



YUGOSLAV SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION  
YSSSR Annual – Year XX

# A PRIEST ON THE BORDER

---

edited by  
DRAGOLJUB B. ĐORĐEVIĆ  
DRAGAN TODOROVIĆ  
MILOŠ JOVANOVIĆ

YUGOSLAV SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION  
FACULTY OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ

Niš  
2013

# **A PRIEST ON THE BORDER**

YSSSR Annual – Year XX  
XX Annual International YSSSR Conference  
*A Priest on the Border*

## **Founder**

Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Niš, Serbia

## **Editors**

Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Niš, Serbia  
Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Niš, Serbia

## **For the Editors**

Danijela Gavrilović  
Vlastimir Nikolić

## **Edited by**

Dragoljub B. Đorđević  
Dragan Todorović  
Miloš Jovanović

## **Reviewers**

Ivan Markešić  
Mirko Blagojević  
Vladimir Bakrač

## **Computer Support and Cover Design**

Darko Jovanović

## **Print**

SAB Informatika, Niš

## **Circulation**

300

## **ISBN**

978-86-6055-038-7

Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of Eastern and Southeastern Serbia* (179013), conducted at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Tehnological Development of the Republic of Serbia

## CONTENTS

---

- 1 Missionary Activity and Social Service of the Russian Orthodox Church  
in the Border Regions: To Sociological Analysis .....5  
*Victor Bakharev*  
*Sergey Lebedev*
- 2 Priests of the Borderlands: Veliko Gradište .....13  
*Milovan Vuković*
- 3 The Priest on the Border – Golubac .....25  
*Ninoslav Golubović*  
*Vladan Petrović*
- 4 Ukrainian among Catholics in Majdanpek, Bor, Zaječar... .....35  
*Danijela Voza*
- 5 The Priest on the Border: Father Dragan from Kladovo .....45  
*Vesna Trifunović*
- 6 A Vlachian Priest in the Border Region (Negotin) .....57  
*Miloš Jovanović*  
*Miloš Tasić*
- 7 Father Bora – A Good Man and Priest (Zaječar) ..... 69  
*Dejan Krstić*  
*Dragan Koković*
- 8 The Priest in the Border Area:  
Spasa Pavlović from Knjaževac ..... 85  
*Lela Milošević Radulović*  
*Dragana Stjepanović Zaharijevski*
- 9 Branislav Pavlov:  
Head of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac ..... 103  
*Dragan Todorović*  
*Jovan Živković*
- 10 A Priest in the Border Area (Dimitrovgrad):  
The Preacher of God's Word and a Participant in Relity .....123  
*Jasmina Petrović*  
*Zoran M. Jovanović*
- 11 A Priest on the Border – Two Sides of a Coin (Babušnica) .....147  
*Danijela Gavrilović*  
*Marija Cvetković*

12	The Activities of the Clergy in the Border Area of Crna Trava .....	165
	<i>Suzana Marković Krstić</i>	
	<i>Aleksandra Kostić</i>	
13	About Priesthood in the Border Municipality Surdulica .....	183
	<i>Ivana Ilić Krstić</i>	
	<i>Vesna Miltojević</i>	
14	Zoran Stojanov: A Priest from Bosilegrad .....	195
	<i>Dragan Todorović</i>	
	<i>Dragoljub B. Đorđević</i>	
	<i>Neven Obradović</i>	
15	Administration in a Remote Region – Trgovište .....	207
	<i>Dragoljub B. Đorđević</i>	
	<i>Danijela Zdravković</i>	
16	Rajko Glišović: A Priest from Temska (Piroć) .....	221
	<i>Dragan Todorović</i>	
17	The Life and Work of Imam Lukman Ibrahimović from Čukarka (Preševo) .....	237
	<i>Danijela Zdravković</i>	
	<i>Dragoljub B. Đorđević</i>	
	Abstracts .....	251
	The Procedure for Collecting Data on the Life and Activity of a Priest on the Border .....	263
	Index of Names .....	267
	Notes on the Contributors and Editors .....	269

**WE ARE THANKFUL FOR THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT  
 TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGICAL  
 DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND TO THE OFFICE  
 FOR COOPERATION WITH CHURCHES AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS  
 COMMUNITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SERBIA**

Victor Bakharev  
Sergey Lebedev

**MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL SERVICE  
OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE  
BORDER REGIONS: TO SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

---

It has passed only a quarter of a century since the time when Marxism-Leninism as the only world outlook paradigm, cultivated in society as a state ideology, positively perceived by the communist leaders of the country, has lost its former importance in Russia. Doors of hospitals, schools, military units, etc. were widely opened before religion, once the former pariah in the standard of spiritual values of the Soviet people.

In the recent retrospect the process of mutual religious and secular contacts in the country is not extremely selective. Not only representatives of Russia's traditional religions, but also foreign religious missionaries were the guests of universities, colleges, hospitals, hotels and homes for the elderly people, orphanages and rehabilitation centers for minors, military groups. This period is characterized by an uncritical acceptance by the Soviet citizens, including officials of the state authorities, and the social and political discourse of everything that was presented in a sacralized religious framing. Different kinds of religious movements and social institutions appeared in the regional socio-cultural environment, many of them were sponsored by foreign religious centers. Joint conferences, speeches of religious leaders and clergy to the pupils and students, military personnel, prisoners and others, cult practice in the institutions of education, health and social welfare, in prisons and military units, and other forms of mutual contacts have become commonplace for regional society.

The vector of social consciousness gradually began to change after the terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway, committed adherents of Aum Shinrikyo religious movement also registered in Russia. Dozens of innocent people were its victims. This event served as a good reason to revise once a widespread position, which was reduced to a generalized-syncretic interpretation of a religion as a panacea for the spiritual diseases of Russian society (Лебедев 2004).

As it may seem strange to someone, but it was Russian Orthodox Church (ROC MP) which one of the first noted to the destructive tendencies in the religious life of Russian society, which have become very prominent in the last decade. The hierarchs of ROC MP (hereinafter – the Church) have expressed their concern about active missionary activity carried out on its “canonical territory” by representatives of traditional non-Orthodox and non-traditional religions in Russia, the leading centers of which are located outside the Russian Federation. Only after that the legislature responded to the processes and adopted the Federal Law “On Freedom of Conscience and

Religious Associations” (1997), providing, in comparison with the Federal Law “On Freedom of Religion” (1990), a number of limitations in activities of foreign missions and organizations.

Finally, the Russian society “saw the light” in the matter of the relationship between constructive and destructive in religion in connection with the expansion of the territory of Russia by “pure” form of Wahhabi Islam, which found itself required by certain parts of Sufis and Chechnya politicians in the 1990s. Since 2000, as a result of terrorist attacks in Russia, 1175 people were killed and over 3,200 were injured (ПАHOV).

The modern dialectic of cause-effect relationships of rising and overcoming the threats in the border-line and attached to them territories of the Russian Federation is accumulated today in the concept of “international terrorism”, having Islamic roots in its sacred framing. The activation of Islamic extremist groups in their quest for political leadership demonstrated it quite vividly, as well as terrorist attacks in Russia, which served as a starting point, for example, for the counter-terrorist operation of Russian troops in Chechnya.

From the analysis of the events of recent years it is clear, that threats to border security, arising from international terrorist organizations, which sacral and ideological content is formed by Islamic fundamentalism, are becoming dominant. Among these organizations are: “Muslim Brotherhood”, a network of groups entitled: “Social Reform Society,” “Islamic Call Committee”, “Al-Igasa” which operates on the territory of Central Asia and the Caucasus, “the Committee of Muslims of Asia” operates on the territory of Russia and the countries of Central Asia, “Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami”, actively manifesting itself in Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Ukraine, “ Hamas”, operates in places where Muslims compactly live in Russia and in Central Asia countries, Charity Fund “Adul Aziz Bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim,” which is active mainly in Russia, “Akromidy” – a religious movement which is characteristic mainly for Uzbekistan, “Center for Islamic Development”, has chosen for itself the territory of Kyrgyzstan, “Adolat Uyushmasi” , spread its nets mainly on the territory of Uzbekistan, “Tovba” – extremist movement, acting on the territory of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

As the security of the border region, – which is Belgorod region in Russia in particular, – is a system structure, and the religious factor is an integrative concept (Лопаткин 2004), so the formulation of the question of how do the elements of the system correlate with the factorial components is quite natural. National and regional legislation “de jure” reflects the multi-religious nature of the religious life of the people in the region. Proclamation by the Constitution of Russia secular character of the state approved the equality of all religious organizations before the law. However, “de facto” their social significance is determined by a number of religions, their integration into the history of the regional society, and the attitude of the leaders of the country and the region to the different faiths.

The fact that the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in this connection rightly takes prior positions is not a discovery. The hierarchs of the Church are always present at significant for the state and region events. Thus, the date of January 7 – an Orthodox Christmas, is legislated as a public holiday. The leaders of the country and the region are taking part in the celebrations of the Orthodox Christmas, Easter, and in turn, the Patriarch of the ROC and Moscow Patriarchate and the ruling bishops are invited to important state and regional celebration.

### **SOCIAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH.**

What was said above about some aspects of the Church, is to a certain extent its social service. However, this aspect can be isolated and studied in a special block.

There are areas of social service of the Church in border regions, we do not set the task of examining them all in one article, but we only denote some aspects.

First of all, it should be noted that in the “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” are the following areas of cooperation:

1) peacemaking on international, inter-ethnic and civil levels and promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between people, nations and states;

2) concern for the preserving of public morality;

3) the spiritual, cultural, moral and patriotic education and upbringing;

4) charity and the development of joint social programs;

5) the protection, restoration and development of the historical and cultural heritage, including concern for the protection of monuments of history and culture;

6) dialogue with the public authorities of all branches and levels on issues important to the Church and society, including the development of appropriate laws, regulations, orders and decisions;

7) care of the military and law-enforcement agencies and their spiritual and moral education;

8) works on crime prevention, care of persons in custody;

9) science and research;

10) health;

11) culture and arts;

12) the work of the church and secular media;

13) protection of the environment;

14) economic activity for the benefit of the Church, the State and society;

15) support for the institution of the family, motherhood and childhood;

16) opposition to the activities of pseudo-religious structures that cause a threat to the individual and society (Основы социальной концепции Русской Православной церкви 2000, 13).

In this regard, it should be noted that the interaction between state and church institutions in Russia in recent years, is reaching *a new organi-*

*zational and legal level.* As a precedent, it is characterized by an agreement on social partnership between the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and Plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation in the Urals Federal District NA Vynnychenko. At first a document of this kind is comprehensive and is officially called the “Social Partnership Agreement”. The feature of this paper is that it affects a large number strengthening security and stability of society, creating of moral spirit and authority of the warrior – the Defender of areas of public life, encompassing issues of strengthening the moral, familial, social, civil and patriotic values, developing of charity, preserving of historical and cultural heritage, the Motherland, the development of scientific research. It is important to note that the “Agreement ...” proposes to facilitate the conclusion and implementation of other regional agreements between the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church, on the one hand, and the executive authorities, local governments, state and local government agencies of Russian regions – on the other (Зимова и Лебедев 2012).

The church organizes symposia, conferences, exhibitions, forums to social issues in the border regions, as in the country as a whole. It blesses the opening of socially important public institutions (schools, hospitals, museums, etc.).

Particular attention is paid to social advertising campaigns and publications dedicated to charity and educational activities of the Orthodox Church.

The development of systematic materials and manuals, conducting exchange activities with overseas border offices of the ROC and its spread are supported.

The projects, aimed at the development of librarianship and replenishment of library collections of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the introduction of new technologies to Orthodox libraries and training librarians are supported.

The church is not eliminated from the help to the victims in different kinds of disasters: natural and man-made, whether it is fire, flood, earthquake, etc. Just one example of such assistance are the victims of the tragedy in the Kuban (flood, July 2012). In the Diocese of Ekaterinodar ROC the staff was established to assist the victims. As the head of the diocesan social department Archimandrite Tryphon (Carpenters), priests provide a spiritual and psychological assistance to victims of the floods. Under the agreement, the diocese and the regional representative of the Ministry of Emergency Situations 34 dioceses (priests and laity) have passed special training courses to assist in emergency situations. The diocese sent from Krasnodar a car loaded with humanitarian aid and food to Krymsk. A fundraising to help victims of the flood was declared. Humanitarian aid, according to the spokesman of Department for Church Charity and Social Service of the Moscow Patriarchate Basil Rulinskogo has been already provided by the Department for Church Charity in Moscow. And the first vice-governor of Kuban Dzhambulat Hatyov said at a meeting with residents of Krymsk that 1.5 thousand volunteers are already been working on the streets of the town and three thousand people will be added to them (Российская газета 2012, 9 июля).



*The church is “working” in the army.* Temples are built and operate in the territories of army units, worship services are held.

An assistant commander's post for work with the faithful is introduced in the army. In general, priests' serving in the army is governed by the secular laws. There is a delay in the appeal for them. On this occasion, the Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation dated October 4, 2012 № 1004 “On Approval of the Rules of the clergy eligible for deferment from military service, and the Rules of passing by priests special training required for the performance of duties as assistant commander (head) for work with the faithful soldiers” was adopted (Российская газета 2012, 8 октября).

It can be seen how serious is the church engaged in social service from the fact, that in July 9, 2012, an All-Russia Conference on the Church social service was held in Moscow. The Congress was led by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill. Except 125 representatives of the dioceses, also government officials took part in the Congress. Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Service is headed by the Bishop of Smolensk and Vyazemskij Panteleimon. He said that the service includes a variety of initiatives, which can often compete with government projects in their importance and organization. The church has taken custody of several children's homes for children with disabilities and neuropsychiatric boardings. In the Martha and Mary Convent a medical center “Mercy” for children suffering from cerebral palsy was opened. We engage volunteers, carry out rehabilitation of drug addicts, alcoholics and the homeless. For the third year there is an anti-crisis program “Friends of Mercy,” which consists of the subscription by people of the one hundredth part of their income. New projects are created. The experience of supporting family has been already accumulated: the shelters for pregnant women and women with children are functioning, the voluntary organizations, humanitarian centers are created. Department conducts the Regional Competition of Social Projects in the sphere of protection of the family with a total budget of 15 million rubles.

Many facts testify *activation of the international activities* of the Church. Here are some of them (for the last year):

1. It was declared at a meeting of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and Archbishop Jozef Michalik (Poland): “We are the peoples-brothers.” In this case, the statement was made as an address to the peoples of Russia and Poland (Российская газета 2012, 2 ноября).

2. In March 2011 in Würzburg, the IV International Congress was held, in which the head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk participated. He said that the Orthodox and Catholics need to accept each other today not as rivals but as allies in protecting the rights of Christians. We have a common field of missionary activity – a modern Europe that has lost its religious, moral and cultural roots. This is especially important – pointed Hilarion – in the light of the common challenges that face both Orthodox and Catholics. These are, above all, challenges of unchurched (rastserkovlennogo) world that is hostile today for both Orthodox and Roman Catholics, a challe-

nge of aggressive Islamic movements, a challenge for moral decadence, family breakdown, failure of many people in traditionally Christian countries, from traditional family structure, liberalism in theology and ethics, which erodes the Christian community from inside. According to Metropolitan Hilarion, it is necessary to reply together on these and many other challenges. There are all-known differences in theology between Orthodox and Catholics, but there is common basis on moral issues and social issues that are not shared today by many representatives of liberal Protestantism. That is why cooperation is needed between the Orthodox and Catholics, that is a strategic alliance (Российская газета, 2011, 23 марта).

3. On November 3, 2012 the VI Assembly of the Russian World was held. It gathered together more than a thousand representatives of the “Russian World” from abroad and from Russia: school teachers and university professors, scientists, artists, politicians, public figures, journalists, diplomats, clergy.

Russian World unites nearly 300 million people nowadays. The Fund has been existing for 5 years already. During this time they opened 94 Centers in 43 countries (Российская газета, 2012, 1 ноября).

And in such a space, clergy carry out their missionary activities. It should be noted that the “Russian World” unites people not by ethnicity, but in the Spirit, on Culture – everyone who thinks, speaks, writes in Russian and is interested in Russian culture.

To summarize the article, it must be said that in the Russian Federation the interaction of State and Church as a whole, has gained new features, new qualities, which are in tune with the time and demands of the era. In the border regions of the country such interaction is particularly relevant, due to the situation, escalating the expansion of radical Islam and of extremism and terrorism, following it.

The development of socially constructive initiatives, going from institutions of traditional religions and faiths, are of particular significance and relevance in this context, with the most authoritative, influential and “set the tone” to all other traditional religious communities with Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate among them. And comprehensive cooperative partnership of these institutions with government agencies and emerging institutions of civil society is of great importance too. An important task of the sociology of religion, in this regard, is a conceptual analysis, systematic monitoring and forecasting the processes in the relevant subsystems and religious situation aspects as at the state level and at the level of regions, especially the border ones. This article focuses on setting the problem and a primary review of aspects of research in this area.

## REFERENCES

- Лебедев С.Д. Духовное versus культурное? К пониманию религиозного возрождения в России // Россия и современный мир.– 2004.– № 3. – С. 111-119.
- Панов В. Ваххабизм атакует Россию // Столетие. – [http://www.stoletie.ru/rossiya\\_i\\_mir/vahkhabizm\\_atakujet\\_rossiju\\_586.htm](http://www.stoletie.ru/rossiya_i_mir/vahkhabizm_atakujet_rossiju_586.htm)
- Лопаткин Р.А. Социологическая интерпретация понятия “религиозная ситуация” // Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом. Информационно-аналитический бюллетень.– М.: Изд-во РАГС, 2004. № 1–2 (33-34).– С. 79-89.
- Основы социальной концепции Русской Православной церкви // Информационный бюллетень Отдела внешних церковных связей Московского Патриархата (специальный выпуск). М. – 2000 г. – №8. – С. 13.
- Зимова Н.С., Лебедев С.Д. Институт социального партнерства в государственно-конфессиональных отношениях постсоветской России // Известия Иркутского государственного университета. Серия “Политология. Религиоведение”. (ISSN 2073-3380) . – 2012. № 3 (8). С. 252.
- Российская газета. 2012. 9 июля.
- Российская газета. 2012. 8 октября.
- Российская газета. 2012. 2 ноября.
- Российская газета. 2011. 23 марта.
- Российская газета. 2012. 1 ноября.



