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RELIGIOUS CHANGES IN MONTENEGRO – FROM THE SOCIALIST ATHEIZATION TO THE POST-SOCIALIST REVITALIZATION

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Abstract

The influence, significance, and meaning of religion and religiosity in the Balkans at the end of the second decade of the 21st century have not diminished. Peter Berger argues that today's world, with some exceptions, is deeply religious—perhaps even more than before. This attitude of Berger refers to modern society, but in the era of socialism, it was not so. Empirical verification from that period records the atheization and secularization of society. In this regard, the primary aim of this paper is to present a kind of panoramic review of religiosity from the era of socialism to the post-socialist transformation and religious revitalization. The focus of the first part of the paper is the analysis of de-monopolization and stigmatization of religion in socialism while the second part of the paper concerns the analysis of the elements of desecularization of society, and the post-socialist revitalization of religion in Montenegro. Subsequently, a kind of stability in religiosity is detected on the basis of empirical material.

Keywords: Montenegro, religion, religiosity, socialism, post-socialism, desecularization, revitalization of religion.

Introduction

Researching social phenomena is a complex task, raising many doubts. The situation is even more complex if it is a scientific study of religion, an ancient, complex, changeable but constant socio-psychological and spiritual phenomenon. Therefore, the need for precision and scientific responsibility in the panoramic presentation of religiosity in Montenegro, from the late 1980s to the present day, should be constantly and carefully emphasized while studying religion and religiosity, perhaps even more in the Balkans than elsewhere.

The studies of this type, which call for a review of the chronology of thematic events, do not represent glorification and advocacy for only one referential social system, but a credible and objective presentation of the social state of religiosity viewed through the prism of the sociology of religion. It is important to specify that the paper deals with three denominations: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Islamic, which coexist in this area. Our research aims to panoramically present the scope of religiosity in this republic during real socialism and conducted atheization of society, and then to compare it with the post-socialist period, when sociological expertise detects the return of religion.

The twentieth century is marked as the century of secularization in the sociology of religion. There has been an erosion of religiosity in many countries, especially in the countries of the real socialist and socio-political system, including Montenegro. For many sociologists of religion, the century we have stepped into under the influence of Huntington's theory of "the clash of civilizations"¹ and the practical events of September 11, 2001, has looked like a century that promises many conflicts or "clashes of cultures."² Since the sociologists of religion in the Balkans detected the erosion of the secular paradigm and the return of religion to the public scene in the late 1980s, these conflicts were expected to occur in the name of religion as well. What is stated as the main argument in favor of desecularization is the return of religion to the political level, the strengthening of fundamentalism, the rise of traditional and conservative

¹ Samjuel Hantington. *Sukob civilizacija*. [The Clash of Civilizations]. (Podgorica: CID. 2000).

² Linda Woodhead, "Five Concepts of Religion." *International Review of Sociology* 21. (2011): 121-43.

organizations, the decline of citizens' willingness to identify with atheism, the strengthening of ultra-right political parties, etc.³

Review of Religiosity in Montenegro under the Mask of Socialism

Much of the world was secularized, and secularization has been the dominant frame of reference for the sociological study of religion since the 1960s.⁴ Religions and confessional communities in the former socialist Yugoslavia, and therefore Montenegro as its member state, went through a painful experience of atheization, conducted by the regime and secularization of society as its subsequent (un)intended consequence.⁵ The historical background in Montenegro was marked by weakening and marginalization of religion and the church, encouraged by systemically conducted and imposed atheism, guided by atheistic education and upbringing, which all led to the process of separating people from religion. The whole system was ideologically shaped and adapted to the current political model. Such an attitude of the state towards religion can be explained from the social aspects and within the church aspects. Namely, considering the negative historical memories, the socialist regime believed that the marginalization of religion would reduce the historical inter-confessional and inter-ethnic hostility in The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Subsequently, there was a strong desire of the communist government to establish the absolute power of control over the whole society. The demographic trends of the population should not be neglected either. After the war, a large part of the population migrated from the countryside to the city, which led to a reduction in the rural population that, according to empirical records, has always been more religious than the urban population.⁶ The causes of high levels of secularization in Orthodox homogeneous

³ Timothy Crippen. "Old and new gods in the modern world: toward a theory of religious transformation." *Social Forces*. 67, 2.(1988): 316-336; Grace Davie. *Religion in Britain since 1945*. (Oxford: Blackwell.1994); Rodney Stark, "Secularization: R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60, 3. (2000): 249-273.

