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POLITICAL USE OF ICON PAINTING TRADITION AND/OR COMMON CHURCH PRACTICE: SYMBOLISM AND MEANING OF THE NEWLY COMPOSED CUSTOM OF COMMEMORATING OF FOUNDATION IN MODERN SERBIA

In September 2016, a piece of news resounded on social networks and in traditional media that the former Minister of Defense Bratislav Gašić and his brother Boban were portrayed on a fresco in the Church of Sveti Jovan in Kruševac. The Gašić family were donors of the construction of this place of worship. That this is not an exception in contemporary material religious practice is also shown by some examples like the one from the Šumadija Diocese where the initials of the former First Lady Dragica Nikolić were forged on the church's pole. Her husband, former President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić was a donor of the church. A few years earlier, Miodrag Nikolić and Radoslav Milenković, businessmen from the municipality of Jagodina, were immortalized on frescoes of the village churches in Rakitovo and Majuna. Milenko Kostić, businessman from the municipality of Čačak did the same and this year's case from neighboring Montenegro, where the figure of the former Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić was painted on a fresco in a church in Podgorica indicates continuity of this recent political–ecclesiastical practice.

This paper will try to point out the multi-layered meaning of the newly emerging practices, while emphasizing the importance of including the analyses of the social context when interpreting and explaining examples that shape contemporary reality and send latent messages to the society through various mediators. Are the new founding practices on church frescoes an example of the cult of rule and capital, or a common church procedure when private persons donate funds for the construction of a church building? The backbone of this research are attempts to find replies to the questions of what kind of messages the portraits of

politicians in churches send to the local population and wider community and where the boundaries between the primarily secular state and the formally apolitical Orthodox Church are.

Key words: church, politics, social context, frescoes, founding