Milovan Vuković

## **PRIESTS OF THE BORDERLANDS: VELIKO GRADIŠTE\***

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary world could hardly be comprehended without understanding the role of religions in the societies at the beginning of the third millenium. There is an increasing need to consider religion as a “dynamic phenomenon the end of which can not be foreseen” contrary to what was investigated earlier in the spirit of secularization and modernity (Blagojević and Radisavljević-Ćiparizović 2005, 43; Đorđević 2005). Until recently, de-secularization was a term that could not be avoided in numerous studies of religious changes all over the world, both in contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies, and in post socialist, transitional societies.

In the modern sociological and politological studies of religion, several new research topics have been recognized, such as: globalization, identity and violence (Vukomanović 2008, 131). People look for new sources of identity, new forms of stable community and new moral assumptions to provide them with the sense of purpose and meaning. The church in post-socialist societies, as Vukomanović contends, plays an increasing role in the area of religious education, moral, social and charity work (2001). This institution becomes an important integrating factor in the mind of every religious individual.

Despite this empirical evidence, social scientists have neglected religious institutions or individuals, considering them mostly as conflict instigators, rather than agents of conflict resolution. Yet, religious communities are capable of making positive steps towards re-conciliation.

Local clergy has the most decisive role in conflict prevention and protection of cultural and religious heritage. Local religious leaders hold a place of esteem and influence at grassroots level of society. These priests have greater credibility with their people than do the politicians. Moreover, members of other religious communities less negatively perceive local clergy.

Given these assumptions, the aim of this study is to analyze the place and role of the priests in a local community. The study has been conducted in Veliko Gradište – (a small town, lying on the right bank of the Danube).

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

## PRIESTS IN VELIKO GRADIŠTE

Two priests have served in Veliko Gradište since 1995 (when the former parish was renewed) – Milan Mrkalj (ph. 1) and Predrag Milisavljević (ph. 2). Priest Mrkalj's parish encompasses a part of Veliko Gradište and the nearby village of Kumane (on the road to Požarevac), while priest Milisavljević's parish also comprises a part of Veliko Gradište and the village of Požeženo (on the road to Golubac).

Priest Milan Mrkalj (protoiereus stavrophor) was born in 1953 in Veljun, the municipality of Slunj (Croatia). He is married; he has a son and a daughter and five grandchildren – the sixth is “on the way”. Mr. Mrkalj finished the seminary “Saint Sava” in Belgrade. He was ordained at the age of 22 (in 1975). He moved to Veliko Gradište from Croatia on 25 August 1995, sharing the fate of many of his compatriots who fled during the military operation “Storm”. In Veliko Gradište, right next to the church of Saint Archangel Gabriel, a parish house was built for him recently.

Priest Predrag Milisavljević was born in 1972 in Belgrade, the municipality of Savski Venac. He is married; the father of three sons. He finished the Faculty of Theology of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade, and was ordained in 2000. He lives with his family in the former parish house.

For the purpose of the research into the topic of this paper – activities of priests in the borderlands – a specific questionnaire was prepared that included various aspects of life and work of the priests. The questions related to: (1) the parish, (2) the congregation and religious life, (3) relationships with the local government, (4) relationships with other religions, confessions, and religious communities, and (5) the life and work in the borderlands. The complete interview was conducted with priest Milan Mrkalj (ph. 3), while Predrag Milisavljević, the younger priest, occasionally entered the conversation.

### ON THE PARISH

The parish of priest Mrkalj, as mentioned above, is not an urban one nor a rural one. Namely, it is of a mixed type since it encompasses a part of Veliko Gradište and a nearby village of Kumane (consisting of some hundred houses). The Church of Saint Archangel Gabriel, in the Žitni Square in Veliko Gradište, is the only one on the territory of this parish. It covers, at the same time, the other part of this town and the village of Požežno – the parish where priest Milisavljević is in charge. In the past two decades there has been no need for the construction of new churches.

The priests in this parish face a number of technical and material problems. The Church of St. Archangel Gabriel has had a long tradition (it was built in 1854), which was the topic of the first part of this paper, and it demands substantial resources for maintenance. The last major restoration of this church took place in 1993. However, thanks to its own revenue, as well as

the contribution from the believers, this church has managed to secure basic funds for maintenance of the church and the parish house (ph. 4).

The solution of the above material problems is facilitated by the exemplary quality of relationship and cooperation with colleagues, other priests from the neighboring parishes and from the entire Braničevo Eparchy. This cooperation, as father Mrkalj states, is a “brotherly” one in the true sense of the word. Having in mind that the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel covers two parishes, this makes the service of these two priests – Mrkalj and Milosavljević, easier in the first place. Finally, the both of them have good communication with the bishop of Braničevo Ignjatije (Dobrivoje) Midić.

### ON THE CONGREGATION AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

According to priest Mrkalj, one can be satisfied with the regularity and attendance at the service. The structure of believers during the worship mostly corresponds to the structure of the population of Veliko Gradište. The ratio between men and women is approximately “fifty-fifty”, and the service is mainly attended by younger people. Mr. Mrkalj notices that the Sunday service usually gathers around two hundred people from the parish, among whom there are a lot of children.

During the service, there are also a lot of Vlachs among the believers – according to the assessment of the interviewees even up to 30%. The members of this ethnic community have been moving to Veliko Gradište in the last couple of decades; particularly from Boljetin, Brnjica, and other places. Yet, the ratio of believers from this ethnic community shows a serious discrepancy in relation to the official statistical data on the share of Vlachs in the population structure in the municipality of Veliko Gradište – that is, it is much smaller. This can, however, be assigned to the fact that a vast majority of Vlachs from this region declare as Serbs in the national sense. The service, according to priest Mrkalj, is also attended by Roma (around 5%).

It is interesting that the liturgy is attended by small numbers of Hungarians and Croats as well, since there is no Catholic church all the way to Smederevo. By the by, there once used to be a functional Catholic church in this small town by the Danube.

There are numerous holidays and customs that the Church of Veliko Gradište actively participates in. The priests are called to almost every event – starting from the well-known happening, the “Days of Carevac”, to the celebration of the Municipality Day on August 2 (St. Elijah’s Day). The St. Sava’s Day, i.e. the school saint’s day, witnesses the preparation of between 500 and 600 gift packages for children in this parish. For seven years now, jumping into the Danube and racing for the sacred cross has been organized on the day of the Epiphany. One should also mention an example from the middle of the 1990s when, upon the initiative of priest Mrkalj, the *Blagovesnik* magazine was first published (1996).

All this speaks to the fact that the Church is once again recognized as an institution at the local level, which can also be noticed in this border re-

gion. And at one point in the past (before the 1990s), some people (from the political structures), as Mr. Mrkalj says, “used to count those who attended the service”.

Among the positive experiences is the activity of the priests from this parish in the area on the other bank of the Danube – the one that belongs to Romania (municipality of Sokolovac). According to priest Milisavljević, who has visited that part of Romania on several occasions, in the villages of this border region (starting from Divič, Belobraška, Požežena Donja and Gornja, Radimna, to Mačević) there are around 4,500 members of the Serbian ethnic community. In some of the villages, even though Serbs were once dominant, the Romanization occurred over time; the example is Šaška. Furthermore, this border region of Romania, adjacent to Veliko Gradište, once belonged to the state of Serbia, i.e. the Kingdom of SCS – up until 1921.

As far as negative experiences are concerned, priest Mrkalj emphasizes the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) which is trying to bring the believers (the Orthodox) from the Vlach population under its own wing. The vast majority of Vlachs in this region resists such attempts. The fact that there is a grave problem between the two Orthodox churches, which is clearly seen in this region, is corroborated, as Mr. Mrkalj thinks, by the lack of the invitation from the SOC to the ROC Patriarch for the participation in this year’s celebration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Constantine’s Edict.

### **ON THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The priests of the Church of Saint Archangel Gabriel in Veliko Gradište have for years now cooperated with civil councils in local communities. There is a regular contact maintained with the president of the municipality and other officials of this local government unit. Moreover, the priesthood is satisfied with the cooperation established with the political parties which function in this region. All parties, apart from the SPS, have their own saint’s days.

### **ON THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS, CONFESSIONS, AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

The SOC plays a dominant role in the religious life of the people in the region of Veliko Gradište. Naturally, the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel does not close its doors even to the members of the Roman Catholic confession. The few members of the Catholic community in Veliko Gradište are able to perform their religious rites in the local church of St. Archangel Gabriel, to take communion, etc. However, as Mr. Mrkalj points out, they still cross themselves in the Catholic manner.

The described examples show that the Orthodox believers (who are the majority) accept the members of other ethnic and religious communities well, and that the SOC, in fact, accepts ecumenism in practice.



“Up to now, considerable efforts have been made in establishing all-Christian unity; yet, it seems that the most modest ones are those of the Orthodox. The ecumenical persistence to reduce the differences among the Christian churches has failed to gain the needed trust of the Orthodox dogmatics (Todorović 2005, 71).”

In the past, there was a small religious community of “Jehovah’s Witnesses” – some 10 to 15 families, in Veliko Gradište. However, their activity was, according to Mrkalj, short-lived, which can be seen in the unfinished town building which was constructed for their needs.

A weak influence of these Christian religious communities could be explained by the Serbian dominant demographic structure (Đorđević 2005). Namely, Serbia, as a state of many nations and religions, bears three main religious traditions: Orthodox Christianity, prevalent throughout the country, Islam, concentrated in the southern regions and Roman Catholicism, located in the northern areas of the country.

The Serbian Orthodox Church has significantly influenced the development of Serbian national identity and the history of the country.

Although religion in Serbia became a focal issue during the process of desecularization after the 1990s, and individual freedom of worship is respected, the vast majority of people is expected to remain faithful to their birth religion. Namely, eventual converting to another religion could be considered as an act of treason. Zorica Kuburić, for instance, contends (2005, 57):

“As an extension of the Orthodox Church, from which other Christian groups broke off, the Serbian Orthodox Church maintains that unity among various Christian groups can be established if all return to the Orthodox tradition.”

### **ON THE LIFE AND WORK IN THE BORDERLANDS**

The life on the border (at that, in a multireligious and multinational environment) leads to the personal, group, and general development of the community. Priest Mrkalj, himself raised in such an environment (Kordun in Croatia), expresses his experience in the following words: “If they have, so will we.”

Education is, according to Mr. Mrkalj, the way in which a priest can best help the survival and development of the congregation and the parish. This is in line with the long tradition of the connection between the school and the SOC activity. It was no coincidence, then, that in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the most prominent spot in Veliko Gradište, the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel was built, followed by the building of the high school with the shared fence (Makuljević 2006). Even later, during the time of communism, a clear line was drawn between the School and the Church, only for those close connections between these two institutions to be established once again in the 1990s.

The cooperation of the church and school representatives began in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It rested upon the law, that is, a decree from 1857. According to this decree, for example, those who finished the “seminary with a good success” could also become teachers (Srbske Novine 1857, 395). The cooperation between the school and the church was, of course, active in Veliko Gradište as well, which can be seen from the following examples:

“The school life in Veliko Gradište was marked by the educational role of the Orthodox temple. This was the reason behind the decision of the municipality, upon the opening of the high school in 1881, to purchase the building which was ‘right next to the church’. (...) The period between the two wars was a special time for the connection between the school and the church in Veliko Gradište. This caused the construction of the new building for the ‘King Petar II’ high school. The celebration upon the opening of the new high school building started in the church with the bishop’s service on 11 May 1930, performed by the Bishop of Bitola Josif, then the representative of the Eparchy of Braničevo, with the help from archpriest Milan Branković. After that, the bishop and the archpriest consecrated the new school building, and the bishop gave an appropriate speech (Makuljević 2006, 26, 28).”

Later on, during the time of communism, according to priest Mrkalj, the relationship of the authorities towards religion, i.e. the church, changed drastically. There were no mutual school and church activities, which became most symbolically obvious in Veliko Gradište with the demolition of the fence shared by the school and the church.

In the 1990s, the cooperation between the church and school institutions was renewed in Veliko Gradište as well. Namely, the religious education of high school students from this town is conducted in the facilities of the Parish house, and the teaching is performed by Predrag Milisavljević, a religious teacher (ph. 5). By the by, the newly-built parish house is characterized by a modern style (ph. 6), equipped with a small library (ph. 7), while its walls are adorned by religious motifs (ph. 8).

However, it is necessary, as priest Mrkalj notices, to improve the religious education of the believers from these parishes since many of the religious rites are performed in an inappropriate way, contrary to the Orthodox doctrine. In Topolovnik, the largest village in the municipality of Veliko Gradište, all candles are taken back after the funeral to the yard where they are lit together on a table. This indicates that besides religious practices at different occasions there are also additional elements of superstition expressed through pseudo-religious rituals and rites; they vary from place to place. This is especially characteristic of some places in the Municipality of Veliko Gradište populated mostly by Vlachs. This is in accordance with some earlier studies.

“In traditional churches, especially in the Serbian Orthodox Church, the strong influences of folk customs have still persisted. These customs are inseparable from the most important events in a person’s life such as: birth, marriage, and death, that is, funeral.... Serbian folk tradition abounds in rituals and customs performed at funerals which are not part of the Orthodox Church and Orthodoxy in general (Branković 2009, 95).”

Still, the identity of ethnic communities in the borderlands, mostly the identity of Serbs, is best defended, according to priest Mrkalj, by preserving its language, as the most important element of the cultural heritage. One should not forget the fact that the struggle for church independence was one of the most important national tasks. It was won by Prince Miloš Obrenović by the Hatt-i Sharif from 1830. It was then that Serbs obtained the right to appoint their own bishops as well as to freely build Orthodox churches. The conditions became also ripe for the rise of the parish life in Veliko Gradište. Prior to that moment, the service started being performed in the folk language.

In order to sustain the identity, however, it is necessary to reignite this region in the economic sense, adds Mr. Mrkalj. The way out of poverty has to be found, and one should count on the contribution by the people when they know what they are contributing to. The church in Veliko Gradište, for example, collects up to a hundred Euros every Sunday for those in need.

## CONCLUSION

The experiences of priests interviewed for the purpose of this study confirm the fact that local clergy can influence religious hierarchy and, hence, make impact on the higher level of society. In other words, the enlightened people of faith, as Vukomanović rightly argues, may act together to help religious institutions discover constructive ways to promote democratic pluralism, social justice and peace (2008). This completely describes both priests in Veliko Gradište – Milan Mrkalj and Predrag Milisavljević. Their experiences show that dedicated priests may be important actors in attempts to protect cultural or religious heritage. The Church of Veliko Gradište and its religious community have a long tradition of teaching (almost two centuries) and practice based on neighborly concern. Thus, religion increasingly becomes more an issue of collective identity than of actual religiosity.

Some insights of the interviewed priests in the study are in accordance with other empirical findings. For instance, an empirical research of homogenous Orthodox population in the District of Braničevo conducted by Blagojević two decades ago confirmed the general restoration of the holy and, hence, an increased credibility of the church (1995). One other study revealed that young generations demonstrate high level of religiousness (about 60%), higher than middle generations, but lower than old generations (about 70%) (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović 2002, 226). Therefore, the Veliko Gradište

case confirmed an observation that religiousness is no longer a typical rural phenomenon and it increasingly relates to young people and well-educated believers.

This work was based on the assumption of studying of religious institutions from the inside. The research of local religious communities, as well as their connection with other similar or their international networks, should represent a question of further interest for sociology of religion. The empirical evidence shown in this paper reveals that, despite some recently created problems, there is a room for transborder religious cooperation – the service of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the villages mostly populated by the Serbs on the Romanian side of the Danube.

### REFERENCES

- Blagojević, Mirko. *Približavanje pravoslavlju*. Niš: JUNIR i Gradina, 1995.
- Blagojević, Mirko and Dragana Radisavljević-Ćiparizović. "Curent Desecularization, Globalization and Modernization in Serbia." In *Religion and Globalization*, edited by Danijela Gavrilović, 43-54. Niš: YSSSR, 2005.
- Branković, Tomislav. "New Religious Movements, Pseudo/religious Rituals and Rites." In *Revitalization of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Approaches*, edited by Danijela Gavrilović, 91-100. Niš: YSSSR, 2009.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. "Religije i konfesije nacionalnih manjina u Srbiji." *Sociologija* 47 (3) (2005): 193-212.
- Kuburić, Zorica. "Religious and National Identity in the Process of Globalization in Serbia." In *Religion and Globalization*, edited by Danijela Gavrilović, 55-63. Niš: YSSSR, 2005.
- Makuljević, Nenad. *Crkva Svetog Arhangela Gavrila u Velikom Gradištu*. Veliko Gradište: SPCO Veliko Gradište, 2006.
- Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, Dragana. "Religija i svakodnevni život: vezanost ljudi za religiju i crkvu u Srbiji krajem devedesetih." U *Srbija na kraju milenijuma*. Beograd: Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, 2002.
- "Srbija." *Srbske Novine* 103 (Beograd 12. IX 1857).
- Todorović, Dragan. "Orthodox View of Ecumenism." In *Religion and Globalization*, edited by Danijela Gavrilović, 65-77. Niš: YSSSR, 2005.
- Vukomanović, Milan. *Sveto i mnoštvo – izazovi religijskog pluralizma*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2001
- Vukomanović, Milan. "How to Understand and Study Religious Diversity Today (Several Theses)?" In *The Sociology of Religion in the Former Yugoslav Republics*, edited by Dragoljub B. Đorđević, 131-138. Niš: YSSSR, 2008.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. Priest Milan Mrkalj in the parish house



Ph. 2. Priest Predrag Milisavljević in the parish house

## A PRIEST ON THE BORDER

---



Ph. 3. Priest Milan Mrkalj in front of the Church of St. Gabriel



Ph. 4. Reminder of the benefactors of the church in Veliko Gradište – two out of a dozen commemorative plaques in the Church port



Ph. 5. Religious education in the parish house in Veliko Gradište



Ph. 6. Priest Mrkalj in front of the parish house entrance





Ph. 7. Part of the church library located in the parish house



Ph. 8. One of the motifs adorning the interior of the parish house



Ninoslav Golubović  
Vladan Petrović

## THE PRIEST ON THE BORDER – GOLUBAC\*

---

The municipality of Golubac is placed in the southeastern part of central Serbia, in the easternmost part of the district of Braničevo. It borders the municipalities of Veliko Gradište on the west, Kučevo on the south and Majdanpek on the east. The northern border of the municipality of Golubac is the Danube, which (in that area) is at the same time the borderline river towards the Republic of Romania. The municipality comprises the area of 367 km<sup>2</sup> and it is inhabited by 8,331 people, which is 44% lower in comparison to the year 1948 and 14,844 inhabitants from that period. Among 24 inhabited places in the municipality of Golubac, the settlement of Golubac is the one with the greatest concentration of inhabitants – with 1,653 inhabitants, its share in the total population of the municipality is 19,8%. The territory of the municipality is sparsely populated. In 2011, its population density was 23 inhabitants per square kilometre, whereas at the same time it equalled 94 inhabitants per square kilometre on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The differences in population density in various part of the municipality are large – it ranges from 5 to 93 inhabitants per square kilometre, which is the result of natural, economic, demographic and historical factors. The most suitable area in terms of building settlements were flooded once the water level of the Danube increased, which, in turn, resulted in resettling.