⁴ Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*. (London: C. A. Watts. 1966); Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967),107; Peter L. Berger, *Desekularizacija sveta – oživljavanje religije i svetska politika*. [The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics]. (Novi Sad: Mediteran. 2008). Karel Dobbelaere, "Secularization Theories and Sociological Paradigms: A Reformulation of the Private-Public Dichotomy and the Problem of Societal Integration." *Sociological Analysis* 46. (1985); Karel Dobbelaere. *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 2002); Rodney Stark, and Lawrence R. Iannaccone, "Response to Lechner:"Recent Religious Declines in Quebec, Poland, and the Netherlands: A Theory Vindicated." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35. (1996); Rodney Stark, "Secularization: R.I.P." Steve Bruce."Secularisation, Church and Popular Religion." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62. 2011.

⁵ Dragoljub Đorđević B. *Beg od crkve*. [Escape from the Church]. (Knjaževac: Nota, 1984).

⁶ Mirko Blagojević. *Religija i crkva u transformacijama društva*. [Religion and the Church in the Transformations of Society]. (Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju "Filip Višnjić," 2005).

areas could be attributed to the internal weaknesses of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which most often point directly to loyalty to the regime, schism within the church, etc. The dependence of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the national being dates back to the Byzantine era, and it represents, according to Vukomanović, one of its main weaknesses, and therefore one of the main factors where the causes of secularization should be evident. In addition, Vukomanović finds three more reasons that condition the secularization, and that are primarily related to the Serbian Orthodox Church:

- a) persistence of the Serbian pagan heritage;
- b) permeation of the religious, confessional, and national factor;
- c) conservatism of the Serbian Orthodox Church, lack of understanding for the process of modernization, as well as the readiness for transformation and adaptation of the spirit of the new post-industrial civilization.⁷

In such a socio-political climate, religion was suppressed and treated as a form of a person's alienation. Such orientation represented a desire of the official socialist establishment to constitute, according to its views on religion, a social environment that would embody the Marxist understanding of religion. In accordance with the official attitude of the regime towards religion, cooperation between religions was obstructed, and the nurturing of culture and interreligious dialogue was almost absent. A kind of liberalization of the regime towards religion began only in the early 1980s.

Empirical studies detect increased secularization in that period. According to Yugoslav studies entitled "Social Structure and Quality of Life" from 1989, 19.0% of Orthodox respondents considered themselves religious, 29.9% were indifferent to religion, and 51.1% were opposed to religion. Among Roman Catholic respondents, one third of respondents declared themselves as religious, one third as indifferent to religion, and one third expressed an attitude of opposition to religion. Members of the Islamic community declared themselves as religious in 25.9% of the cases examined, 33.3% were indifferent and 40.8% were against religion. Therefore, Orthodox respondents are at the forefront of non-religiosity in comparison with the other two denominations. The religious practice also testifies to the low frequency of religiosity. In sociological studies, the indicator related to church visits is one of the most authentic

⁷ Milan Vukomanović. *Sveto i mnoštvo – izazovi religijskog pluralizma*. [The sacred and the multitude - the challenges of religious pluralism]. (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2001), 103.

