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Book Review: Politicization of Religion, the Power of State, Nation, and Faith: The Case of Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States

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Book Review

Ognjenović, Gorana and Jozelić. Jasna, eds. *Politicization of Religion, the Power of State, Nation, and Faith: The Case of Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

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Although many scientific studies that dealt with the conflict in former Yugoslavia and its consequences have been published in the last 20 years, editors Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić's book *Politicization of Religion, the Power of State, Nation, and Faith: The Case of Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States*, and eminent scholarly contributors, produced a work of strong theoretical and analytical depth. In the beginning, it is clear to the reader that the book will not merely deal with general definitions or already known theories. It will also provide essential paradigms related to the historical, legal, social, and cultural background of the conflict in former Yugoslavia, as well as the role of religion and religious institutions in the past and present.

Jasna Jozelić, with the topic "Politicization of Religion: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina," opens a large and significant research field focusing on the problem of "how" and "when" the politicization of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina was used as a mechanism for the creation and development of the ideology of nationalism. After an extremely clear and interesting presentation on the history of the Bosnian medieval state and its religious specifics, and an analysis of political and religious assumptions for the outbreak of war in Bosnia (1992-1995), the author presents arguments for defining the national identity of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks). One conclusion is that Islam, during and after the war years, became the basis for the identity of Bosniaks in Bosnia, in the region and around the world. Similar processes were

happening simultaneously in Serbia and Croatia, in which the Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church also had key roles in (re)defining the national identities of Serbs and Croats.

The beginning of Sergei Flere's text "Was the Bosnian War (1992-1995) a Full-fledged Religious War?" reminds us that although the religious texts of the dominant religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Christianity and Islam) promote peace and understanding, throughout history, up to this day ideas like the "just war" are being actualized by religious institutions and their representatives. For many years, theorists have pointed out the specific nature of the war in Bosnia, emphasizing the religious component of the conflict, but not completely and without a critical delay. The author's conclusion is that the blessings and mythical rhetoric of the religious communities have not only encouraged warfare but have become the very essence of the war. The question of religious identification and identity became crucial, in which, according to the author's opinion, the Serbian Orthodox Church and its members dominated.

The study "The Role of the Catholic Church in Bosnian Conflict 1992-1995: A Historical Approach" by Clemens Cavallin and Sead S. Fetahagić presents a thorough overview of the presence and role of the Roman Catholic Church (especially the Franciscan Order) from its appearance in Bosnia and Herzegovina until today. Also, it is particularly important to critically examine the Catholic Church's role in the Bosnian conflict, as well as the Catholic relationship with other religious organizations in that region. Focusing on the period of war (1992-1995), the authors seek to balance the responses of social sciences against existential questioning which relates, not only to the war's destructions, but also to the times that came to Europe. This suggests a change of political discourse with possible inconsiderable consequences.

"The Gospel and Politics: Transforming Grace for Transformed Society?" is the essay of Kosta Milkov in which he discusses how Protestant participation was manifested in the politics

of former Socialist Yugoslavia; more precisely, the political demands, attitudes, and opinions represented by the most prominent and eminent evangelical theologian in former Yugoslavia, Petar Kuzmič. The author reveals that few theological views were decisive in creating a political opinion of Protestant Christians, and many believers of free evangelical churches were opposed to any form of politicization. Nevertheless, a certain set of questions required deceduous political answers, and they were given by Kuzmič through newspaper columns and TV shows. He referred to them, first in Croatia, then in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, without hesitating to shake the political establishment and accepted political frameworks.

Milan Vukomanović, one of the most eminent sociologists of religion from Serbia, with his essay “Ecclesiastical Involvement in Serbian Politics: Post-2000 Period,” recalls that Serbia from the time of socialism and secularism was relatively suddenly faced with the general politics of ethnocentrism and the spirit of nationalism in the late 1980s and early nineties. The author expresses the view that wars in the territory of former Yugoslavia were caused by interethnic-political conflicts, which occurred in conditions of deep economic and social crisis. However, the religious element has always been related to a certain ethnic community and its perception of one's own identity. Also, certain religious communities, such as the Serbian Orthodox Church, did not understand the conflict of war only as ethnic or religious, but also as a territorial issue. One of the consequences of this was the demolition of other religion’s objects, representing the domination of one national collectivity over the other. The author, in his essay, touches on various topics (religious education, church and foreign affairs, etc.), and raises the following questions concerning modernity, democracy, civil society, and the relationship between the State and Church. To what extent are religious institutions competent to deal with contemporary political problems? What is the nature of their response to the challenges of democracy? Can