The municipality of Golubac belongs to the group of agricultural municipalities, with a high level of active population participation in the primary work sector. The population structure in terms of activity is dominated by those who are economically inactive, with 67% (5,554 people). There are 2,777 active inhabitants, 512 of which are unemployed. On the basis of the analysis of economic development features, the municipality of Golubac belongs to the fourth group of municipalities, whose level of development is below the average in the Republic of Serbia. To be more precise, the municipality of Golubac is referred to as a devastated area of the Republic of Serbia.

The population structure in terms of ethnicity seems to be homogenous – there is a large majority of Serbian population (7,576 people, or 90.93%), followed by Vlachs (5.10%, or 424 people), whereas the share of other ethnic groups is only 3.97%.

The territory of the municipality of Golubac has a complex and favourable geographic position. Among favourable factors we find its location in relation to the Danube development axis, in the vicinity of its link with the development axis of Serbia proper. Other components of the geographic lo-

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

cation which are relevant to the establishment of development potentials in the future include: 1. being located in the contact zone between Eastern Serbian lowlands and mountains, 2. being located in the contact zone between Podunavlje and Zaječar regions, and 3. being located in the borderline area.

### THE PRIEST

Vladan Petrović and Ninoslav Golubović visited Miroslav Milošević, a priest in the local Orthodox temple of St. Father Nicholas in Golubac on 13 June 2013. On this occasion, they interviewed him in the parish home (ph. 1). We met him a couple of days after we had contacted him by phone. He welcomed us in the churchyard and then introduced us to the members of his household (ph. 2).

Father Miroslav was born on 12 September 1964 in Koceljeva, a small-town in the northwestern part of Central Serbia, the seat of the municipality of Koceljeva. The municipality is bordered by the Kolubara basin on the east, Mačva and Pocerina on the west, Srem on the north, the mountainous region of Vlašić and Valjevska Podgorina on the south. In terms of administration, it belongs to the district of Mačva, which also comprises the municipalities of Bogatić, Krupanj, Loznica, Ljubovija, Mali Zvornik, Šabac and Vladimirci. His wife is named Olgica and they have two children, a daughter and a son (ph. 3). Their son Marko is the senior student at the School of Theology and their daughter Jelena has graduated from the School of Economy. She does not live with them anymore, as she has started her own family, so Father Miroslav has already become a grandfather with the birth of his grandson, though he is quite young.

He studied at the Institute of Theology and was ordained in 1987. He arrived to the parish of Golubac in 1995. He lives with his family in the parish home in Golubac and serves two parishes – one in Golubac, with the Church of St. Father Nicholas, and one in Dobra, with the Church of St. Stefan the First-Crowned (ph. 4 and 5). During his service in Golubac no new churches have been built, but he is proud to say that with the help of local people he has managed to renovate both churches. The church in Dobra was renovated in 1995 and sanctified on 7 October 1996, in the presence of Bishop Ignjatije (ph. 6). When he arrived to Golubac, the church of St. Father Nicholas was in

“such a miserable condition, all cracked, there was a rupture in the capital, the dome was made of reed and mud. We had to demolish a half of the walls and rebuild them, as well as a new cement dome, which was followed by fresco artwork and plastering the building on the inside and the outside.“

From its construction in 1843 until Miroslav's arrival, there were no attempts to renovate the church. Ravages of time, wars and the state's indifference in the second half of the twentieth century left their tragic mark on the church object. Along with the people's return to their faith and church, the need to reconstruct the church appeared. His wish came true in 2000, when, with the financial help of the Ćarić family and voluntary work of the

local people, the church got renovated and painted (ph. 7). The end of works on the church was marked by the sanctification of the frescos on 16 July 2003 in the presence of Bishop Ignjatije (ph. 8). By renovating the church, they did not finish all the work. They also had to renovate the parish home, the celebration and congregation hall and the access road (ph. 9). The intensity of the works depended on the financial income, so the on-going activities in terms of adaptation seem to be visible today as well. The new fence and access road are being built, the fountain at the entrance to the churchyard is being renovated and they are also planning to adapt the children's building (ph. 10).

He speaks highly of his parishioners. He says that they are diligent and honest. They come to the service as often as their duties allow them. The most visited service is the one which takes place on 28 August, the Dormition. The people of Golubac worship this holiday and a majority of them celebrates it as their patron saint's day. The weekly service, which takes place on Sundays, gathers around thirty believers – most of them are elderly, as there are very few young people in Golubac. On Sundays, most of the present believers are women, whereas both men and women come to the church during the important holidays.

Along with the Serbs, who represent the dominant population in Golubac, there is also a number of Vlachs. They come to the service together.

“The relation between them has always been good, they have always intensively worked together, there have been no problems nor conflicts. You know, the Serbian and the Vlach people who live here have never had conflicts nor problems, I repeat it like a parrot. They have lived here for centuries and married each other. There are many instances of Serbian men marrying Vlach women and vice versa.”

He agrees that the local customs shall be cherished if they are in the spirit of Orthodoxy.

“Everyone has the right to cherish his customs. They say that it is better to burn a village than to change its customs. Everyone shall be given freedom, as we were once given freedom by our Lord.”

They say that Vlachs, though being Orthodox believers, practice very many pagan customs which are not in line with the church's practice.

“You know what, there are some customs the church cannot agree with. For instance, their funeral feasts for people who are alive, ‘pomane’, as they call them... that means that they organize funeral feasts for the living, the church cannot agree with that. They have a different conceptualization of life after death, they believe that they are going to be alive in the other world.”

Although he has not personally experienced the period when the church was defamed, the faith marginalized and the believers “stigmatized”, he reluctantly speaks about it. He was lucky enough to start his education when the state pressure on the church and clergy alleviated. “There are more

believers, but unfortunately there is no population growth.” His current goal is to preserve the harmony and unity in his parish and to protect the local people from the harmful influence of various individuals and sects.

During his service in the parish, which started eighteen years ago, he made very many friends among the local Serbs and the members of other ethnic groups present in the region. He is very pleased with the people’s return to the church and faith, as well as with the harmony and unity which exists among parishioners in these difficult times of poverty. However, the only thing which makes him concerned is the aggressive influence of the priests serving the Romanian Orthodox Church in the borderline area.

“There have been negative experiences. One of them happened in the borderline area. Romanian priests are coming without a permission issued by our Bishop, they enter our parishes... They have settled an area near Čuprija and they interrupt our service... They did it once when I had my service in the church. Our Patriarch and Bishop wanted to talk to them, but they refused to do so, so there can be problems in regard to this issue in the future.”

Father Miroslav points out that he has had a good cooperation with the head of the municipality, both the previous and the current one, as well as with the citizen council. All local authorities have always materially supported his plans to adapt and renovate the church. The proof of their successful cooperation are the current works performed by Golubac Construction Office.

We asked him which political party he had cooperated with better than the others and he replied:

“I have cooperated with everyone. Everyone is equal before God, and I share this criterion”

In the parishes of Golubac and Dobra there are no other religious communities, so there have been no religious misunderstandings and conflicts, nor cooperation. It is known that in the parish of Braničevo there are five “sabbatarian” houses, but no such houses in his parish. He says that some sects have attempted to act in this region, but those were only attempts.

“There was one, but I brought him back, he was an old man,... this old man tells me ‘Father, I went there for material reasons, this is how they seized me, held me.’ He says: ‘I went there and barely escaped. Thanks to you.’ I talked to him patiently, explained to him what Christianity and Orthodoxy are all about. I told him: ‘Your grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, they all were Orthodox Christians, Serbs, why should you be an exception?’ He accepted it, took their books to them and came back to us.”

With regard to the fact that there are no objects of other religious communities in his parish, he had no opportunity to make friends with them and start cooperating. However, he is sure that he would cooperate with them to increase the quality of life of his parishioners in the same way it happens in multiconfessional parishes.

He believes that the identity of Serbs and national minorities in his parish and municipality is in no way endangered. The population of this area are consistent when it comes to religion and customs. Nevertheless, there is the problem of emigration – many of them go abroad. The first generation of emigrants has largely preserved their mentality and bonds with their homeland. Their descendants, those who were born and who grew up abroad, have a different attitude towards it.

“Well, this moving abroad... Their sons might want to come back, but I doubt that it will be the same with their grandsons. And when they come back, they still appreciate the manners they adopted abroad.”

He is consoled by the fact that no one from Golubac has changed his or her confession:

“I witnessed no instance of conversion from Orthodoxy to other confessions. But I saw that a German man married a Vlach woman and made him change his faith and convert to Orthodoxy. There were Swiss, German and Austrian people doing the same, and there were no instances of our people doing something similar.”

Although he is originally from a completely different part of Serbia, the locals have totally accepted him. He is a passionate fisherman, he loves rivers, and he spends hours with them on the Danube. This is when he has a good opportunity to learn about their problems and troubles in a casual conversation.

During his service, he witnessed the economic collapse of the municipality, as well as emigration. In spite of the fact that the municipality of Golubac has an extremely favourable position and many natural potentials, young people emigrate and seek job opportunities. This is particularly visible in village settlements, which lose their population quite rapidly. The causes of this situation, according to him, are: 1. the economic crisis, 2. corruption, 3. the state's indifference, 4. migrations, 5. population ageing.

We ended our interview by reading several entries from the church chronicle. The last text referred to the year 2012 and these sentences give us an overview of the whole situation in the parish:

“The young are unemployed, which is why many of them go abroad in 2012, they seek jobs there, the people who live here, including us priests, live with difficulties, we feel the crisis, parishioners have no means to pay for our services. This year we celebrate our holidays in a modest manner, it becomes more modest year by year, it is not the same as it used to be.”

PHOTOGRAPHS



Ph. 1. Ninoslav Golubović in conversation with Father Miroslav Milošević



Ph. 2. Father Miroslav before the altar





Ph. 3. The priest, his wife and son



Ph. 4. The Church of St. Father Nicholas in Golubac



Ph. 5. The Church of St. Stefan the First-Crowned in Dobra



Ph. 6. Father Miroslav with Bishop Ignjatije Midić during the sanctification of the church in Dobra on 7 October 1996





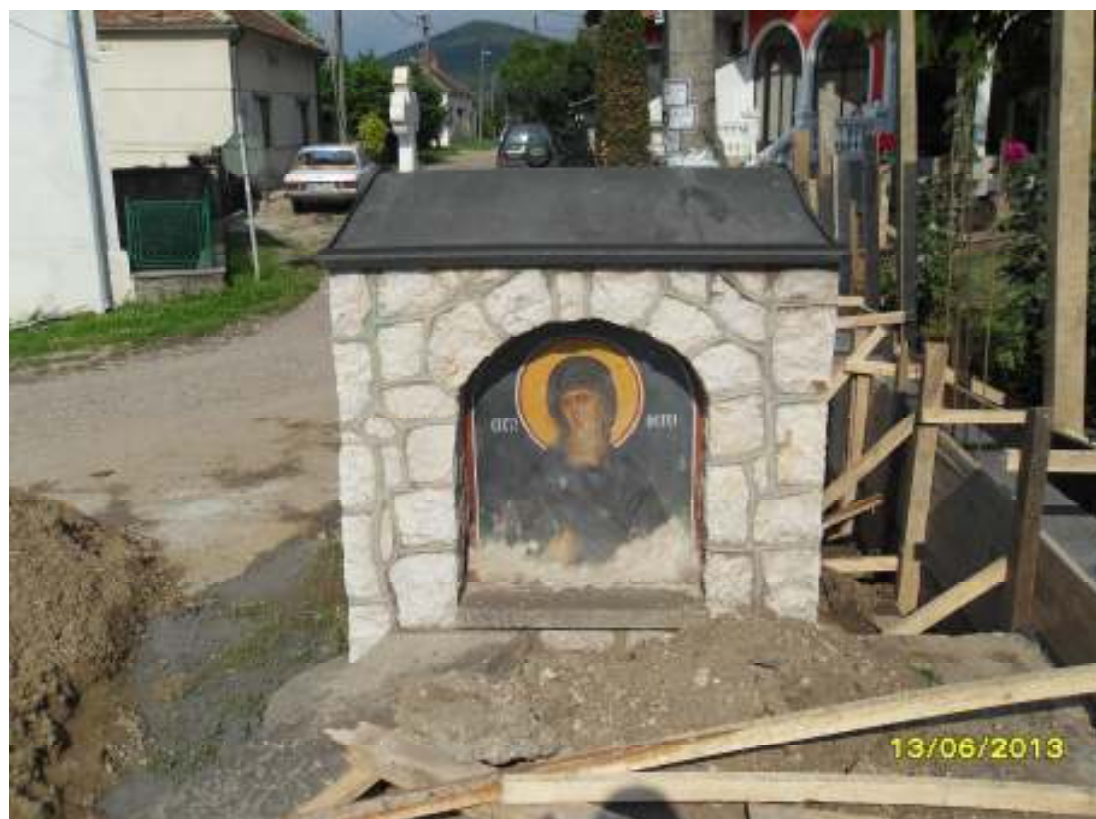
Ph. 7. New frescos in the Church of St. Father Nicholas



Ph. 8. Father Miroslav with Bishop Ignjatije Midić during the sanctification of the church in Golubac on 16 July 2013



Ph. 9. The works on the parish home



Ph. 10. The works on the construction of the fence and the fountain adaptation

UDK 316.74:272 (497.11-11)  
272-725 (=477)(497.11-11)

Danijela Voza

## UKRAINIAN AMONG CATHOLICS IN MAJDANPEK, BOR, ZAJEČAR...\*

### INTRODUCTION

Serbia is extremely diverse in ethnic and religious terms. This relates, especially, to its border areas, which are considered as multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. The dominant religions in Serbia are, so-called “world” religions: Christianity and Islam, as well as confessional spokes within them: Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, or Sunnism (Đorđević 2005).

The area where research was conducted is eastern Serbia borderlands. Results of the research are presented in this paper. According to the population census of 2011th, after the orthodox and the Islamic religion, the majority of the population belongs to the Catholic religion (table 1).

Table 1.

The population structure of Eastern Serbia  
according to religious affiliation

	Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Other Christian	Islam
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
<b>Population by religion</b>					
Bor area	112084	535	216	112	1458
Bor	42993	337	80	46	1338
Kladovo	18746	57	5	21	21
Majdanpek	17083	70	5	0	30
Negotin	33262	71	126	45	69
Zaječar area	111174	353	60	43	277
Boljevac	12072	41	2	11	53
Zaječar	54738	192	36	27	164
Knjaževac	29687	70	18	0	30
Sokobanja	14677	50	4	5	30

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.



Despite the significant presence of Catholicism, there is only one Catholic priest serving parishes in Bor and Zaječar area. With the aim to investigate functioning of the Catholic Church in the region, the difficulties faced by, attitudes about the ethnic identity of the Serbs and ethnic minorities, local customs and some other points, it was conducted an interview with the only Catholic priest in eastern Serbia. The interview was carried out according to the “Priest in borderlands” procedure prepared by Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Dragan Todorović and Milos Jovanović, researchers who participate in the project “Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of Eastern and Southeastern Serbia (179013)”.

The interview with Father Leonid, a Catholic priest originally from Orthodox family, was conducted at the premises of the Catholic Church in Bor, 3 May 2013th year. A warm welcome to the author he wished with Philip, a young theology student from Split, who is on the practice work (ph. 1). At the beginning of the interview, Father Leonid suggests that he doesn't have much time to talk, so the author is trying to comply his request without going to the details during the interview.

### **SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Our interlocutor (ph. 2) was born in the year of 1970 in Vinica in Ukraine. He graduated on the theological school in Pula, Croatia, and was ordained in 2007. An unusual way of life led the author, right at the beginning, to examine a little further the events in the Father Leonids' life. On the question of when and how appeared a love of God and theology, and did he have in family someone who was a priest, Father Leonid has responded:

“No, I did not. I was a bandit, and then I turned to theology. Before that, I have not visited the church. Once, I went on a pilgrimage to Poland, because I was in a crisis, in the uncertainties, and there I met the church as the church structure and from there after I went to the Catholic Church and revealed the Gods' love and worship. It saved me from a lot of trouble ... It's a long story for this opportunity ... “

Based on his words, it might be concluded that Father Leonid had a turbulent youth. The salvation of the troubles that have befallen he found, accidentally, at the church. Important life change happened after the pilgrimage in Poland, which led him on the Faculty of Theology in Croatia. In the year of 2009, he arrives in eastern Serbia as a Catholic priest in charge of all the parishes in Timok Region.

### **ABOUT THE PARISH**

Parishes served by Father Leonid belong to the Archdiocese of Belgrade and they are all located in cities (Bor, Zaječar, Knjaževac, Majdanpek, Donji Milanovac, Kladovo, Boljevac, Negotin). Our interlocutor says that the

most believers are in Zaječar and Bor – St. George and St. Ljudevit Parish (ph. 3), so he spends most of his time in those cities:

“I’m a little bit in Zaječar – for two or three days and in Bor, alternately. But lately, I spent more time in Zajecar, because of the air pollution” (catholic Church in Bor is located in the old part of the city, close to the melting chimney, prim.aut.).

Since year of 1991, in this area has not built a single new Catholic church. However, there has been a renewal of many existing ones. For example, the Catholic Church in Bor was completely restored in the year of 2011, with the financial assistance of Mining Smelting Basin (RTB) Bor. Father Leonid pointed out that he does not come across to any material, but technical problems that could hinder his preaching, worship and church activities.

With colleagues, other priests from around the archdiocese, he is in very good professional, but also friendly relations. About the relationship with the Archbishop of Belgrade Stanislav Hočevan, our interlocutor said:

“We have a good relationship. We have programs for evangelization, for work, pastoral care... Good, good collaboration. Every second or third weekend we have meeting.”

### **ABOUT PARISHIONERS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Incidence and attendance of worship in Catholic churches throughout the Timok region varies from parish to parish. Generally, there are the most believers in Bor and Zaječar where, according to father Leonid, on Sunday misa come about 50-60 people. In Negotin, misa holds in the home of an old woman, just for a few believers. As regards other cities, eg. Majdanpek, Kladovo etc. he almost doesn’t go there, because he gets calls very rarely, mostly in cases of burial.

