemed almost inevitable²- what should be chosen instead of the earthly kingdom (slavery) is the heavenly kingdom (freedom). Once it found itself in such circumstances, the Serbian Orthodox Church also reverted to its "inevitable choice" - it incorporated the newly-created mythology into its lore, while adapting it to the fundamental Orthodox dogmas. Thus the outstanding representatives of the former nobility from the Nemanjić dynasty were consecrated or canonized. By merging the sacred and the profane the Orthodox Christianity created in the Serbs an exceptionally strong feeling of identity between the national and the confessional allegiance which would, for centuries to come, contribute to the preservation of the national identity.³ The myth of Kosovo, the faith of the Nemanjićs and their genealogy were for many centuries the defense against the Serbian assimilation into the Catholic corpus (on the Austro-Hungarian territories) or into Islam (within the Ottoman Empire). However, the choice of the "heavenly kingdom" was, in the domain of the real-sociological influence of the Orthodoxy upon the Serbs, manifested exactly in neglecting the rational and enterprising spirit. The "inner-world" asceticism in its ideal form - unlike Protestant religion that is being realized through immersion into one's vocation or profession - manifests itself through a sacrifice in fighting or a stoic acceptance of humiliation in slavery which could be, in its turn, justified or it could find consolation in the Orthodox view of the world. Though not Manichean in its outlook, this attitude seemed to deprive the secular world of

² Of course, the idea of "inevitability" here does not imply historical absolutism by choice, but rather a total constellation of circumstances, namely, of anthropological, cultural, social, etc. It is sufficient to have a look at the history of the Greeks or Bulgarians to see that an almost identical external action (enslavement) did not result in an identical reaction from the inside, namely, in the formation of the social mentality.

³ Regarding the identification of the national and the confessional identity in contemporary circumstances, see more in Đorđević, D. B., Đurović, "Confessional Mentality as a (Dis)integration Factor, *Innovation 3* (1990) 107-116

its primary importance. In addition, in view of the fact that the influence of the Church was weakening, it does not surprise that the Orthodox Christianity as practiced by the Serbs mixed with pre-Christian religions, various superstitions and a special kind of fatalism. The fatalism of Job or an uncritical submission to the fate (that was ultimately to be interpreted as the will of God) led most often to a passive attitude towards enterprising and rational economy. The basic rule was to work in order to survive, since, under the conditions of the slave position and permanent existential threats, there were not many chances to preserve anything achieved by toil and suffering. Besides, even till the late nineteenth century, the Serb population, due to its permanent sense of insecurity, was forced to migrate; thus even the elementary form of the surplus accumulation in agriculture was not feasible. "The serious warring of the Turks against the Christians starting from the seventeenth century, that was transmitted far into the Balkans, did not bring about pacification of the spirits and settling down that would be a natural seed of conservatism. The sense of insecurity, both personal and of property, turned our peasant into a fighter and an outlaw, especially in the regions where the conditions of living were too harsh to bear. In Montenegro the formation of outlaw companies became some sort of national economy. The same was prevailing in Šumadija in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Therefore, the peasant who is in other countries usually tied to the land and liable to conservatism, was in our countries quite moveable and, in many aspects, also ready for action" (V. Ćorović 1993:636).

The Church did, throughout the centuries, its best to preserve, together with the people, whatever was there to preserve, most of all, the sense of allegiance to the national community and of belonging to the "only true faith", that is, to the Orthodox Christianity. Still, in the period when the Ottoman Empire started to weaken more and more, while the privileges of the Serbs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire tended to increase, the Orthodox Church in Serbia started to take on another attitude. Namely, due to the strengthening of the enterprising layers of traders and craftsmen as well as to the schooling of the first secular intelligentsia (second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century) there was the first, though timid, penetration of the ideas from the West that met with a fierce resistance on the part of the ecclesiastical circles. First of all, these ideas implied the concept of the separation of the ecclesiastical (spiritual) competence from the secular one; this, naturally, threatened the church hierarchy. On the other hand, the Church, as the great "spahi" was not able to accept the idea of creating the necessary prerequisites for a free "capitalist game" that emerged on the horizon (though it did itself, being a landowner and a fiscal taxing on the behalf of the spiritual sphere, participated in the process of turning the peasantry into the proletariat, thus encouraging the process). Since it became more and more clear that particular layers of the clergy were increasingly turning their back on the people, there were frequent conflicts between the local population and the Orthodox Church clergymen. The people's dissatisfaction also turned against the monks and the monasteries that, on one hand, preached the rejection of the secular goods, while, on the other hand, they lived in unsuited luxury.⁴ Besides, the literacy and the education of