indicators of institutionalized, i.e. church religiosity. This indicator is very suitable for sociological expertise due to a more objective view of the religious situation in the research area. Hence, going to church is an indicator that is very important from the perspective of sociological analysis, and not only from the perspective of believers' religiosity and religious organizations to which they belong. A very low percentage of going to church was recorded in Montenegro--19%, which means that the lowest percentage of those who regularly went to church was in the dominant Orthodox area of Montenegro. According to the studies from 1985 and 1986⁸ there were also 19% of religious respondents in Montenegro who went to church. This percentage has been on the rise since 1989, especially in the Orthodox areas of Yugoslavia, which can be understood as part of the process of increasing the public importance and the revitalization of religion and church.⁹

Revitalization of Religion – the Post-Socialist Period

With the collapse of socialism, “desecularization of the world” is put on a pedestal of values at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.¹⁰ Therefore, a religious “renaissance” came within all traditional denominations in Montenegro (Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Islam) in the final decade of the twentieth century. The period of the rise of religion coincides with the collapse of real socialism in Eastern Europe, which has convincingly questioned the theory of atheization and secularization as no less an important consequence of it. The theoretical framework in the sociology of religion experiences a kind of turning point, and the theory of secularization is suppressed, while the attention of theoreticians is now focused on the desecularization of society and the revitalization of religion towards social processes in which the number of people, who confessionally identify and believe, grows.¹¹ Some sociologists of religion do not abandon the secular theory but admit that certain parts of the world are not yet

⁸ Stipe Pojatina. “Religija i religioznost u jugoslovenskom društvu.” [Religion and religiosity in Yugoslav society]. in *Empirijska istraživanja društvene svesti*, (Beograd: Centar za društvena istraživanja. 1988).

⁹ Dragomir Pantić. “Prostorne, vremenske i socijalne koordinate religioznosti mladih u Jugoslaviji.” [Spatial, temporal and social coordinates of the religiosity of young people in Yugoslavia], in: S. Mijalović et al.. *Deca kriz*, (Beograd: IDN,1990),2019. Dragomir Pantić. “Religioznost građana Jugoslavije.” [Religiosity citizens of Yugoslavia], in *Jugoslavija na kriznoj prekretnici*, (Beograd: IDN. Centar za politikološka istraživanja i javno mnjenje. 1991).

¹⁰ Berger, Desekularizacija sveta – oživljavanje religije i svetska politika.

¹¹ Jeffery K. Hadden, “Religion and the Quest for Meaning and Order: Old Paradigms, New Realities,” *Sociological Focus*, 28 (1995), 89-97.

mature enough for such a process.¹² Today, we are witnesses of desecularization, and sociologists of religion detect a religious renewal. Former proponents of secularization today admit that religion “has always been present somewhere” and that the modern world is still as religious as it used to be, with certain exceptions that confirm the rule.¹³

When it comes to post-Yugoslav areas, where we geographically and socially locate Montenegro, the desecularization of society was accompanied by ethnomobilization and nationalism, especially during the crisis and conflicts of the 1990s, so there was an opinion that it was a kind of clericalization of society (of Serbia and Montenegro) while identification of the religious with the national was politically forced.¹⁴ It should be pointed out that, although religion is not always, and, in every place, politically colored, there have always been, and there will always be, people who do believe for personal reasons, free will, and choice. This is the prevailing trend. In other words, when it comes to Montenegro, the collapse of the socialist system was accompanied by the national political revitalization of religion. All this led to confessional homogenization, mobilization of religious and national groups, public support for religious communities, and, consequently, the greater connection of people with religion and church. It is now religion that gives identity and identification to the community, integrating an individual into the collective. This is important in conflict situations in the Balkans because religion and churches mobilize people into a collective that opposes another collective in a new situation. If the culture of a community is really endangered or only perceived in these conflicts, religion stands in defense of culture and tradition.¹⁵ The desecularization of society and the revitalization of religion in Montenegro are zealously detected by sociological studies.

Miloš Bešić and Borislav Đukanović developed a consistently functionalist approach to religion and empirically confirmed it by their research in the work “Gods and People-Religiosity in Montenegro.” Consistent with the functionalist approach to religion, the authors start from Durkheim’s statement that religion represents society. Arguing that religion is a society, the authors imply a community, not a global society. The typical functionalist approach of the authors is reflected in the assertion that modern society contains many social groups that have

¹² Steve Bruce. “On the Demise of Christianity in Britain,” in *Predicting Religion, Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures: Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective Series*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003).