Speaking of approximate gender, age, education, professional and ethnic structure, it can be concluded that believers are predominantly elderly (retired), females, with different educational and professional backgrounds: “... a wide range from engineers to ordinary workers...”. They are mostly Slovenes, Croats, Germans, Italians, Poles, Hungarians... and Serbs whose spouse is Catholic.

About his relation to local holidays and traditions, Father Leonid said:

“We respect and appreciate their Orthodox holidays and customs, but the local... that... I do not think anything special... nothing at all.”

Commemorating the 1700’s anniversary of the Milan Edict, the Catholic Churches organize various events in the city centers around the world, implementing the mission of evangelization. These events were held in the cities in Serbia, too. The goal is to bring back the believers to the church by singing, dancing and preaching at the public places. Discussion on this topic

was perfect introduction to the following authors' question, referring to the making parallel view between the earlier period of marginalized religion and its current state when religious communities operate freely and religious life is renewed. Father Leonid response was:

“It's normal now. Every week we preach our church in Bor, free church, who wants – he comes, so there are no problems like that, but there are problems as fewer and fewer people attending the church. So, every week we preach in the city square, in front of the cultural center. We talk to the people, preach Jesus Christ. This way of preaching is doing on 10,000 countries around the world and who wants – he comes. Because of the difficult situation, I talked with Orthodox priests who said that Orthodox believers do not come in the church either. People began to live alienate. The Church has become institution for older people. In this way, we are trying to get people closer to God, asking them questions like who they are and what is the reason of their life ... and to attract them to the church.”

Through the conversation, author found out that this type of propagating religion is not close to the citizens, who often react negatively identifying them with small Protestant religious communities, so-called sects. The main reason of believers' distancing from the church, despite the existence of religious freedom, the interlocutor explains by the alienation between the people arising under the influence of new technologies. He points out that a similar situation has always been existed and that the church always had to fight for their believers and constantly calls them. Father Leonid says that this is the only way of propagating the faith present in Christianity:

“The apostles preached in the streets, two by two. We just went back to the old way of teaching, and how God gives us strength. When someone shows interest, we invite him to the church where he could learn some things about Christ. When I first entered the church, I didn't know anything. I was just an ordinary man as they are now. I was baptized, but I did not know what baptism is, what the church is... So when I came in, I began to discover what it is, exactly. That God loves you and forgives your sins, that all of us have our patience, fear, uncertainty, pain that we feel deep in your soul, that anyone in this world cannot help you, neither psychology, only Jesus Christ who loves you as you are.”

Given that father Leonid is “foreigner” who lives in the border area of eastern Serbia only four years, the author has not received a lot of information about the positive and negative experiences of respondents serving in border areas:

“I have no negative neither too positive experiences... Normal, normal conditions... The people, the people as they are who need Jesus Christ and you have to give him to them. You can always see some-

thing positive in that, right? Helping people in remote areas... Bringing Jesus Christ to someone who lives on the edge.“

Mentioning the good cooperation and friendship with Orthodox priests from neighboring Bulgaria, who often come in Zaječar, brought author and father Leonid that it is great opportunity to exchange experiences with colleagues what is recognized as one of the positive sides of serving in the border municipalities.

### **ABOUT THE RELATIONS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Although he points out that he is satisfied with the relationship with the local government, Father Leonid had never had the opportunity to meet with the president of any municipality in which he serves. Also, there is no cooperation with citizens councils in local communities. The main donor and support to the Catholic Church in Bor, and Majdanpek is company RTB-Bor. Father Leonid said:

“They helped us two years ago to rebuild the church and we are getting help from them all the time. We come to understanding, because the first settlers of this town are, in fact, French, Catholics, so Catholic Church was quite important in Bor. I think that our church in Bor, was the first built church, if I'm right. After that, the Orthodox Church was built. The Catholic Church in Bor has a lot of respect. Workers at the mine who came from Poland and other Catholic countries have done a lot to create this respect. They came to the masses. All in all, a tolerant city.”

To the question with whom the representative of a political party is in best relations and why, our interlocutor corresponded too short that he does not make the divisions of that type, because the only party for him is: “The party of Jesus Christ...”

### **ABOUT THE RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS, CREEDS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

Father Leonid was not sufficiently informed about the existence of other religions, creeds and religious communities in the dioceses they serve. The only thing he stands out is the presence of the Orthodox Church and religion, with whose priests he socializes, shares experiences, spends time... However, cooperation in a professional sense is not established.

During his stay in this region, father Leonid had not met with any conflict or dispute with other religions and creeds. He didn't have the data about the smaller sects (cult pejoratively) spreading among Serbs and ethnic minorities, but he said the following:

“... I just know that there are in Negotin. Some believers said that to me. That’s because there is a lot of people who live abroad, and all of them take and accept something from there. I have heard only that.”

### **ABOUT THE LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN BORDERLAND**

As already mentioned, the father Leonid was not good interlocutor on the topic of borderland and border relations, because he is in this region only for four years. Also, as he is Ukrainian he is not introduced yet in the identity of the Serbian people and minorities living in border areas of eastern Serbia. However, the author asked him the questions referred to the procedure, and obtained the following responses. To the question “In which segment is identity of Serbs, the majority of the people who live on the border and in borderland, the most vulnerable?”, Father Leonid said: “I do not know answer to that question. I’m not a Serb, so I do not know.”

After the sub-question: “Does he, as an objective observer, see the threat of the Serb identity?”, the following response was obtained:

“No. And threat from who? Only from the devil... only he threatens. Only threatens the evil that exists. It is the largest thing that can threaten a nation. That is because, man's only wish is to live well, and the good life you can't find in this world. This world is created by God for us. Sometimes there are a lot of politicians who are disguised in “good shepherds” under the name of Jesus Christ, and so-called humanitarian. This man leads to a false happiness, threaten man's... what a man seeks his life. So the biggest threat for the man is the enemy we fight against and Jesus Christ was fighting, and all of that troubles and traps and lies of this world expanded. This world is created by God for us, but I say, this world lies in evil. This is the evil world in which there is no happiness for man, but a real joy is in God, who had intended for us new location, a new life. If you listen to Jesus Christ, you will be happy, if not – you will ruin your life. See just how many church marriages there are who are devoted... So much suffering... How many children suffer... Only evil threatens the man.”

Almost the same answer we got to the question concerning the vulnerability of the identity of national minorities in border areas.

Relying on his, not so rich, experience about life on the frontier, in multi-religious and multi-national area, Father Leonid believes that diversity can only enhance personal, group, and general development. In addition, in his responses our interlocutor primarily relies on religious diversity and the division of the Orthodox and Roman Catholics:

“Here live different people, who came from all sides. Orthodox as well as Catholics. Jesus Christ merged them and as soon as they can be together, it's all right. With God it is possible.”



In one part of the conversation, it was mentioned the need for a common struggle of Christians against Islam:

“I think we are far behind the times when it was coming to conflict and the Orthodox and Catholic churches and people mingled, inter-married marriage, the Orthodox and the Catholics ... We are one, so we can't make a big difference. So Orthodox and Catholic churches are like brother and sister, they say. There's a lot of politics and nationalism, but our faith is similar. We're pretty equal. Few things make us different. But we hope in the future to be together, not be split up, but to fight against all that threatens us, against Muslims...”

Father Leonid (ph. 5) believes that his role as an individual in the survival and development of the parishes he serves is negligible. In doing so, he points out that the more important role has the collective, or the entire religious community of believers and the maintenance of the church and Christianity:

“I cannot help personally. We help each other, but it is not just about the material development, rather about helping a man when he's sick, when there is no hope, he was disappointed in life, when the burn of this world, to know that there is a church where the priest may ask, request to talk ... We have an answer, and that is the love of God that helps every man and every man needs him in life, for happiness, for the future, for... That's our mission. We do not do anything else. Like when St. Peter came to a poor cripple in the Gospel, and he told him: I have no money, I have nothing to give you, and what I give in the name of Jesus Christ is a health and he got up and walked. And we make miracles because we give to people the meaning of life, faith in the world, we do that it is going forward and that's it. “

Finally, as the main reason for underdevelopment of border regions and devastation of villages, Father Leonid cited a lack of money and man's quest for a better life and he ends conversation with these words:

“There is no happiness for man in this world. Money is not happiness. Man has to find happiness in love of God, not in the money.”

## CONCLUSION

Population of Catholic confession is present in eastern Serbia to a great extent. This is in particular true for the Bor region. Opening the mine in Bor and Majdapek at the beginning of the last century, this region was settled by the French, Czechs, Poles, and many other nations and nationalities, which bring and their religion, customs and culture. All this led to the creation of a multicultural and multi-ethnic area.

Catholic priest, Father Leonid, presented in this work, is the only priest who serves parishes in Timok region. Our interlocutor, Ukrainian native, lives in this area relatively short, so he is not really familiar with the identity of the Serbs and ethnic minorities. Therefore, questions about the threat to the identity of both parties, is poorly suited, without a lot of information about the topic. It can be concluded that the father Leonid is satisfied by functioning of the Catholic Church and the relationship with local government. He also emphasizes good relations with Orthodox priests with whom he private socializes. Even if they were, according to the census, far more, the church misas in Bor and Zajecar regularly takes between 40 and 60 believers. In other cities such as Majdanpek, Boljevac and Negotin believers who come to church are almost absent. Father Leonid highlights the dwindling of the misa attendance, while the rest of the visitors are mostly retired and older people.

### REFERENCES

Dorđević, D. B. "Religions and confessions of national minorities in Serbia." *Sociologija* 47 (3) (2005): 193-212.  
Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. *Population Census of 2011 – Database*.  
<http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/public/ReportView.aspx> (site visited: 17. 05. 2013)

### PHOTOGRAPHS



Leonid and Philip, student of theology



Ph. 2. Father Leonid, the only Catholic priest in the Timok Region



Ph. 3. Exterior of the church St. Ljudevit in Bor



Ph. 4. Interior of the church St. Ljudevit in Bor



Ph. 5. Father Leonid in front of the church altar

Vesna Trifunović

**THE PRIEST ON THE BORDER:  
FATHER DRAGAN FROM KLADOVO\***

---

**INTRODUCTION**

On a cold but sunny March day, on Saturday, when the Orthodox Church celebrated the day of the holy martyrs Evtropije, Kleonik and Vasilisk, a road to Kladovo, probably covered with the last snow of winter that seemed to have been gone two weeks earlier, was deserted. As if no one had visited Kladovo. White hills, clear sky and special Rtanj's fog only around the summit of the strange Rtanj Mountain, quietness and a flock of storks which flew over the asphalt road somewhere away from Negotin were the only witnesses of silence in which eastern Serbia lives in a special rhythm. Marginalized from the mainstream of events happening in the only center which imposed itself, Belgrade, poorly connected to different centers along, today actually-called Istanbul road, and shielded with the Danube watershed, the eastern borderland spread in eastern Serbia, richly bestowed by nature, but with not a lot of people, and even those living here are constantly contemplating where they could eventually go. If you could live on beauty in ordinary earthly life, a lot of people would move to eastern Serbia, however, human needs first address the material things and in this world laws different from beauty rule. Looking for a job, permanent, with a safe and continuous income, people from eastern borderland and from Kladovo, are constantly moving away. Demographic characteristics are going through demographic transition, only the blue Danube water and churches along its banks are steady over time. The water changes the riverbed a bit, churches change the material they are built from and together they serve the survival of people, before their decision to move and after the decision to come back.

Besides Kladovo district, the Danube separated with hydropower concrete, is rushing to the Black Sea and with its lapse as if it constantly warns that all is impermanent: life expectancy, events, memories, buildings. There is in Kladovo, just like in any major place where Christians live, churches, slender and white, between the heaven and earth enable association of people with the universe and the Creator. And in each of them, an ordained priest performs service and reminds people to pray with bells and publishes the ceremony of Orthodox celebrating. In the Kladovo Holy and Great Martyr George (ph. 1), father Dragan has been performing religious services and to the lay people in his parish he is always at service.

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.



## ABOUT THE CHURCH IN KLADOVO

The Kladovo church is dedicated to the Holy and Great Martyr George, and according to the records compiled by Fr M. Blagojevic, which can be taken in the Church, this Church originated 300 years ago, when it was built by the devote Christians; therefore, the original church was built of wood and covered with tiles and served for the Glory to God and the benefit of the people in this place. The present church was built during the reign of Alexander Karadjordjevic, the Negotin bishop, his holiness blessed Mojsije, and the priest Nikola Popovic, a Kladovo parson. The construction of the Church started in 1856 and finished in 1862. It was solid built and funded according to M. Blagojevic, with the money from the old church and people's donations, and their own labor. The Church was built in the Byzantine style with a dome and a large tower with a cross and three bells (200, 300 and 400 kilos). It was recorded that 66,000 dinars were given for the construction of the church, and that the cross on the dome and the tower are gold-plated. Gilding was obtained from 300 gold coins, melted and obtained from people. The dimensions of the church are the following: 30 meters long, 15m wide and 20 m high, with the tower 35 meters high. It is considered to be the most beautiful ecclesiastical building in the Krajina district.

Serbian Orthodox churches has always, throughout history, shared the fate of people and hardship they experienced, especially in wars, which almost never bypassed traditional Serbian territories-geopolitical strategy of the world's great powers always used this territory as a transit, either for penetration to the east or to the west. The Kladovo church like many Orthodox churches and monasteries was destroyed. In the World War I it was ransacked and desecrated by the „Austro-Germans“ by the infamous marshal Mackensenn's corps, that overpowered Serbian 13th regiment III ban (10 October 1915), committing great damage in the villages of Sip, Davidovac and Kladusnica. Kaldovo was occupied by the hostile army on 13 October and started using the Orthodox Church for their purposes.

„so he put 30 horses in and turned it into an ordinary barn, desecrated the holy Christian church and robbed some silver stuff, like crosses and icons. At the end of that year (1915) they removed three bells and sent them to the weapons factory in Budapest“ (Blagojević 2012, 4-5).

The church was re-equipped with all it needed in the post war period and continued with its mission; its interior was not changed (the original structure of it was not lost), and the exterior was just painted and the roof maintained. Today's appearance of the temple, which is said to be the decoration of Kladovo, was renovated in 2011 with the blessing of his Grace Bishop timocki Justin and thanks to the contributors, businessmen from Kladovo and the hydropower company „Djerdap“.

## **ABOUT THE PRIEST AND THE PARISH**

In the Kladovo church, as brothers in Christ, three Orthodox priests serve: priests, Dragan Ivanovic and Dejan Pajic and the archpriest and officer priest Milan Blagojevic. Father Dragan, who accepted always hard dealing with people – talks, told us the details about his service in the Kladovo Church (ph. 2).

The priest, Dragan Ivanovic was born on Christmas Eve on January 5 1962 in Kusiljevo, the municipality of Svilajnac. He finished secondary theological school, then the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade and was ordained a priest in 1985. After years of working in the „Bulgarian border“, in 1993 due to the service, he moves to Kladovo. IN a blessed community with his wife, he has a daughter.

Father Dragan serves in two village and one town parishes (the town of Kladovo is divided into three parts and each of the three priests of the Kladovo church serves one part), i.e. serves three churches- The church of Holy and Great Martyr George in Kladovo (ph. 3 and 4), the Church of Holy Trinity in the village of Kladusnica and the Church of St Petka in the village of Davidovac. After 1991 in his parish one church was built, the church Saint Petka in Davidovac in 2001. He says that in his service he does not meet material and technical problems, what God gives is sufficient, and if there is a lack of something, everything can be overcome with patience and calmness.

“Thank God’ – says our interviewee – ‘with priests from other parishes and the entire eparchy I have normal cooperation, we have regular brotherly meetings and when there is a need, we meet at the vicar’s request. So, we have regular and good communication. And our Bishop Timocki Justin (whose full name is Miroslav Stefanovic), great enthusiast of the Orthodox faith, is always an honor and pleasure to hear, ask for advice and receive obedience’.”

## **ABOUT THE MEMBERS OF THE PARISH AND RELIGIOUS LIFE**

In the church (ph. 5), prayers are done every day, Matins and Vespers are served and the liturgy on Sundays and for church holidays. Father Dragan, following the usual order, performs daily worship service, and his heart is full because today (for the last couple of years) there are more believers who participate in the services and come to pray than at the beginning of his service.

“Today, there are more believers than before, the church is open throughout the day and before it used to be open only on Sundays and church holidays; there were no many people who came to God service, even for Easter only a few believers used to gather... churches were empty. Today, thank God, churches are full, both men and women come, and I think there are more women, people of different age, younger and older, I would say everybody comes to the chu-

rch... Still, who would come depends on the holiday itself. For example, for Vrbica there are the youngest mostly, that is their holiday, so children come with their parents, usually mothers with their children. On other days and religious holidays such as Easter the church is full of people of different age, gender, profession, I would say, all people come to celebrate Resurrection of God... – says father Dragan.”

In parishes where father Dragan serves and throughout the entire Kladovo area, Orthodox believers prevail. There are Serbs (about 90% percent of total population declare themselves as Serbs), there are Vlachs (about 1,6 % identify themselves as Vlachs) and those who identify themselves as Montenegrins (about 4%); Romanians and other ethnic minorities are below 1 percent of the total population of the Kladovo municipality. Even when these people belong to minority groups they are at the same time of Orthodox origin.

Out of the total population of Kladovo (23.613), 22.406 of them according to the results of the census (Census 2002), identified themselves as belonging to the Orthodox religion; 22 inhabitants are Muslims; 1 is of Judaic religion and 67 are Catholics. A larger group of people, 776 of them, according to the census data, did not declared what religion they belong to, and for 282 inhabitants the religion data is unknown; 18 inhabitants are atheists.

It can be concluded, in fact, that the municipality of Kladovo (the town of Kladovo and surrounding settlements, 23 of them) is a homogenized Ortodox area. There are a small number of individuals who belong to the Roman Catholic Church and Islamic community, but they do not have their sacred sites in the area. According to the experience of father Dragan, Serbs are members of the majority and members of other minority groups (Vlachs, Montenegrins, Romanians, etc.), happily and joyfully, participate in the performance of religious rites and celebrate religious holidays together. All of them are Orthodox Christians and there are no disputes among them.

The Kladovo area is near the border and has its own peculiarities, but also similarities with areas that are territorially far from the border—one of them is the way of celebrating holidays. The church which co-exists with the people addresses their needs and tends to take part in people's lives in the celebration of holidays too. Local holidays that priests participate in are for example, the Day of Kladovo, which is at the same time religious holiday, the Ascension of Jesus, the Day of Djerdap (May 16), school celebrations (St Sava Day-school festival, the day of school, etc.). Priests then go to the office of local government or schools where the celebration is taking place and perform the ritual of cutting the flatbread or if it is a local holiday, with no religious character, their presence shows respect-or kindness/or compliance with the event relevant for the local community.