⁴ Assuming the role of one of his heroes in his *Priključenja*, Dositej says: "I speak for myself: I am ashamed of myself. I am a disgrace for the gray hairs of my beard. Our whole life is spent on caring and speaking about brandy stills, wooden tubs, barrels and hoops; our whole science is in our ability to judge how old some wine or

the clergy and the monks were at a very low level, so that their conflict with the Enlightenment-oriented and relatively well-educated members of the newly-created secular intelligentsia was harsh on them. Thus, "when in 1733 in Sremski Karlovci there was a Metropolitan school opened in which the grammar school subjects of the times were also being studied the greatest enemies of the school turned out to be the monks themselves. When the old Metropolitan, its protector, died, the monks took advantage of the misfortunate occasion. The school was closed down, while the teachers were dismissed."⁵ It might have been as well that illiterate clergymen felt relieved since the Metropolitan Vićentije had forced them to attend the school and thus get at least some sort of education. The situation can be further illustrated, as far as literacy is concerned, by the fact that the Metropolitan Vićentije ordered, in 1723, that each parishioner had to have at least the New Testament, Catechism, Decalogue, the Liturgy Book and the Book of Rituals (in Russian-Slavonic) (M. Kostić 1952:223). Later on (1737), the Bishop of Bačka Visarion Pavlović founded a grammar school in Novi Sad; it is from these two schools that the first two generations of our intelligentsia sprang from, that is, the generations that had partly had Western education but cleansed of all the Catholic influences (since they were under immediate Russian impact, while the Russian Slavonic had almost completely drove away the Serbian Slavonic). Still, afterwards, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the government of Vienna, as part of the Theresian reforms, carried out radical changes in the ecclesiastical-political and cultural-education life of the Serbs in the Empire. By taking over the Serbian schools by the State, and by making their programs equal to those of the Austrian schools as well as those of other peoples in the Empire, the development of the spiritual life of the Serbs took on another direction. Of course, these reforms in the Empire were not motivated by some philanthropic or enlightenment ideals, but by their attempts to suppress the Russian influence that was increasingly penetrating the Serbian subjects. Still, regardless of the Vienna court intentions, the fact is that the Serbs in the Empire started to achieve a solid secular education that, truly, was not at the same level as that in the Protestant parts of Europe, but at least it was a step forward regarding the previous period when it had the Church as its immediate tutor. Unlike the situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the education of the Serbs on the territories that were under Turkish rule was disastrous. There was not even one school per hundred villages, while the future monks and clergymen studied at monasteries or at village priests' who were themselves poorly educated as well.⁶ The weakening of the Orthodox Church influence moved some of its

a plum brandy is..." (67); assuming the dramatic persona of Bishop Georgije Popović: "Speaking of the monk, therefore, dressed up in his black garments, who only declares to be a monk and a bachelor, who has only verbally renounced the world, while by his deeds he seeks the world and the worldly goods more than laymen, or even worse, unjustly seeks other people's sweat, toil and suffering, seeking and requesting with no shame at all: I am not asking you if he is a monk, if he is a good old man, but I am asking you if he is worthy of being called an honest man!" (37) Dositej Obradović, *Priključenija*, Rad, Belgrade, 1964.

⁵Jovan Rajić says: "These envious people were court monks, people of perfect standing, but truly ignorant: they could hardly read. It seems difficult or even too difficult to them to have children read and write and sing better than them. That is why they liked to bring good-natured young people back into ignorance instead of trying to bear alleged shame." Quoted from Kuprešanin Veljko, *Borba protiv kaluđera i popova u XVIII veku*, Narodna knjiga, Belgrade, 1953, p. 23

⁶"Whenever some student learns the alphabet from the manuscript, he takes (Slavonic) Primer; when he studies

authorities to have a more engaged attitude to the enlightenment, but these attempts mostly failed to represent an organized action of the church hierarchy; instead, they were the attempts made by enthusiastic individuals.⁷ Though the Orthodox faith of the Serbs, regarding its fundamental dogmas and liturgy, has preserved its traditional basis, the same could not be said about the domain in which it penetrated into everyday life - especially concerning religious holidays. Namely, the local festivities and the celebrations of the local patron saints have become so widely spread among the Serbs that, until the second half of the eighteenth century, there were 170 days reserved for celebrations, not counting Sundays. On those holidays, the Church prohibited all kinds of work; it could have been allowed only with a special blessing (that was to be paid for) (Kuprešanin 1953:69). In view of the fact that an enormous number of peasants was very poor, the blessing and the permission were, as a rule, obtained only by the spahis and the richest people. The poor peasants worked for them on those days without any payment expect for food and drinks (Vuk Karadžić 1972:189). In addition to otherwise primitive and difficult working conditions in agriculture, the Church prohibition of work on holidays (meaning on two-thirds of the year, including Sundays) led to an even greater regression and pauperization of the Serbian peasants so that it was even difficult to realize simple reproduction.