religious organizations reduce social capacity for change, such as integration into the European Union? How many traditional religious communities, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church, can keep up with European democracy and genuine pluralism of opinion? Vukomanović concludes that a consensus is needed between Orthodoxy and secular political philosophy regarding the values of civil society, especially at the time of various inclusive global socio-political processes. Consistency on political values (such as EU policies) does not imply loss of cultural identity, as evidenced by the fact that majority of believers in the Serbian Orthodox Church, despite the opposition of some conservative bishops, accept European integrations and its social rules.

In the essay “The Political Dynamics of Intra-Orthodox Conflict in Montenegro,” Kenneth Morrison and Nebojša Čagorović problematize the influence of politics and political organizations between the Serbian Orthodox and the non-canonical Montenegrin Orthodox Church in Montenegro. In 1993, when the conflict of the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox churches formally began, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church was originally registered as a non-governmental organization and then as a religious organization. The crisis was profound and became radicalized over time. The authors emphasize that behind the problem of independence of the church stands the question of the identity of the Montenegrin nation and its political interests. An insight into the religious history of Montenegro and its connection with Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, is the role of Bishop Amfilohije Radović as the most notable representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and the fighter for the interests of the Serbian national corpus. His policies differ from the official policies of both Serbia and Montenegro. After the declaration of independence of Montenegro in 2006, conflicts between the members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the supporters of the Montenegrin Orthodox

Church continue, especially in the struggle for Church property and future political influence. Unfortunately, there are similar divisions in Montenegro today. Thus, even though the Montenegrin Orthodox Church recognizes the Law on Churches and Religious Communities of Montenegro, the only recognized canonical Church that remains is the Serbian Orthodox Church, with all the rights that come from it.

The relationship between the state and the church in Slovenia is discussed by Srečo Dragoš in the essay “The Separation between Church and State in Slovenia: A Political Fiasco” reminding us that little has been done after the establishment of Slovenia's independence regarding the plan to have a true dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and state institutions. Analyzing legal norms and statistical data, the author presents the following trends and conclusions: the insufficiently clear principle of separation between Church and State, establishing political interests through the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant role of the Roman Catholic Church as opposed to other religious communities, aggressiveness of the clergy towards state organs, etc. Dragoš concludes that while Slovenia has long been in the European Union, the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy are privileged at the expense of small religious communities and its believers, with negative economic and political implications.

By providing a historical perspective of the presence of Christianity (Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church) and Islam in Kosovo and one part of Albania, Anton K. Berishaj and his study “Religion and Politics in Kosovo” provide interesting data on the religious specificities of that region. The author analyzes the phenomenon of religious syncretism called Crypto-Christianity, in which external forms of religious behavior have remained Islamic but with the presence of certain Christian traditions and values. Another form of specificity relates to Bektashis, the Sufi dervish order, which cultivated the teaching of equality for all religions. The

author recalls that, unlike most other nations in the Balkans, Albanians belong to Christian Churches (mostly Roman Catholic) and to the Islamic community. However, there is a noticeable presence of various Christian sects and Islamic fundamentalist groups, especially now and in recent decades. In political terms, although most Albanians belong to the Islamic religion, the vast majority of Kosovo's citizens want a Western form of democracy and to join the Euro-Atlantic integrative processes.

The authors and articles try to answer the question of how religion is used to build and establish national identities and what the relation is between states, nations, and faith in times of crisis and conflicts. The history and effects of the former one-party system, the fragility of democratic institutions, and the absence of open dialogue among peoples and their dominant religious communities opened the way for the spread of nationalist ideas and ethnocentric political movements. Unfortunately, the divisions between the policies of states and peoples remain in the present time, and the fear of new conflicts is noticeable.

The relevance of such issues is indisputable if political and religious elites do not realize that coexistence, peace, and understanding is necessary for the Balkans and Europe. The academic community will remain lonely in the efforts to promote peace and nonviolence, while war trumpets will again be heard instead.