The service of priests in the borderland can have both positive and negative sides, but for our interviewee, father Dragan, who has always been on the border, there is no difference between the ways of serving God and church, or treatment of believers in border areas and central territory of a



state. The work of a priest in each settlement is supposed to be the same: readiness to show commitment, diligence, patience, humility, good will and a lot of love. A priest who acts in accordance with these virtue requirements and takes care about religious needs of his parish members persistently, serves in the right way, in borderland or any other place.

A priest cooperates with the local community he lives in and with its distinguished representatives for two reasons: as a churchman on behalf of his church and the inhabitant of the community he belongs to, more or less active in everyday life. Father Dragan says that his contact with citizens councils in local communities, are permanent and they mutually agree on important issues, different time periods require solving different issues and now it is the agreement on the assistance for the repair of the church (Holy and Great Martyr George). Small financial investments are always needed in order for the building to remain "healthy" and to arrange the interior the best possible. The local people helped a lot during the building of the church (in Davidovac) both in cash donations and their own work during different phases of building it..., Our interviewee also has contacts with the mayor of the municipality of Kladovo; cooperation is achieved when necessary. Recently it has been intensified because there are ongoing negotiations with the municipality representatives on construction of the parish churchyard. When asked about the established cooperation with political parties, father Dragan says that the church and priests do not have a special cooperation with political parties and of course, they do not have their favorites among them; political life is of secular character and clergy is above all political divisions. Cooperation is established with politicians and political parties only when celebrating their saint patron's, or when the parish priest or another ecclesiastical person performs the act of cutting the flatbread.

In the parishes of father Dragan and even further from there, in the eparchy he belongs to (Timocka) only Serbian Orthodox church acts and its believers, besides the majority-Serbs members consists of ethnic minorities, mainly Vlachs...

"These are Orthodox believers and ethnic differences are not a source of conflict among them, they are all Christians, i.e. Orthodox-Christians, they are united by the same faith and they go to the same place of worship, says father Dragan."

In the Kladovo municipality there are no other Christian denominations or religions, therefore, our interviewee cannot talk about cooperation or conflicts with them. He points out that from time to time, there are small groups of new believers (Adventists) who tend to spread the Protestant religious communities: they hand out leaflets, usually near the market, sometimes they gather in private-owned houses, then they disappear..

There are no unrests regarding religions life and expression of affection and belonging to the Church. However, there is a serious problem in terms of decrease of population in Kladovo and its surrounding which influ-

ence the participation in church and orthodox customs. Village parishes of father Dragan: Kladusnica and Davidovac are small settlements, the population of the first one is 610 and of the other one is 727, but these are mostly older people, their children work abroad.

„In these villages there are big and well-furnished houses, you could tell that people are rich, but the problem is that there are no young people. All of them went to work abroad, their old family member stayed here to take care of the houses and wait for the holidays when their children come visit. Baptisms are rare here and sometimes there is nobody to take the dead body to the burial place during memorial service, there are no strong, young people and only old decrepit people, and it is a great problem. These are the problems here, little is spoken about them. Everybody immediately start inquiring about inter-ethnic and religious intolerance and conflicts, probably because we live on the border... You cannot find that here, but you can find life torments, people are gone, villages abandoned... It should be stopped, but how?”

### **ABOUT THE LIFE AND WORK IN BORDERLAND**

Life on the border in the multinational environment can be challenging and it carries a lot of potentials which should be used skillfully, turned into advantage; on the other hand, such position on the border, on the periphery and among different societies, to the one you belong to and the other one you are observing and think you know although it is different, can be a source of frustrations, economic, social, ethnic, even religious. The priest from the borderland, father Dragan, says that life in Kladovo is peaceful, with no frictions either ethnic or religious, but there is not much interaction with *others*:

„We are away from everything, Kladovo only has a road connecting it with the rest of the world and if you do not own a car, then you have to rely on busses. If people from Kladovo go to Pozarevac, they can reach other towns more easily and there are more departures to Belgrade, etc... If you go to Zajecar, there is just one departure a day to Belgrade from there. If you miss the schedule, you stay ‘trapped’ until tomorrow... Our people, in turn, can easily go to the Romanian side, to travel to Turn Severin and perform a favorable purchase, and it is as far as Negotin is So, the border sometimes connects, but the life along the border is sometimes burdened by circumstances which cannot be found elsewhere.“

The priest’s response to the questions *how to help the parish and parishioners*, is as follows:

„There are not enough jobs; the economy needs to be strengthened. If it weren’t for the Hydropower Djerdap and a separate company

Djredap services, local people wouldn't have where to work and earn for the survival of their families. Our young people go to school in other major urban centers, Belgrade, Nis, and they get their degree, and try to find work there, they know that they are not given a chance here. A lot of young people go to the western countries, majority of them go to Denmark and Sweden. First one person from a village or family goes, then they settle down, then invites their relatives and acquaintances... A lot of them go blind, hoping to manage on their own and succeed, find job and stay there. In the first generation, our expatriates do not forget the mother tongue; come how for holidays, but in the next generation there is a cut from the mother country, language, customs... Our children, who were born there, tend to fit into the life in the country or a town they live in, because their plans for the future see just in that new environment. They forget about Kladovo and its villages; they do not learn the mother tongue.”

Our interviewee believes that life in the borderland and in the Eastern Serbia, in particular, where Serbs and other ethnic minorities live together, does not carry threat to the survival and identity neither for the majority or minority. Everyone is free to develop: everyone can speak their mother tongue, respect their tradition and foster the faith – communities that live side by side and more frequently, intermixed, see differences as treasure and respect the right of others to nurture and express these differences. That there is mutual understanding and respect show mixed marriages and joint ventures, where partners are not asked for their national origin, but for honesty that business confidence can be built upon“.

The census data shows (Census 2011) that the ethnic composition of the population in this area is primarily Serbian (21.130 inhabitants), and Montenegrins (572 inhabitants) and Vlachs (568 inhabitants), while other ethnic groups does not exceed one percent of the total number of inhabitants. There are 216 Romanians in this borderland, according to the 2011 census (first results). Such, almost homogeneous ethnic structure in the borderland presents so-called security favorable structure and, on the other hand, the presence of ethnic groups, even a small percentage, whose home country right across the border is an open opportunity for bilateral cooperation at the cultural level, the economical, simply the opportunity to connect with each other at different levels.. However, latest incidents or accident in relations between Serbian and Romanian state (request of the Romania state to allow the plea of Vlachs as Romanians, in exchange for support to Serbia's candidate status for EU membership). However, it shows that bilateral relations between countries can be instrumented in order to achieve certain political goals.

Kladovo belongs to so-called underdeveloped border municipalities, whose characteristics and expressed migratory population movements (settlements are getting more and more abandoned), and demographic indicators point to a decrease in the total population and long-term aging. According to the Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Serbia in 2011 and preliminary results, in the Bor region, where the Mu-

nicipality of Kladovo is located, it is evident that there is aever-present decline of the total number of population. Between the two censuses (2002-2011) in the Kladovomunicipality there was a drop of the total number of population: out of 26.714 people living in Kladovo in 1991, over 23.613 people who lived in this area in 2002, we came to the number of 20.635 inhabitants living in the Kladovo municipality today.

Comparative review of the population from 1948-2002 shows that the number of inhabitants in the municipality of Kladovo increased in the period after the World War II until the beginning of the nineties. The number of inhabitants was the greatest between 1961 and 1981, that is, in the period when the hydroelectric plant Djerdap was being built up and when the shipyard was fully operational. Indirect reasoning refers to the idea that economic prosperity is a condition for stopping the exodus of working population, i.e. a certain guarantee that some will not migrate to more significant economic centers in the country or abroad.

Causes of declining population in the Kladovo municipality and so-called aging of the population are, according to father Dragan, above all, of economic nature:

“The economy is still underdeveloped, there is no developed industry and everything that used to work in the nineties does not work anymore or is not competitive. Also, the blame is on geography; land is here not suitable for agricultural production, it is poor, stone and sand. It is fertile from Negotin onwards. And how is it possible for someone to stay here, when it seems that in other places in the country, especially out of the country is much better... Everybody wants to take a chance somewhere else in the world, real or imaginary and to go from here.”

For the survival of national identity of Serbs and ethnic minorities in borderland, this Orthodox priest believes that there are several important factors, but faith is the crucial one. He emphasizes again the importance of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its activities through history for the survival of the Serbian people, its culture and state. These are the facts recognized in the public and which to the Orthodox Church and clergy ensure respect even today when it seems that globalization pushes identities and many tend to form so-called new-fragmented where national is not a crucial determinant. But in the Balkans story, just like in and all stories where the opposing sides are David and Goliath, the participants have to know *who they are, what their roots are and finally who they belong to*. This classification is not an invitation to conflict but desirable foundation from which grows self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-confidence-qualities without which you can neither meet others nor understand and respect.

## CONCLUSION

We are leaving the Church of the Holy and Great Martyr George and father Dragan gave us his blessing for our leaving, with the feeling that this beautiful white church build in efforts of orthodox believers many years ago, here on the eastern border, keeps the sortie of the endeavor of entire nation. People who created their history as Christian nation, ready to vow to God. People whose, priests and people themselves worship God in their own language and in their own choices. And they also keep Orthodox faith, the right to serve God. Here at the Danube border, with the Romanian world on the other side, Kladovo, with a special key, characteristic of small towns situated away from the crowds surrounding the center, keep the faith of ancestors and teach the new generations. What they have been thought started 2000 years ago and on Serbian territory 800 years ago. It is unchanged, preserved, and precious. Precious and life-like. A grain of salt in this world where strong winds and mountains are moved, and it, a small grain of salt cannot be relocated, because it is a life saver and the life itself.

Talk with father Dragan, a priest in the borderland, who has been located in the borderland-first “Bulgarian” and now “Romanian” since his consecration, is a simple story about the complex activities of the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the daily life of people. Here, on the Danube river banks, Orthodox church has been a refuge for hundreds of years to believers, sanctuary to those seeking comfort and strength and those who want to hear the word of God and invigorated by it, walks safely through the worldly life. The church of Holy and Great Martyr George was originally built from somehow modest material, later of durable material and it testifies on the need of Serbs to wherever they live and last, witness their faith in God, dedicate churches to Him and record their names among the faithful ones. At the same time, church buildings remained the new generations of the ancestors and their recognition of the need to constantly renew the covenant with God, remanding them of the importance of preserving the religious identity as a relevant element of cultural identity.

## REFERENCES

- Blagojevic, Milan. *150 godina hrama Svetog velikomučenika Djordja*. Kladovo: Nova kladovska crkva, 2012.
- Popis 2002. *Etnicka i nacionalna pripadnost po naseljima*, knjiga 1. Beograd: RZS, 2003.
- <http://www.kladovo.org.rs>

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. Serbian orthodox Church of the Holy and Great Martyr George in Kladovo



Ph. 2. Orthodox priest, Dragan Ivanovic outside the church



Ph. 3. Ordination of a priest D. Ivanovic in the church



Ph. 4. Ordination of a priest D. Ivanovic in the church





Ph. 7. In the church Holy and Great Martyr George in Kladovo



UDK 316.74:271.222(498)(497.11-191.8 Negotin)  
271.222(498)-725 (497.11 Negotin)

Miloš Jovanović  
Miloš Tasić

## **A VLACHIAN PRIEST IN THE BORDER REGION (Negotin)\***

---

This paper is a continuation of our previous co-authored work presented at the last year's conference of the *Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Even though it is too far-fetched to say that this is the second step in a longitudinal research, the findings presented here certainly offer a further insight into a specific segment of the religious situation in Eastern Serbia – the one dealing with the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in that region, namely, the activity of its priest Bojan Aleksandrović (in Vlachian/Romanian: Boian Al Lisăndroaichi) (ph. 1).

Similar to all the previous occasions, our third encounter with this priest on the first day of Easter took place in a warm-hearted atmosphere of mutual respect, openness, and understanding. We would like to take this opportunity to particularly thank Bojan Aleksandrović on taking his time to talk with us in the moment when he was, due to his duties relating to the celebration of the greatest Christian holiday and the accompanying events, burdened by obligations and worries most often connected with purely technical and secular problems.

Our interviewee was born in 1977 and today still lives in Negotin, now belonging to the District of Bor, and once to the Region of Zaječar. He has no children and he is not married – in his own words: “it was out of my hands.” He has secondary education. He was ordained ipodeacon in 2003, and priest in 2005. His parish house is located in the village of Malajnica, and the seat of the Protopresbyterate of Dacia Ripensis of the Romanian Orthodox Church (functioning as a diocese), which he manages as the administrative vicar of Timok and protoiereus, is situated in Negotin (ph. 2).

There are three village parishes, with one church and two chapels, that he serves regularly, but he also replies to anyone from, as he calls it, the “missionary zone” and performs the necessary services and rituals. The “missionary zone” currently encompasses<sup>1</sup> 154 villages and 48 mixed-type settlements with the Vlachian/Romanian population from the districts of Bor, Braničevo, Pomoravlje, and Zaječar. However, it is not rare that Serbs also address him

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> Households are “coming ever closer” to the church and the number of believers is constantly rising, thus it is impossible to precisely determine the boundaries of the “missionary zone”.

for priest services, usually those people which are not satisfied with the way “their own” priests from the Serbian Orthodox Church are performing their duties. The most frequent reason behind this dissatisfaction is economic in its nature. Namely, some priests, having in mind the adverse economic situation in the entire country, and especially in Eastern Serbia, charge too much for their services. In our previous conversation with Bojan Aleksandrović, during the Negotin Fair of 2012, we were informed of a not so pretty example of a priest advising the impoverished members of his congregation to obtain a loan (!) in order to pay for the children baptisms. Apart from “avarice”, some clerics display complete disinterestedness and lack of care for the spiritual and religious life of villagers in this part of Serbia (ph. 3). Bearing all this in mind, it is not surprising that the people, after some inquiring, turn to father Bojan for prayers, sanctification of home, or funeral service.

“There are Serbian families that want it, they’re celebrating the Saint George’s Day today, I cut the bread today for them, for the people who are from this region, they say: “Alright, you’re a Romanian priest, but you’re ours – you’re from around here and we want our people to be here, regardless of their nationality,” somehow, they don’t have a positive opinion on the priests who moved here from somewhere else, and who, for example, visit them and ask for a hundred euros when people don’t have that money.”

Apart from the abovementioned church and two chapels, the priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church also use a “zapis” (literally “inscription”) – a wooden cross or a cross inscribed in a tree which is considered a holy place where the service is performed if there is no church. By the by, all of these facilities are newly-built, constructed after the year 2000.

As the greatest technical and material obstacle that he encounters along the way, Bojan Aleksandrović singles out the lack of religious objects. Their current number is insufficient to satisfy the spiritual and religious needs of the population. The financial resources might not even be that impossible to obtain, but there is an additional problem with the local government which does not want to issue the permits for the construction of religious objects: “By now, we would have had at least ten (churches – M. J. and M. T.)!” The Episcopate of the Romanian Orthodox Church for the Romanians from Banat is territorially limited by the law, thus it is not possible to obtain any permits for the construction of a temple of this religious community, which is considered a religious activity, outside of Banat.<sup>2</sup>

There are no problems in his relationship with his fellow priests, five of them apart from the Protopresbyter Bojan,<sup>3</sup> since they are a “single structure”. His relationship with the bishop of Dacia Ripensis, Daniil from Vršac

---

<sup>2</sup> More on this in: Jovanović and Tasić 2012.

<sup>3</sup> More information on the priests of the Romanian Orthodox Protopresbyterate of Dacia Ripensis can be found at the following web address: <http://daciaortodoxa.ro/sr/svetenici.html>.

(secular name: Nacu Stoenescu) is excellent (ph. 4).<sup>4</sup> The same, unfortunately, cannot be said for his relationship with the bishop of the Timok diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Justin.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the religious life is concerned, our interviewee says that it is more developed in those parts which are closer to the border with Romania. Services are more frequent there and the attendance of religious objects is greater than in the parts closer to Central Serbia, still both of these regions display a noticeable trend of increase in the number of those who are joining the church.

“The closer the Romanian border, the more people are familiar with the church, the faith, everything. The farther they were from it, the more they transferred the celebration of religious holidays to their own homes, since they had no priest that they could understand in their own language. They are, now, distant in a way, but as of lately I can say that I’m satisfied with their acceptance and taking heed of what the priest is saying, meaning: they ask, look for advice... Although we positioned ourselves in such a manner from the start, we said: “Don’t think that you don’t know something, and be embarrassed about it, and stop going to the church because others may laugh at you, and don’t think we’ll be angry about it because you don’t know.” We won’t get angry if you know or don’t know, we are here to explain some things to you, to instruct you, so I can say that I’m very satisfied even with those parts that didn’t have a priest for almost 200 years, a priest serving in the Romanian, Vlachian language. We measure things by how many believers we have and how often those believers attend the service, how often they call us to perform the rites for them, how often they gather around a zavis, since a zavis is closer to their homes [...] some people don’t have a church closer than a hundred kilometres away from their home. I can’t expect believers to come every Sunday, because fuel is expensive, and it takes time...”

There are more female believers – “let’s be realistic, there are always more women in the church.” The age structure of the believers varies from place to place and it is not, which is interesting, limited only to the elderly, but it remains “mixed” (ph. 5).

“As far as the structure of the population is concerned, if there are elderly people, without younger ones, then they rarely attend the service. They have no one to give them a lift, to take them there, so they wait for their grandchildren to come from abroad. We don’t have villages that are populated only by the elderly. There are both young and old people living in them. Now, the problem is that the yo-

---

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Daniil visited the congregation in Negotin and the surrounding villages for a number of times, but now there is an internal agreement on his not doing that any more, “so as not to accidentally provoke anger and animosity in the brethren from the Serbian Orthodox Church.”

<sup>5</sup> On the strained relationship with bishop Justin see: Jovanović and Tasić, 2012.

unger people come only when they take a vacation or something, since they are all abroad, for example, around Easter, but they come here for the Catholic Easter because they live in the Western countries where the Catholic Easter is celebrated. And when it happens that their and our Easter fall on consecutive weeks, they take some time and stay here for a while.”

Even though, as already stated above, Vlachs/Romanians are dominant, there are also Serbs and Roma (who, depending on the village that they live in, Serbian or Vlachian, declare themselves Serbs, that is, Vlachs!).