CONCLUSION

After the break-down of their medieval state, the Serbs were for centuries hindered in realizing their national, cultural and economic interests, thus creating a special kind of mentality characterized by a kind of fatalism and aversion towards economic enterprising and rational economy. The Orthodox religion, coupled with the Kosovo mythology, directly participated in creating such a mentality among the Serbs, while offering, as a model of the "inner-world" asceticism, a heroic death for national causes ("for the noble cross and golden freedom") or stoic endurance of the humiliation in slavery (modeled after the Christian martyrs). The view of the future that would be deprived of suffering and humiliation assumed as its eschatological objective the "heavenly kingdom" for the former generations and the "new Serbian empire" for the future ones. Such a model of the "inner-world" asceticism, in its turn, contributed to "forsaking the world", that is, to a passive attitude toward everyday engagement in the work that would be founded upon strictly organized and rational principles. A relaxed attitude or aversion towards rational organization and enterprising (that give no short-term results), or even sometimes the so-called "Slavonic laziness" among the Serbs (and especially the Montenegrins), are not genetically predestined characteristics, but they represent a subconsciously absorbed

and reads several times the Primer, he takes the Psalm Book; when he studies and reads several times the Psalm Book, he has already learnt the whole book; then, he was able to become, if he wanted, a priest, a monk, a deacon, or, if he had enough money, a bishop. Whenever a teacher, at his own will, opened a school, he also closed it down as he pleased and he moved to some other place or tried his hand at some other job." Vuk Karadžić, *Etnografski spisi*, Prosveta, Belgrade, 1972, p. 359

⁷ "May God give us," says Stratimirović, 'to have our clergy once and for all... (as habitual among other peoples' clergy) start teaching the flock... There would truly be less criminals, and the clergymen themselves, if modest, would be much more respected by the people, as are the Roman ones.'" Đoko Slijepčević, *Istorija srpske pravoslavne crkve*, II, BIGZ, Belgrade, 1991, p. 122

pessimistic view of the human effort, inherited by the cultural channels, that had been built up for centuries. The assumption that the Orthodox Christianity, as an identifier, participated in preserving the national identity of the Serbs is correct, but it should not be ignored that there were other factors at work as well - especially the mythology that gathered around the "myth of Kosovo". Still, in the recent history of the New Age (18th-19th centuries), when the Serbs started their liberation process trying to re-connect themselves with the European civilization the Orthodox religion not only failed to contribute to the modernization processes⁸ but it was most often in conflict with them.

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PRAVOSLAVLJE I RAZVOJ KOD SRBA U XVIII VEKU

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Pravoslavlje je kod Srba, stopljeno sa kosovskom mitologijom, neposredno učestvovalo u izgrađivanju socijalnog mentaliteta, nudeći kao model unutarsvetovne askeze herojsku pogibiju za nacionalne interese ("za krst časni i slobodu zlatnu") ili stoičko podnošenje žrtve poniženja u ropstvu (po uzoru na hrišćanske mučenike). Takav model unutarsvetovne askeze je, s druge strane, doprinio "napuštanju sveta", odnosno, pasivnom odnosu prema svakodnevnom angažovanju u radu koji bi se temeljio na strogo organizovanim i racionalnim principima. Tvrdnja da je pravoslavlje, kao identifikator, učestvovalo u očuvanju nacionalnog identiteta Srba je tačna, ali ne treba smetnuti s uma delovanje i ostalih faktora - posebno mitologije koja se formirala oko "kosovskog mita". No, s druge strane, u novovekovnoj istoriji (XVIII-XIX v.), kada su Srbi započeli proces oslobađanja i ponovnog uključivanja u evropsku civilizaciju, pravoslavlje ne samo da nije doprinisilo modernizacionim procesima već je, najčešće bilo u sukobu sa njima.

⁸ Modernization not understood in its value aspect but in its real-sociological traits.