¹³ Berger, *Desekularizacija sveta – oživljavanje religije i svetska politika*.

¹⁴ Dragoljub B. Đorđević, “Religiousness of Serbia at the Beginning of the 21st: What is It About?” in: Danijela Gavrilović (ed.), *Revitalization of Religion - Theoretical and Comparative Approaches*. (Niš: YSSS Annual, 2009).

¹⁵ Blagojević. *Religija i crkva u transformacijama društva..*

the character of a community, and therefore can be treated as a religion. These authors create a schematic setting of religion: community=transcendent=sacred=religion.¹⁶ The basic elaboration on which the authors base their theoretical setting refers to the conclusion that each religion represents a transcendent world, and therefore, each religion implies a social group (community) as its social carrier. These authors observe the analysis of religion in the context of the three main theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Marxist, functionalist, and phenomenological theories. The authors believe that Marx's model of class society has its own transcendent world, i.e. its religion. "This means that in class society we indeed deal with two social communities, and therefore with two religions."¹⁷ Guided by Durkheim's beliefs, the authors notice that each system of ideas, beliefs, and values is a form of religiosity because it contributes to the creation of the community. Their functionalist approach to religion comes to the fore in the claim that religion is a society in the elementary form of a community. The authors add that human communities are born and that they disappear, so the same is the case with religion, emphasizing that religion is a social phenomenon par excellence. They are convinced that secular religiosity is no less a religion than classical religiosity. The authors emphasize that many human values, systems of ideas, and beliefs that transcend the individual and integrate him into some forms of human society (into the community) represent a religion.

Sociological and empirical studies in Montenegro also show an evident revitalization of conventional religiosity. The study of Bešić and Đukanović consisted of four ordinal scales of religiosity of ten items each that measured religious belief, social behavior according to a certain religious pattern, religious practice, and knowledge of religious doctrine. The scales measured the overall religiosity of the respondents (Catholic, Orthodox, and Islamic denomination), and separately the religiosity of people in the mentioned denominations. According to this study, the religiosity of one fifth of the respondents is low, the religiosity of 57.1% is medium, and 22.2% of respondents are religious. If we express ourselves as authors, according to a continuous scale, we arrive at the conclusion that religiosity in Montenegro is high and amounts to 117.1 in the interval from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 170 points. As for denominations individually, this study shows that the religiosity of Catholics is on average regarding general religiosity, the religiosity of the members of the Islamic religious community is above average, while the

¹⁶ Miloš Bešić & Borislav Đukanović. *Bogovi i ljudi*. [Gods and Peoples]. (Podgorica: CID, 2000), 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

religiosity of Orthodox respondents is below average. According to this study, 25.8% of the Orthodox, 29.1% of the Roman Catholics, and 35.3% of the Muslims respect religious rites.¹⁸ The 2003 census in Montenegro shows that 74.23% of people declare themselves as the Orthodox, 17.74% as the Muslims, and 3.54% as the Roman Catholics. The 2011 census detects 72.07% of the Orthodox, 19.10% of the Muslims, and 3.44% of the Roman Catholics. Although, according to the census, certain trends in the religiosity of the population of Montenegro can be monitored, in terms of increase, stagnation or decrease in denominational affiliation, it still contains data on nominal religiosity, without providing a deeper analysis. The census provides only a representation of confessional identification, i.e. an external representation of religiosity.