“Certain Vlachs, they suffer from the inferiority complex, and I believe that is the case with all Roma too, and Vlachs and Serbs when they go someplace, to another environment, they would like to be something they’re not, because they believe that it is a higher level. And then when you ask Gypsies from a Vlachian village, they say that they are Vlachs/Romanians, and when you ask a Vlach, he says: ‘I am a Serb’, and so they all run away from what they are.”

A genuine curiosity can be seen in the presence of Macedonians, Muslim Albanians from Macedonia (one family which owns a confectionery, who came to Negotin in the 1940s and 1950s), Catholic Albanians, and Croats (there are Catholic churches in Bor and Zaječar) – yet the number of all of them together is almost negligible. There are no Bulgarians, still. Even though Dacia Ripensis is the “Diocese of the Romanian Orthodox Church for Romanians/Vlachs from the whole Serbia,” there are no persons unwanted or ostracized because of their ethnicity, nor has anyone ever encountered maltreatment – both from the priests or the members. Therefore, there are no recorded examples of inter-religious or inter-confessional conflicts, apart from those with (some of) the representatives of the Timok Diocese (ph. 6).

“There are Serbian villages around the Timok which have clearly stated that they want to belong to us, saying: “You have done this well, you’re from around here, we can see when someone from this region fights for it [...] we would like to join you.” I say, no problem – if they call, I have no right to deprive anyone of service, but it’s going to be a huge problem because the Serbian Orthodox Church will not allow it.”

The relation toward local holidays and customs is quite tolerant, since almost all of the old folk customs have been incorporated into the Christian tradition, which fully corresponds to the syncretism characteristic for Orthodoxy.

“Let’s say there are some Pagan elements, but they have been Christianized, like the patron saint’s day in the Serbian population, so we tolerate, respect, and manage ourselves according to those local customs, meaning that we don’t interfere with the believers who per-

form them, and then there are some customs which don't need the presence of the priest, such as pouring water, lighting candles, fire by the water for the soul of the deceased, the people do that by themselves, but there are also customs here where there is music, for example, at the funerals. In the majority villages in the plain, in the hills some villages have it some don't, and it is practically a way of explaining the soul of the people through the music sung there. It is said that Vlachs, that is, Romanians, originate from the Romanized Dacians. When those musicians come, they sing, and play these sad songs up until a moment when they reach the centre of the village, and there they play a joyous *kolo* [...] Why does this explain the soul of the people? Romans mourned for their dead, because they simply thought that the dead were leaving, while Dacians rejoiced when someone died because they believed that the deceased were going to a better world, a better place. Here, it's all mixed up, there is something which is called *musica* or *dor*, *musica dje dor* – *dor* being this specific feeling. Someone has tried to describe it, there are many terms that can describe it, but none is, how should I say, 100%, none can fully explain the meaning of it. For example, "longing", "sorrow", but it's not classic longing, nor classic sorrow, it's a feeling between strong sadness and joy."

Since Eastern Serbia is famous for its so-called "Vlachian magic", we could not skip this subject, particularly in a conversation with the Orthodox priest, who says that they have never forbidden it, but only advised people against going to the prophets or soothsayers.

"People want to go to soothsayers. I told them: don't go for nothing, to be lied to, to give your money, but they say: 'We heard there is this old hag, 'we want to go'. I tried convincing them – no, no, no, and so as not to let her have her own way with them, I said – OK, I'll go along with you, but I'm not coming inside, because I don't want to participate in the whole thing, but still I only wanted... The old lady came to the fence and she said: 'What do you need, children?' – 'Well, old lady, we came so that you can tell us something.' She said: 'Is your name Dragan?' and that person was really called Dragan, but nobody called him that, everybody called him Bata, even I didn't know his real name was Dragan. And then, you know, a man starts to wonder – she didn't know him, yet all of a sudden she knew his name, and let's draw on the church teachings here, concerning soothsayers and such, the ones who are, so to say, genuine soothsayers are the ones who work with the Devil, because the Devil is the spirit. For a fisherman to catch a fish, when he throws the hook, the fish is not crazy to get caught, he needs some bait also. It's the same here. She threw the bait, she said this and then – absolute trust and there was nothing that could be said to him. Then again, she's always sick, always in the hospital, her husband once told me this: 'I'm going to beat up this old hag once. I can't force her to stop doing this,' because any time she has this thing, she ends up being pale for days, her look is somehow ugly, her eyes goggle... There's something there,

they're connected somehow. Only few such remain, people say that there used to be a lot of them, now only because of the financial situation. [...] The fact is that it exists. The fraud can linger – a woman may lie for her whole life and that's it, or up to a certain point in time. But there's something, there really is. [...] The Romanian people pay much attention to the spiritual side. When someone dies among us, he is a greater saint than anyone else. We practically have no dead people."

In the earlier period, when faith was marginalized, the religious life of the Vlachian/Romanian minority was, paradoxically, more developed than today. The state was much more involved in the discontinuation of such practice in the majority, particularly in those villages which were "loyal" to the Chetnik movement. Vlachs were encouraged to develop their own culture, which also meant going to church (but not inspiring nationalism), so as to present a form of counterbalance to the population which was the bearer of the "old-regime"/pre-war cultural model and mentality, as our interviewee says, "they were afraid that the king might return."

"We have Štubik, for example, a small town back then, now a Serbian village, which had its church built together by the people from Malajnica and Štubik, since Malajnica was a part of the Štubik parish, and it had never had its own church. After the war – only Vlachs went to the church. Up until, let's say, the 1950s or 1960s, maybe both of them went, since there were some older Serbs from the village, but as the new generations arrived – 'We're gentlemen, we work, we have offices, the chief of the local office said, look at these stupid Vlachs, they are so primitive – the church is for them, not for us' and so Vlachs went to church. My grandma used to tell me: 'I can remember back in the sixties, seventies, we went to church, snow up to our waists, the church was full, you couldn't enter it – no Štubikers anywhere, and us,' she said, 'a churchful'."

Also, villages in the hills were "left alone," since the authority back then probably thought of them as "less civilized, as people more prone to nature" than in the villages in the plain. It was expected from the people who were in any way part of the state structure (worked in the town hall or were members of the local community, and such) to stick to the "drawn line" and to publicly declare negative attitude toward the church, faith, religion.

By the by, Bojan Aleksandrović was nearly expelled from his school as a little boy, because he was dedicated to the faith and church. As a good pupil, he could not provide a bad example for other children, who were fond of him. He got out with only a reproach since he was, in all other aspects, a non-problematic child.

As positive experience of his service in the border region, Bojan Aleksandrović states "the preservation of faith, Orthodoxy above all, maintenance of church awareness in people, practically a national minority which is a part of the people from the neighbouring country, being in the border region." In

short, the preservation of the religious and national identity of the people. After the ten years of the Romanian Orthodox Church activity, as our interviewee emphasizes, there are no problems and the state of international relations has not deteriorated, but improved, thus making the “building of bridges” between the two peoples and the demonstration of religious pluralism ones of, certainly, most positive experiences of his religious service on the border.

On the other hand, as a major negative experience he mentions “the great opposition by the priests of the Church of the majority people.” It bears pointing out that our interviewee talks about the negative experience with the state bodies, institutions, and their representatives, but not with the people of the majority, whose potential hostility due to prejudice and propaganda by the priests of the SOC would usually stop upon the first personal meeting, when father Bojan would “immediately disarm them with his words,” while other colleagues, the ROC priests, have already had a lot of problems – threats of being run over by cars or those involving being “shot down” if they even came close to some villages.

There is no formal contact nor cooperation with citizen councils in local communities, but there are close links with actual people who comprise that bodies in villages, so one can say that there are informal relations and connections, which, as is the case in other social spheres, can turn out to be more functional and efficient than the official ones, established at the level of institutions.

The president of the Municipality of Negotin is a man from a Vlachian village, a member of the Socialist Party of Serbia. He personally showed good will and interest in “talking” with Bojan Aleksandrović, when the ambassador of Romania visited this region. However, it seems that he was somehow forbidden/warned against doing such a thing from the party central in Belgrade, and that was the end of any attempt at cooperation. A week later, the bishop of Timok, Justin, organized a meeting with the president of the Municipality, which was followed by a press announcement that there was no room for the activity of the ROC in this region.

Father Bojan has a good relationship with the representatives of the “Vlachian” political parties. Particularly with the Vlachian Democratic Party, whose president is a believer, but also with the Democratic Movement of Romanians. Many members of the “Serbian” political parties are believers, but as our interviewee says: “Their political attitudes are their own business and I don’t want to get into it.” He says that he has only paid special attention to the newly-formed town office of the “Dveri” movement with their mythomaniac and extreme nationalistic rhetoric of “the Kosovo pledge”, that can use individuals to create some “small damage”, which might stimulate a larger problem.

Bojan Aleksandrović has tried to cooperate with three Catholic priests from Bor and Zaječar, but after the initial meeting, every further contact would be prevented on their behalf with some unconvincing excuses, so he believes that it is the case of the “ban from the Belgrade central” – regardless of the fact that he received the blessing of the Belgrade archbishop Stanislav



Hočevar in the first place. He thinks that it is the close relationship between the archbishop and bishop Irinej Bulović that is to blame, since Bulović is a known opponent of the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Eastern Serbia. It is interesting that one of the Catholic priests even asked Aleksandrović to confess to him, since he did not have a colleague of his own confession that could perform such service.

The spreading of the so-called small Protestant religious communities occurs mainly among the Vlachian population, contrary to Southern Serbia, where Roma are the main “proselytism target”. There is a notable presence of Adventists (even before World War II), Baptists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses, where the latter are usually joined by Serbs of a lower social status. Conversion occurs much more often in the rural than the urban environment. “The key to success” of Adventists is the bilingual worshipping service – in the Serbian and Vlachian/Romanian language – which is of particular interest, since there is a ban by bishop Justin against service being given in Vlachian, which is the mother tongue of a large part of the population in Eastern Serbia, stated as the main reason behind the beginning of the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in this region, something we have already written about in the paper “Does God Speak My Language, Too?” (Jovanović and Tasić, 2012).

“Adventists are, in my personal opinion, people that one can talk to, they are well-mannered people. [...] And they are mostly Vlachs, unfortunately, in sects because they couldn’t find what they needed from the SOC priests, so they converted there. [...] I could sense a specific characteristic about them, something which is connected to Orthodoxy, and that they were forced, let’s say, to Adventism or some such Neo-Protestant group. One of them even told me why they converted. His grandfather was converted to Adventists, practically he didn’t convert – that was his only choice where he could convert yet stay within the reach of Christianity, in his own opinion, since he simply couldn’t find himself in the church any more because of the actions of a certain bishop. And that man of seventy came to the liturgy in our village with his wife for Easter. That means a lot.”

Life on the border, as a multinational and multiconfessional environment, according to our interviewee, undoubtedly improves the general social, economic, and cultural development. It is also without a doubt, as Bojan Aleksandrović says, that living with other peoples and members of other confessions is a treasure that should be kept and nurtured. What endangers the survival and identity, and hampers every form of development, is, in our interviewee’s opinion, the activity of local politicians, who, most often, defend their own personal interests by “grabbing their own piece of the pie,” which is getting smaller and smaller each year.

A priest can best contribute to the survival and development of the parish by “completely dedicating himself to the church, without sparing himself.”

The main reason for the underdevelopment of the border municipalities, in Aleksandrović's opinion, lies in the neglect of these regions by the state, which can particularly be seen in the lack of infrastructural,<sup>6</sup> as well as economic and cultural heritage investments – both concerning Serbs as the majority and other peoples as national minorities.

### REFERENCES

Jovanović, Miloš, and Miloš Tasić. "Does God Speak My Language, Too?" In *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on The Border*, edited by Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Danijela Gavrilović & Dragan Todorović, 53-68. Niš: YSSSR and Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at The University of Niš, 2012.

*Rumunski Pravoslavni Protoprezviterat Priobalne Dakije*. <http://daciaortodoxa.ro/> (last accessed on: 10/05/2013).

### PHOTOGRAPHS



Ph. 1. The Very Reverend Father Bojan Aleksandrović

---

<sup>6</sup> The authors of this paper are first-hand witnesses of the very poor state of motorways in the entire Eastern Serbia, especially around the town of Negotin.



Ph. 2. In front of the seat of the Romanian Orthodox Protopresbyterate of Dacia Ripensis in Negotin



Ph. 3. Easter festival of Vlachian (Romanian) culture in Malajnica



Ph. 4. At the reception held by His Beatitude Father Danil, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church





Ph. 5. The rite of baptism on the Timok



Ph 6. Liturgy in Alibunar

Dejan Krstić  
Dragan Koković

## **FATHER BORA – A GOOD MAN AND PRIEST (Zaječar)\***

---

Zajecar is specific from a few aspects, when it comes to religious life. Officially, Christianity has never been deeply rooted among people – they have literally adopted so called “folk Orthodoxy” which implies declaring oneself as a Christian, while on the other hand observing many practices not comprised by dogmatic Orthodoxy. There is only a small number of dogmatic Serbian Orthodox Church members, predominantly in the town of Zajecar. Beside this Church, there are also other religious communities in Zajecar – Roman Catholic Church (small number of Slovenian, Croat and Hungarian immigrants), Adventist Church, Jehovah’s witnesses. One of the recent issues has been the missionaries of Romanian Orthodox Church among the Vlachs of north-eastern Serbia.

This paper will make the image of religious life in Zajecar area more complete, since it will present a priest of Serbian Orthodox Church (whose life is a testimony of Church life here and across Serbia) and his personal view on religious life in this area. It is archpriest staurophor Borivoje Radojicic, widely known in Zajecar area as “Father Bora” (ph. 1). He was not a random choice for the paper, because he has distinguished himself for his reputation and popularity, as a lenient, benevolent, always smiling, plainspoken, close to people and well-known for his good deeds and positive energy. He is also known for not having a beard like other priests and for riding a bicycle, although he’s 77 (ph. 2). This interview with him was arranged in May 2013. For the purpose of this paper an interview with him from 2005. regarding the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his work which was published in the *Gazette of Eparchy of Timokwas* used (Гл. Епарх. тим. 2005).

### **LIFE AND CAREER**

Borivoje Radojicic, Father Bora, was born on March 15<sup>th</sup> in 1936. In Banjani, the Ub municipality, Valjevo county. His family had peasant background. He lived in an extended family – apart from his family, there were the families of two of his paternal uncles, his grandparents and spinster aunts (in his native area husbands wouldn’t live in their wives’ households, so

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

brothers would get married and continued to share the same house). He finished his primary school in his native village.

His parents wanted him to attend Agricultural school, because they owned 60 acres of land. But he wanted to attend the Seminary. In an interview published in *the Gazette of Eparchy of Timok* he explains his dedication to the profession of a priest:

“I grew up in a Christian Prayer Movement family. Back then, my father was an active member of Bishop Nikolaž Velimirović’s Christian Prayer Society. That was post-WWII time, 1947-1948, when the society was active in my native area. As a child, when I was not at school, I attended Liturgies, on Sundays and holidays. That is because of my family’s Christian Prayer Movement background and many of its members gathering at our house. This is how I made my choice regarding my profession as early as in primary school (Гл. Епарх. тим. 2005, 45).”

In 1948, the communist government, like in case of other households, assessed huge taxes for his household too. However, the yield of wheat wasn’t as expected and because of not being able to pay the taxes in wheat, his grandfather was sent to prison and his estate was confiscated. Sometime later, the government returned only 9 acres of land to his father and uncles – 3 acres each. This is how the extended family disintegrated. His father didn’t object to his going to the Seminary, but didn’t have enough money since the Seminary was in Belgrade and was a boarding school. His father suggested going to teacher’s college, since it was in their vicinity. However, one day, when the rest of the family went to field to work, his grandmother took him to the local priest and enrolled him in the Seminary (at the time, the enrollment was carried out through local priests). In the evening she informed her son of what she had done, who couldn’t oppose his mother because of his patriarchal views. Later, his father paid for the schooling, but it was very difficult—they had to go to Srem to work for wages. Interestingly, his father tried, at some point, to make him leave the Seminary – by promising him to buy the accordion in return (Bora is musical, he plays the fife, the double fife, the violin, and at the time he loved playing the accordion which started being used as a folk instrument). He didn’t agree to it. Later, when he became a priest, the first thing he bought was the accordion.

Father Bora went to the St. Sava Seminary in 1949, and finished it in 1954. It was located within the Rakovica Monastery, because its building had been confiscated. As he says in the interview to the *Gazette of Eparchy of Timok*:

“In the Seminary, the living conditions for pupils were extremely poor. We, virtually, didn’t have breakfasts, only tea, and only in the evening we had boiled carrots and corn that we produced ourselves. Only when we were in the third year, we got powdered eggs (Гл. Епарх. тим. 2005, 45).”



After WWII, thanks to Christian Prayer Movement of Bishop Nikolaj, (because of which the religious life in Valjevo area was intense), 70% of all pupils in the Seminary were from Valjevo and its vicinity, whereas the rest of 30% came from other parts of Yugoslavia.

In the interview to *the Gazette of Eparchy of Timok* Father Bora says about his wishes after finishing the Seminary:

“After I finished the school I went to a responsible Bishop, the Bishop of Timok, whose nominee I was and asked for his blessing to enroll the Faculty. Bishop Emilijan didn't agree because, at the time, there was huge need for priests, therefore he suggested that I should be ordained as a priest, and later, as a priest, I could enroll it, if I want (Гл. Епарх. тим. 2005, 46).”

He was ordained a deacon on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1955, in Belgrade, in the Church of St. Nikolaj at the New Cemetery, and on the next day a priest in the Patriarchy chapel dedicated to Simeon Myrrhobleter. He married Milena Malesevic from the village of Druzetic, near Koceljeva, in January, 1956. Soon after the wedding, he was appointed as the priest in the village of Recka near Negotin, where he served for three years (ph. 3). In Recka, he, his wife and their daughter Radmila, born in 1957 were tenants and since their income from parish was insufficient; they had to work as day laborers in agriculture. They used to hoe the crops all day for 2 kilos of flour each. That period, the first half of the 50's of the XX century, was very hard for priests. One day his wife said to him: “My father has got the land, your father has got the land, and I don't want to work as a day laborer any more. If you want to work the land, let's work our land”. He decided to find some better parish, and in case he doesn't-he would ask to be tivated and to go back home. Bishop Emilijan Piperkovic said to him: “I know all your problems, I will give you a parish where you won't have to work as a day laborer, where you will have for bare necessities”. The Bishop nominated him for the priest of Veliki Izvor near Zajecar, where he began to work on February 1<sup>st</sup> in 1959. It is in Veliki Izvor where he was awarded his first distinction – the red belt. In this village, he and his family were also tenants, but before the end of his tenure in Veliki Izvor, at the end of the 60's of the XX century, he managed to build a small parsonage in the churchyard. In this village, as a priest, he was involved with the Red Cross. The inhabitants of Veliki Izvor are stereotyped as bad people, but he never quarreled with anyone. On the contrary, he built outstanding relationships. He is still popular in this village and always is a dear guest.

After he began to work as a priest, in two years, from 1956-1957, a huge drain of priests in this area occurred. Some of them weren't willing to work as day laborers (the life of priests was difficult), whereas others were compelled by OZNA, the secret police (later UDBA) which offered possibilities to change their jobs. The state officials were consistent and priests who were willing to resign from their service were given steady jobs until their

retirement (those priests who were divested by the Bishop were not left without the job). A man from Veliki Izvor who was in charge of recruiting new members Father Bora made an offer to him: he could have so called "additional education" (although he could find a job with the Seminary degree), if he agrees to give up his service as a priest. He didn't want to, because he loved his profession. But this man was so persistent and managed to persuade Father Bora. So he enrolled the studies of law in Nis and, after two years, in 1968 he got a certificate in law. However, despite obtaining the certificate, he wasn't willing to resign from the service.

By the virtue of the certificate, apart from being the priest he worked in an agricultural cooperative as a book-keeper and an accountant for five-six years. As a priest he couldn't get a loan, but as a book-keeper he got it for building a house in Zajecar. It was finished as early as in 1965. During the construction of the house, the residents of Veliki Izvor gave a significant contribution. They had horses and carts and brought him the sand and other material to the site free of charge, and carried away the ground. He says: "I'm really thankful to people of Veliki Izvor".

He was nominated to be a priest in Zajecar on January 1<sup>st</sup> in 1970. Until his retirement in 1997, he held First parish that covers the part of Zajecar called Vlaska mala (ph. 7, 8 and 9). Upon arrival to Zajecar, he and his family moved into his house, where he has lived up to now. In Zajecar, his daughter married Miroslav Pesic who was an electrical engineer, and now with the PhD in electrical engineering. From his daughter and son-in-law he's got a granddaughter Gordana, a graduate economist, born in 1982 and a grandson Petar, a student of electrical engineering, born in 1984. His wife died in 1995 (ph. 5).

During his work in Zajecar, Father Bora was promoted as follows: in 1971 to the rank of protovicar, in 1976 to the rank of an archpriest and in 1992 to the highest priestly rank: archpriest staurophor (ph. 10) (in Church, the promotions are based on merits, however there are many priests who are retired without having been promoted). Additionally, his reputation among the clergy and his promotions were built not only on his endeavors within his parish, but also on his efforts in the Administration of Eparchy of Timok, where he worked for 40 years, since 1965. And this is how he began to work in the Eparchy: Only ten days after being appointed as the priest in Veliki Izvor and moving there, Bishop's vicar father Dragisa Miletic invited him to come to Bishop Emilijan Piperkovic, for a meeting. He went to Zajecar on bicycle (at the time he was the only priest with a bicycle, the older priests all had horses). The Bishop told him: "I would like to ask you something. Would you be willing to come here at 6.30 every morning, to take me to Church and bring me back here?" Father Bora accepted, but didn't understand what it was about, since the Bishop lived in the same street where the Church was, a few hundred yards away from it. But, the first day he took the Bishop he realized: there was a construction site on the way to the church and whenever the Bishop was passing by, the workers would curse and throw stones at him (it was the time of hostility towards the Church). He took the Bishop to the

church for 20 days. Then, the Bishop offered him a position of the chief of his cabinet, given the fact that Father Bora already spent the time in Zajecar. He accepted this. He did this job for the next 12 years. He used to come from Veliki Izvor to Eparchy office on bicycle every day and then went back, performing his parish duties in the afternoons and on holidays. He did a lot of administrative work in Veliki Izvor, taking the papers back to Zajecar Eparchy office, only for the purpose of authentication. In the meantime, he was appointed as an internal financial controller. After that, from 1976, he worked in the Church court in Zajecar as a secretary. He was also the secretary of the Eparchy for 13 years. He was retired on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1997, but he continued to perform administrative duties as a secretary of the Eparchy, a treasurer, a book-keeper and a prosecutor of the Church court. He was relieved from all these duties in 2008.

He says that during his work in the Eparchy he saw eight Bishops. When Bishop Emilijan Piperkovic died, the SOC Synod appointed the Bishop of Sumadija Valerijan to be in charge of Eparchy of Timok until the consecration of a new Bishop through the Holy Assembly of Bishops of SOC. During the Assembly Bishop Metodije Muzdeka was consecrated, who fell ill after three years. Over one year, until the next Holy Assembly of Bishops, he was replaced by the Bishop Pavle of Raska and Prizren, the latter Patriarch. The Holy Assembly, then, appointed Patriarch's auxiliary Bishop Danilo Krstic to be the administrator of the Eparchy for the period of one year. During the next Holy Assembly, Bishop Irinej of Nis, current Patriarch, was appointed as the administrator of the Eparchy, also for the period of one year. At that time, Bishop Metodije died. Then, Milutin Stojadinovic was consecrated as the Bishop of Timok. After his death, current Bishop Justin of Timok was consecrated. Father Bora was on good terms with all Bishops, he was their right-hand person (ph. 4 and 6).

Father Bora is now retired, he doesn't have his parish, but is very active, as he says "he celebrates the Liturgy constantly", "he helps his brothers".

"Whoever needs me, I am here to help, because I enjoy my profession, to be frank. I enjoy my job. Whoever of my brothers may need my assistance, I will surely help him."

He frequently emphasizes that he enjoys his job and that he's never tired of it. He still celebrates the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holidays. For example, he says that he has recently helped his schoolmate, father Rajko, who has a parish in the village of Crni vrh, on the Stara Planina (Old Mountain) in the municipality of Knjazevac, (the Eparchy of Nis), and is soon going there again on Palm Sunday. A few days ago, he was in Lenovac, Zajecar municipality, where he co-celebrated with his friend. Recently, he has served for four days in Montenegro. He was on an excursion, a pilgrimage, and since he knows the priors of Moraca, Ostrog and Podmajine monasteries, he co-celebrates during all services. He enjoys all services, but prefers services in monasteries because they are specific and longer and are performed

through the day and night. He says that he made many friends among Russian people, because there many of them in Budva, in the vicinity of Podmajine monastery. Very often people from his former parish, a part of town known as Vlaska mala, ask him to perform some rite related to a religious holiday or a funeral. In that case, he attends the ceremony, but lets the current priest perform the rite. In this way he avoids collecting church taxes. Therefore, he pays respect to people, he performs free of charge. The money goes to current priest.

He has always been on good terms with other clergy members and, as he says, he never quarreled with anyone. Regardless of his attitude towards religion, he says he has never had any problems with authorities. He remembers joyfully when former town's mayor Viobran permitted him to collect contributions for the church in Veliki Izvor longer than it was previously agreed.

### **HIS VIEW ON RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Father Bora defines the attitude of people in Timok area towards religion as follows: "In the region of Timok, people are religious, but are not liturgical". This is a concise perception of "folk Orthodoxy" in this area. While he was priest in Veliki Izvor, a vast number of people attended the liturgy only on occasions of important holidays such as Resurrection, Christmas, Epiphany, the village patron saint's day. There was only a small number of people who regularly attended the Liturgy. It is the same case in Zajecar today – of almost 50 000 people, only 100-150 dogmatic Christians that always attend the Divine Liturgy.

As for local holidays and practices that are often not included in orthodox teachings, he says that church canons indicate that the oldest law is the traditional one. According to him, many of the inherited customs come from polytheistic period. But, they had been adopted by people, and he, as a priest, accepted them. He always tried to observe them. There were priests who tried to change these religious customs. But, as a rule, no one is allowed to deny a right to a custom, because those who are denied have a right to complain to church authorities. The traditional law should be observed, except in cases when it is in collision with Christianity. But, customs that are observed in this area are not in conflict with Christianity.

He thinks that people here are not "Liturgical" because this part of the country used to often see skirmishes between Bulgaria and Serbia. In 1915, Bulgarian army killed all Serbian priests that were taken prisoners. In his opinion, this was the reason for people not to choose the profession of a priest. The interest rose only after the year of 2000. Since the clergy wasn't numerous, even illiterate people were educated in monasteries to become priests. People from other parts of the country weren't willing to come here, because this area was a "danger zone". He was simply forced to come to this region. The lack of priests was the reason for the small number of people attending the Liturgies. People were left to perform customs and rites alone.

One priest was in charge of even several villages until the number of priests increased, who came here predominantly from Montenegro, Crna Trava and Branicevo.

The attitude of people regarding the religion was certainly affected by the attitude of the state towards it. In the time of the Informbiro resolution, this border areas were filled with problems, people escaped over the borderlines, so the people were frightened. The situation wasn't favorable for priests. He gives examples of secret baptisms, when he went to homes of even highly educated people, but dressed as an ordinary citizen, while concealing the vestments in his bag; the doors of the home had to be locked first, after which he would put on his vestments, baptized the child, and after that he would put the vestments back into the bag. Then the doors were unlocked, and he would stay at the home as a guest. If, in a family, there was a person who was a member of the Communist party, he wouldn't allow a priest to perform a memorial service. But on many occasions priests were asked to perform seven-day or forty-day memorial services or to visit a family on a holiday or to perform memorial service in a closed ceremony. That was an alternative system in given situation. The reason for this was in the fact that anyone could lose the job in case of being seen attending church services. He knows many people who were dismissed this way. Many people were not hostile to the Church, but were afraid of showing it, because it would mean being fired from work. That is how it was when he began to work in the mid-50's until mid-70's. Only after this period did the spying and informing stop.

There were people who were simply hostile to the religion. He remembers a case when grandparents decided to baptize their grandchildren. Father Bora went to their home. But the father of the children was a communist. In front of the priest he yelled at his parents, not allowing his children to be baptized. The daughter-in-law, the mother of children was silent. Then the grandfather said briskly: "I'm the head of the family. Father, you have come here... you have to perform the rite. Those who object to this being done may leave the house". He says that such situations puts you in a dilemma-to baptize or not to baptize, "sometimes you just don't know what to do". In those days, he had to take care not to provoke conflicts. While he was working, he had to be very careful not to be informed of, I had to "have a pair of eyes on the back of my head" as he says jokingly. When he went to people to bless the water, he had to remember those who crossed themselves, in order to offer the cross to be kissed at the end of the rite only to them, and not to others. He says: "If I offer him the cross to kiss it...it could be unpleasant for both of us – to him, because he isn't a believer, and to me, because I've made an inappropriate offer. But, when the rite is over, we usually have a glass or two of brandy... it means that we are still friends. It means that I respect his attitude, and I have avoided an unpleasant situation". He says that he managed to make such compromises, but there were other priests who acted differently. He says that in times of socialism many people migrated from southern parts of the country to Zaječar, because it was an industrial center. They were atheists, the former communists. But as the time passed by, and after a few generations, the descendants are different.

The principles of upbringing from the socialistic period still affect today's religious life. During the post-socialistic period, when the catechism was introduced into the educational system as an optional subject, many conflicts between parents and children appeared. The children would like to attend catechism, but since they are underage, they need the consent from their parents. There were many cases that parents didn't approve their child's choosing this option. However, he emphasizes, today all households would welcome the priest, unlike the times when it was completely different. As for this post-socialistic period, he says that there are many converts. Suddenly, during the 90's of the XX century, when the freedom of religion was guaranteed, beside true believers, many people who started attending the church services out of fashion appeared. Over the time, their number decreased, hence only true dogmatic, Liturgical believers regularly attend the church services. One should keep in mind that there are many people that are not atheists, but are not regular in the Church, they are indifferent.

As for the influence of an ethnicity to religious life, Father Bora says that he never cared for the ethnic diversity of this area. He says that he hasn't got much experience with the Vlachs. During the period when he was in Rečka (which is a Serbian village), he served also Vlach village of Mokranje, and he had no problems. There were no signs among the Vlachs of boycotting SOC. They were even registered in the Church evidence as orthodox Serbs. He says that he wasn't lucky enough to have a Vlach village in his parish and regrets not managing to learn Vlach language, but only has a poor command of it.

When asked about the priests of Romanian Orthodox Church, who have recently appeared in the region of Timok, he says that it is a new occurrence. He explains that Romanian Orthodox Church is present in Vojvodina, but according to the Agreement signed in 1912, SOC cannot appoint a Bishop in Timisoara, and ROC cannot appoint a Bishop in Vrsac. The Bishops used to oversee their churches over the borders, but were not able to reside there. Three years ago, ROC violated the agreement and appointed their Bishop in Vrsac. The state won't interfere, because it is separate from the church. Romanian priests also appeared in Timocka Krajina. At the moment, five Romanian priests live and work here. It is considered that their work is related to nationalistic issues, that is to "converting" the Vlachs into Romanians. They are paid in Romania, which means that their government pay them to "Romanize" this area as much as possible. Their situation is much more favorable than that of Serbian priests, since they don't collect any Church taxes and fees for their services. Serbian priests have to charge their services, because it is their source of income. People are confused when Serbian priests charge their funeral services 5000 dinars, whereas Romanian priests perform the same rite free of charge. However, he says, there have been no conflicts between Romanian and Serbian priests when they meet; the communication is decent, there are no arguments.

The inhabitants of Veliki Izvor are the descendants of the settlers from the central Bulgaria, from the vicinity of Teteven, and, although they intimately see themselves as Serbs, they speak Bulgarian, a language they

call “izvorski”. Father Bora, as he says, had good command of this speech, only one year after he moved to Veliki Izvor. He wanted to learn it in order to communicate better with believers. He still speaks this language whenever he meets people from Veliki Izvor.

When it comes to Gipsies, he says that he was always welcome in their homes. He was on very good terms with them. In times when others were afraid to confess their religious beliefs, they were not afraid because nobody was interested in them. They are local blacksmith Gipsies, who converted from Islam into Christianity at the end of XIX century. He remembers a Gipsy from Veliki Izvor, who was the second generation after the conversion into Christianity; his father was the first one. His name was Samir Alijevic, but in the village, they called him Kamen Begov. His sons used to slaughter pigs, but he couldn't eat pork. He used to say to Father Bora: “Bora, I don't feel like... It's not that I don't want...I can't”. There are also Gipsies among dogmatic, Liturgical believers in Zajecar. Other believers accept them normally. Father Bora says: “In this area, the Gipsies and the Vlachs are, somehow, intuitively, more religious than the Serbs”.

Father Bora says that he has never heard of any conflict in the eastern Serbia because of religious intolerance. He, himself, is also, very tolerant to other religions.

“I happened to meet mullahs, for instance... to communicate, to talk. He tells me about his trip to Mecca. It is their sacred place as Jerusalem is to us. And so....we talk.... I respect his believers, he respects my parishioners.”

Father Bora says that, during his work, the catholic priest in Zajecar was Stipe, a Slovenian, who had outstanding friendly relationship with all orthodox priests and with him as well. He says that he was an exceptionally good man and that he very often visited his orthodox fellow “colleagues” for a talk over a glass of brandy. They would pay him a visit in return.

In Father Bora's neighborhood is the Adventist church. Sometimes he talks to them. Once he was invited by their high priest from Belgrade to visit them and see what they do and he accepted the invitation. The Adventist church is the first “sect” that appeared in Zajecar. When people from this area went to Western Europe to work as economic immigrants during the 60's and the 70's of the XX century, they were greeted, received and helped, by the Adventists who did them many favors and asked people from here to become their members in return. That's why they first appeared in the Vlach gastabeiter village of Kobisnica near Negotin, then in the Vlach village of Zlot and then in Zajecar. He thinks that they are not advancing in this area.

He thinks that they are different type of people in comparison to Jehovah's witnesses who have their building in the part of Zajecar called Kotlujevac. He hasn't had any contacts with him because they don't communicate with other religions.



“They are somehow aggressive, they don’t tolerate others. They think there’s no other religion in the world and there should be only Jehovah’s witnesses. They can’t seem to respect the others. They are difficult to socialize with.”

He used to know a salesman of music instruments and was in regular contact with him, but when he became Jehovah’s witness he didn’t want a priest to enter his shop. He thinks that this sect is also stagnating in Zajecar, in terms of number of members.

His experiences with Satanists in Zajecar are especially interesting. He says that they were in Zajecar, but no one knows where they gather. Ten years ago, in the part of Zajecar called “Kraljevica” frequent children suicides used to be committed, some of them jumped from the balcony. The priests in the Church knew that the suicides were related to Satanists, and announced on the radio that will bless all flats in building C3 for free. Four priests went on to perform the rite and they did it wherever the door was open. Where no one wanted to open the door, they blessed the hallway. One week after that, Satanists retaliated in such way that they broke into the Cathedral and desecrated it. They didn’t take away many things, but made a lot of damage.

He says that their motto is: “Kill yourself while you’re young, in order to live forever”. They try to be secret, but he happened to be in contact with some of them.

In the 90’s of the last century, a man from his parish approached him and asked him to come and bless his house. Father Bora asked when it would be suitable and the man wanted him to do it immediately. They agreed to do it in one hour time. He went to this apartment. Beside this man and his wife, there also was their daughter, a 14-15 years old girl. The blessing began. She stood up and came close to them, but didn’t cross herself. At the end of the rite, Bora offered them the cross to kiss it. The parents did it, and he asked her: “Girl, would you like to kiss the cross or not?” She didn’t say anything, but she kissed it. Then the father asked him to read a prayer to the girl. She sat on a chair. When he started reading the prayer, she suddenly “exploded”. She started telling the worst things about her parents and then said: “I had a vision, I should have flown out through the window, like a bird, but they won’t let me go, they have nailed the window.” Father Bora started to talk to her: “My child, your wings haven’t grown yet...”. They talked for a while, then they finished the prayer, and after that he sat and continued the talk with her. On his way out, he said he would pay them a visit the next day. The father went to see Father Bora off and told him that he had found various texts in her room and that she wanted to jump out of the window. Father Bora visited them several times over the next several days and talked to her. After that, the parents took her to Belgrade to a psychiatric clinic. Later, whenever he met the father, he would ask about the girl, and the father would reply that she was alright. After a while, one day, when he was in the church, somebody covered his eyes from behind with hands. When he turned, he saw the girl. She said to him: “Here I am, uncle Bora, I’m alright”.