The 2008 European Value Studies, which includes Montenegro, shows that 88% of respondents declare they believe in God, while 87% declare they are religious¹⁹. According to this study, 78% of respondents believe that religion is important in life, 67% of respondents believe that God is important in life, and 70% believe they find strength and comfort in faith. The 2013 study on the youth population detects a kind of stability in religiosity. 60.9% of the entire youth population declare themselves as convinced believers who accept everything that religion teaches, while 20.6% of respondents declare themselves as religious but without accepting everything that religion teaches. Thus, 81.5% of respondents are religious in various modalities, 11.3% are neutral, while 7.2% of respondents are not religious. According to this study, 58.4% of Orthodox respondents declare themselves as religious and 23.0% as religious but without accepting everything that religion teaches. In general, 81.4% of Orthodox respondents are religious. 58.4% of Roman Catholic respondents declare themselves as religious and 22.8% declare themselves as religious but without accepting everything that religion teaches. 68.4% of Islamic respondents are religious, 22% are religious but without accepting everything that religion teaches, while 11.6% are not religious. The structure of religiosity among Orthodox and Roman Catholic respondents is very similar, especially when it comes to religiosity that does not imply the acceptance of everything religion teaches. On the other hand, the indicator of religiosity regarding visits to religious buildings shows greater zeal of the Roman Catholics:

¹⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁹ <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/page/about-evs.html>

37.6% of Orthodox respondents and 54.4% of the Roman Catholics go to church monthly, and 36.6% of respondents go to the mosque at least once a month.²⁰

The study of religiosity on the entire population in Montenegro was conducted in 2016 as well. The religiosity was tested by creating three degrees of religiosity of the total score--low, medium, and high. These scores ranged from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 170 points, while 40 indicated the lowest possible religiosity and 170 the highest. Respondents who had up to 96 points were classified in the group of “lowest score of religiosity,” respondents who had 97 to 137 belonged to the group of “medium religiosity,” and respondents who had over 137 points were “highly religious” respondents. The arithmetic mean of 116.46 indicates the high religiosity of the population in Montenegro. The study shows that overall religiosity is still significantly high. Based on the F-test, the differences between denominations in terms of general religiosity are statistically highly significant ($F = 46.126$; $p = 0.000$). The Orthodox are less religious than the Roman Catholics ($I-J = -10.05174$; $P = 0.000$), and even less than the Muslims ($I-J = -20.20460$; $P = 0.000$). Besides being more religious than the Orthodox, the Roman Catholics are less religious than the Muslims ($I-J = -10.15286$; $p < 0.000$). According to the same study, religious practice is regularly carried out by 27.6% of Orthodox, 30.6% of Roman Catholic and 36.0% of Muslim respondents.²¹ In comparison with the previous studies,²² a kind of stability in religiosity is stated.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of religiosity in Montenegro from the socialist atheization to the post-socialist revitalization of religion, we can draw several conclusions. The socialist, socio-political system did not have a benevolent attitude towards religion. The view of religion was most often harmonized with the policy of the official socialist establishment. This is especially visible in the dominant Orthodox areas such as Montenegro. Official studies from that period, which detect a low score of religiosity, testify to that.

²⁰ Vladimir Bakrač. *Relija i mladi – religioznost mladih u Crnoj Gori* [Religion and the Young: religiosity of the Youth in Montenegro]. (Podgorica: Narodna knjiga. 2013).

²¹ Borislav Đukanović & Nikola, Šaranović. “Religioznost u Crnoj Gori 1999-2016.” [Religion in Montenegro 1999-2016] in *Sociološki presjek crnogorskog društva*. (Podgorica. Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti. 2016).

²² Bešić & Đukanović. *Bogovi i ljudi*.

However, theoretical and empirical expertise identified the revitalization of religion and the desecularization of society in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Strict advocates of the theory of secularization are forced to change their official attitude. The empirical expertise in Montenegro detects a mass return to traditional religions and a significant percentage of religious residents. With the collapse of socialism as a quasi-religion, traditional religion enters the scene. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, studies record a kind of stability in religiosity. When it comes to religiosity in Montenegro, it is important to point out that the revitalization of religion is widespread among members of all denominations in this republic, but with certain specificities. Namely, members of the Orthodox denomination are the least religious, and the Roman Catholics are in the middle between the Orthodox and the Muslims, while the Muslims are convincingly the most religious.

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