As for politics, Father Bora is unbiased. He thinks that a priest shouldn't be involved in politics and he learned this from one of his teachers in the Seminary. When he was in the Seminary, the pupils used to buy newspapers and read them. It was the time of the famous Tito-Djilas political scandal. One evening, a teacher on duty entered pupils' room, saw the newspapers and asked them what they were reading and waited each of them to give an answer. Since there was a blackboard in the room, he took the chalk and said: "Children, this is how a snake moves" and drew a curve, continuing: "When the head encounters a danger, it turns for 180 degrees, and it is usually a tail that suffers. In politics, you will be the tail, because you aren't trained to be politicians, you're trained to do something else. This is my advice: avoid politics, it's better to lead the blind, than to deal with politics." Father Bora accepted that advice and never dealt with politics nor was he interested in it. Even now, in multi-party system, he isn't a member of any party, as he says, he needs all people.

He says that a priest can influence people, because he is always with them. People are ready to accept many advices. Whether they will do it or not depends on how active a priest is and how close he is to the people. "But, it's his job – to be with them".

He thinks that the Serbs should preserve their tradition as much as they are preserving their religion, in order to preserve their identity. They are intertwined. The tradition is passed down from generation to generation and it is a solid support to religion. According to him, there is a relation between a nation and a religion and if a nation ceases to exist, so does the religion.

### References

Гл. Епарх. тим. "Протојереј ставрофор Боривоје Радојичић: 50 година служења Цркви Христовој", разговор водио Горан Мијовић. *Гласник Епархије тимочке* 34: 44-48, 2005.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. Zajecar priest Borivoje Radojicic – Father Bora, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2013



Ph. 2. Father Bora with his bicycle, on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2013



Ph. 3. Father Bora (on the left as a young priest, 1957, the village of Brusnik



Ph. 4. Father Bora (standing) with the Patriarch German (sitting in the middle), Metropolitan Danilo of Montenegro (sitting, on the left) and Bishop Emilijan Piperkovic of Timok (sitting, on the right), in the village of Lenovac near Zajecar in 1965.





Ph. 5. Father Bora with his wife and daughter in Sokobanja at the beginning of the 70's of the XX century



Ph. 6. Father Bora with Bishop Metodije of Timok, in the mid-70's of the XX century



Ph. 7. Father Bora celebrating in the 80's of the XX century



Ph. 8. Father Bora performing a wedding ceremony in the Suvodol monastery with the prior iero-monk Justin in the 90's of the XX century





Ph. 9. Father Bora (among the priests second from the left) performing a wedding ceremony in the Zajecar Cathedral in the 90's of the XX century



Ph. 10. All archpriests stavrophanes of Eparchy of Timok, Father Bora (second from the left) with the Bishop Justin of Timok in the 2000's



UDK 316.74:271.222(497.11 Knjaževac)-725:929 Pavlović S.

Lela Milošević Radulović  
Dragana Stjepanović Zaharijevski

**THE PRIEST IN THE BORDER AREA:  
SPASA PAVLOVIĆ FROM KNJAŽEVAC\***

---

“Yes, Spasa Pavlović has retired,  
but the priest has not.”  
Father Spasa Pavlović

**INTRODUCTION**

The paper's subject is the representation of the activities undertaken by the priest in the border municipality of Knjaževac. The focus of interest is the priest's view of his parishioners and religious life in the border area, his opinion about general social issues and trans-border cooperation, as well as about the experience of life in the border area, through the prism of his own contribution as well as that of the church and religion to the social environment he lives in.

The data are collected by means of an in-depth interview with the priest Spasa Pavlović from Knjaževac in June, 2013<sup>1</sup> on the basis of the *Instructions for Collecting Data about Life and Work of the Priest in the Border Area* made by Dragoljub Đorđević, Dragan Todorović and Miloš Jovanović in 2012. The *Instructions* consist of six parts, namely, 1) socio-demographic traits, and data about 2) the parish, 3) the parishioners and religious life, 4) the relationships with the local authorities, 5) the relationships with other religions, confessions and religious communities, and 6) life and work in the border area.

Life in the border area has the specific traits of a special subculture so that it requires sensitive sociological disclosing of the peculiarities of everyday life as well as of the mechanisms of its functioning. In so doing, what should also be taken into consideration is a period of many years of marginalization of the border municipalities, especially those close to Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia as well as multiple negative consequences of marginali-

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> Father Miladin was on a holiday so that we could not have an interview with him while Father Toma has been in Knjaževac for only two years. He got there from Kruševac. He does not know his parishioners very well since he has been active in the neighborhood of Knjaževac for only a few months. Father Spasa is retired but he is still an active priest His knowledge of his parish and parishioners is excellent since he has been in Knjaževac since 1971.

zation such as pauperization, institutional lethargy, absence of adequate stimuli for revitalization, demographic aging and draining of the population from entire regions. Concerning this, as significant factors of co-existence, we can identify traditional value matrices with specific mores, patterns of socialization and forms of religious activity. Continual mixing of various concepts of norms, values, social and cultural models from both the sides of the borderline represents a characteristic of the border life. There we can find and recognize in their diversity people and values in the process of creating, defining and re-defining social dynamics which can enhance or weaken the habitual attitudes.

“To speak about borders (...) means to speak about spiritual, cultural, religious, ideological, normative, sexual ‘borders’ (Zanini 2002, 74).”

These “borders” have a variety of functions in the border area and border everyday life as a specific social space with respect to the environments that are, within wider territorial and cultural spaces, homogenous regarding their collective consciousness. Such a concept of living breeds a whole series of peculiarities reflected in various segments of social life. The border as a space cannot be an obstacle to the building of a common social space, cooperation, communication and border process improvement. This is not an unchangeable or non-eradicable line. In this sense, a very well-supported is a debate about the borders understood as a socially (anew) produced phenomena that are being ascribed certain meanings, forms and contents from one context to another. It is a constitutive process of imagining borders, of constructing or “colonizing social life,” of socially-constructed imagination regarding affiliation to a certain place/space. This imagination can have potentials which either divide or unite. In that sense we should think of G. Simmel’s essay speaking about the border as a “bridge or doors” with the doors symbolizing blockage and separation so long as they are closed. If open, they also represent a link while the bridge is a phenomenon of linkage. Surely it is that, to a great extent, it is upon these invisible borders (social, mental) that it depends whether people who live territorially close to each other should realize their cooperation or whether they will stay socially removed only because they appear to be, as it were, of other nation or other faith. The same can happen and it happens within the borders where the co-habitants are of different national or confessional affiliation while exhibiting a prominent social distance (Gavrilović, Kostić and Zaharijevski 2011, 1451). Therefore, the border is, as a space, less important for separation than the established and constructed social borderline. Regarding the fact that the invisible borders are very important for understanding spatial ones, it is significant to explore value patterns, stereotypes, identification matrices, religious attitudes as well as those towards “others” and “different” that are all the time defined and redefined. The prevailing opinion is that, under the conditions of the globalizing processes, the borders – cultural, religious, temporal, natural – meaning all those separating or closing us into what is “ours” are transcended.

It is beyond doubt that the present role of religion in the functioning of the border everyday life is a special research challenge for sociologists. Religion is a constituent part of the cultural relations in a given social context while religious activity is a constituent part of the social activities and can contribute to the social stability. Likewise, religion is a means of satisfying certain needs, both individual and group ones. The sociologists of religion, in their approach to interpreting the religion/society ratio, most often take into consideration its functions. Thus, for instance, I. Cvitković speaks about an integrative, compensational, economic, ethic and interpreting function, as well as about the function of religion in linking, integrating as much as separating and disintegrating; yet, he also speaks about religion as a constitutive factors of social stratification and interaction (Cvitković 2004, 112-127). These roles are changeable and they depend on social context, the potentials for development of a region, political turbulence and so on. We are witnessing revitalization of the church religiosity and the growth of social influence of religion. Religion and the church have been going public, since the nineties, while keeping pace with the demands of time through their direct impact on the changes of the legislative and institutional establishment and expressing their opinions about essential issues of existence and co-existence. The church doors are wide open while the priests more and more often enter the homes of their parishioners. Especially through press, radio, television and Internet is mass information enhanced regarding the issues of faith, church life and spirituality.

Through the prism of viewing the priest as a defender of religious, cultural and national identity and a keeper of the Serbian spirituality we are trying to find an answer to the questions regarding the present activities in the border area and the prevailing roles and effects of these activities. Regarding the specific border social cohesion it is of great importance to find out whether religion and religious activity in the border area have an integrative and compensation role or not. Does religion separate or connect people? Does it stifle or add fuel to conflicts? Is it a factor of stability or, just the opposite, of instability? Is its activity integrative or disintegrative? Does it help people to put up easier with scarcity and problems? If the religious activity reduces social interaction, fosters social inequality and excludes “others”, we are to conclude that religion and religious activities do not connect but separate people. Moreover, we would like to know if moral codes, interpretations and explanations are being offered, namely those that lead to the welfare of all? Or, are the religious code and the priest’s activities confined within the frameworks which are “blind” to the needs of individuals in their turbulent everyday life?

### **ON KNJAŽEVAC AND THE CHURCH OF ST GEORGE**

Knjaževac is an urban community in the municipality of Knjaževac in the county of Zaječarski. The Municipality of Knjaževac is situated in the eastern part of Serbia, close to the border with the Republic of Bulgaria; it be-

longs to the territory of Timočka Krajina. With its area of 1202 km<sup>2</sup>, the Municipality of Knjaževac is the fourth in size in Serbia. Its relief is hilly and mountainous. The highest point is Midžor Peak on Stara Mountain (2169 m). Its lowest point of the Municipality is at 176m above the sea level. The city is built at the junction of two rivers, the Trgoviški Timok and the Svrlijski Timok thus creating the Beli Timok River. This river runs northwards where, at Zaječar, it is joined by the Crni Timok River thus creating the Timok River. It is after this river that the whole region is named Timočka Krajina (Borderland of Timočka). The area of the Municipality includes 86 settlements of which 85 are rural. According to the 2002 Population Census, in Knjaževac there were 19.351 people living meaning slightly less than in the 1991 Population Census with 19.705 inhabitants. Today Knjaževac has 18.089 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> In the settlement of Knjaževac the average population age is 40,6 years (39,3 with men and 41,9 with women). The settlement is, to a large extent, inhabited by Serbs (data according to the 2002 Population Census).<sup>3</sup> The present name it got in 1859 after Prince Miloš Obrenović. The ancient tribes living in the area were Thracians and Dacians; in the Roman times the city was called *Timacum Minus*. In the Ottoman times, the city was called *Gurgusovac*. It suffered a lot in the first Serbian-Turkish war, in 1876, when the Ottoman Turks conquered and destroyed it. Knjaževac is the home region of a prominent politician from the People's Radical Party called Aca Stanojević.

A faster growth of Knjaževac started in 1960 when several industrial companies started with the production of textile („Branka Dinić“), shoes („Leda“), tractors and machines (IMT), and furniture (Timok industry of furniture „Tina“) while the wine cellar grew into wine producer (PPK „Džerwin“). The time period from 1970 to 1985 was the most important in the development of Knjaževac so far judging by all the elements of its economic and social development. It is in this time period when the edifices that Knjaževac is known for were built such as the Cultural Center, the Health Center, the Pre-school Center with a network of kindergartens and many residential building blocs. As for its cultural profile, Knjaževac is best known for the Republic presentations and the Festival of Youth Culture of Serbia that was held for the first time in 1962 and that has been organized regularly since then.

In Knjaževac there is an Orthodox Church of St George (ph. 1). It was built after the liberation from the Turks, to honor the first visit of Prince Miloš Obrenović to Gurgusovac in July 1835. The bell tower with a clock was built in 1866. The Church iconostasis was painted by Georgije Bakalović from Sremski Karlovci, disciple of Stefan Gavrilović, one of the most important painters from the early 19th century. As for the Church monumental parts, besides iconostasis, we should mention the Gospel from 1805, a gift from Prince Miloš as well as a silver cross (1866). Among the icons, two are worthy of special attention, namely, of Jesus Christ and St Nicholas, the only ones left from the original altar from 1835 (burnt in fire in 1876 when the

---

<sup>2</sup> Census of Population, Households and Residences in the Republic of Serbia in 2011. The first results. Belgrade, Republic Institute for Statistics.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from the site: <http://sr.wikipedia.org>

whole of Knjaževac was destroyed). In addition to the inscription on the front door, the Church also comprises a memorial plaque devoted to the participants in Timočka Insurrection. It was placed in the Church to commemorate a hundred year anniversary of the liberation from Turks by the members of an association of Timočani and Krajinci. The Church was restored in 1878. A new iconostasis was made by the painter Nikola Marinković, likewise from Sremski Karlovci.<sup>4</sup>

### THE PRIEST SPASA PAVLOVIĆ

Protopresbyter Spasa Pavlović (ph. 2), two days after his return from Chilandar, agreed to give us an interview. He was very kind and open for discussion about all the issues. He was born on March, 15, 1950, in the village of Rajno Polje, Municipality of Leskovac, county of Jablanički. He has been a widower for eighteen years and has a son and a daughter (ph. 3 and 4) and seven grandchildren (son has five children while daughter has two)<sup>5</sup>. He completed the Faculty of Orthodox Theology (five years) in Prizren (Kosovo and Metohija) while he was ordained on December, 4, 1971 in Zaječar (Bishop Metodije, Congregational Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God). His son is also a priest (the Church of St Luke in Niš); he has also graduated from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and they often do religious service together (ph. 5).

Spasa Pavlović has been living in Knjaževac since December, 4, 1971. He was a priest in the Church of St George and he used to live in its parish hall (ph. 6). Today he lives in his flat in Knjaževac since he is retired (since 1997). He evokes his first post in the village of Vasilj:

“When I got here no one believed me I was a priest; they even nicknamed me *pople*.<sup>6</sup> Older priests used to be here, before me. I was very young, too young even to grow a beard! They kept on saying, ‘how can he be a priest, so young is he!’ The first post was in the church in Vasilj. I got to Vasilj very early since it was their custom to go to church early in the morning. I thought people would wait for me near the church but then I found out that the church was three kilometers away from the village. The snow was big. I got off the bus and asked where the church was. They showed me where to go but then I heard someone saying, ‘*Git* the priest!’ There had been only two weeks since I had got there from Leskovac and did not know what these words

---

<sup>4</sup> Taken from the sites:

[http://www.jugoistocnasrbija.rs/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=288&Itemid=359&lang=sr](http://www.jugoistocnasrbija.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=288&Itemid=359&lang=sr)

<http://www.slideshare.net/knjazevac/akcioni-plan-za-razvoj-turizma-knjazevac>

<sup>5</sup> Wife Snežana Pavlović (died in 1995); son Miodrag Pavlović (his children: Grigorije, Vasilija, Hristosija, Mihaila, Teodosije); daughter Žaklina Vučković (her children: Sofija, Dimitrije); grandsons and granddaughters are named after the religious holidays on their day of birth (for examples, Christosia was born on Easter).

<sup>6</sup> A slightly funny expression made by combining the words for a priest and a young man (Translator’s remark).

meant. It sounded like an expression from Leskovac, like 'hit the priest' meaning someone was getting ready to hit me. I was ready for it; I scrunched up and waited for a stroke. Then someone approached me and put his hand on my shoulder. I felt as if he had hit me with a hammer; I was so confused. Then they told me, 'Priest, they call you over there.' I kept starting at them without knowing what to do. Then I followed them. I heard someone asking his grandmother whether she had *git* Vukoslav. I asked them what it meant and they said it meant 'to get, bring somebody.' So, they called me to join them, not to go to the church alone because it was still too early. This I remember as an interesting story from my first days as a priest."

Though he is now in retirement, he is still active and participates in the services. When we made an agreement about this interview, he said, "Yes, Spasa Pavlović has retired but the priest has not." He said he would go on working for as long as he could, as long as he was healthy. Though he had three heart surgeries, he is feeling well. After having retired, he was posted at a parish in Zuniče (Municipality of Knjaževac). The parishioners go on respecting him and often calling him. In addition to many other activities, he performs, every Sunday, an evening religious service in the monastery of Svodol (Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God), 18km away from Knjaževac.

### THE PARISH

Knjaževac has three parishes. Father Spasa Pavlović covered one of them (rural and urban territories). The exarchate (governorship) of Knjaževac has 15 churches and he goes wherever people invite him to come. Since 1991 no new church has been built in the parish. As for the existing ones, some of them need to be restored and adapted, especially in the village areas where there are not enough icons and in which the internal walls are not painted. The village cemeteries are not in a good condition, either. In the village mostly older people have remained; they cannot bring them back to order – they need someone to help them.

He does not lack any technical support. As for material problems he is facing, they are the same as felt by the whole our society:

"The crisis in the society takes its dues on the church, too. The service for weddings, baptisms and funerals is charged. For the church, it is the source of its livelihood. A part of the money goes for church tax; the other part is for priests. But unemployment is the dark side of this region and people have less and less money so that they do not call priests since it is too expensive. Very often older women perform some rites. This has become people's habit. They often say, 'what do I need the priest for, to tell me to do this and that, we know what it is ours to do.' This is hard to change. I am trying, of course, but it is very hard, especially in the villages. I have spoken with my colleagues. When I used to baptize, I baptized the whole family, why not, the whole lot of

them. So you do not read for one person but for them all – and that’s how they pay only one fee. But when you charge each of them, it turns out quite a lot of money. I have told my colleagues that they are wrong if they do it like that, that they would drive away people from the church. Also, we should help if we see that someone has no money to pay.”

He has preserved fair relations with his colleagues, other priests from other parishes and from the whole bishopric. They have regular annual meetings (twice a year) in order to discuss all the current issues in the church. The meetings are attended by all, including the retired ones.

“Maybe I was too naive about some things. My proposal was that all the money should go to the same fund and that we should have monthly wages; but this does not suit all of us. In Negotin there are fewer parishes but the incomes are bigger since people there are richer.”

With the Bishop, Mr. Justin Stefanović, he also has correct relations.

“We have correct relations. But the priests communicate with the bishop through an exarch. Each document the priests send to the Bishop should be sent to the exarch first; the Bishop’s reply also goes through the exarch to the priest.”

The exarchate of Knjaževac has four priests altogether; three of them are in Knjaževac and one is in Minićevo. Spasa Pavlović says the villages have no priest. The reason is that the priest could not survive there since the villages are devoid of people. The priest pays a visit only when someone from the village invites him.

“We used to have seven priests though the times were bleak back then; now we have only four because of the material situation.”

### **ABOUT THE PARISHIONERS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE**

The priest has described Sunday and holiday religious services. He says that they are attended; the greatest number of parishioners come on Easter and Christmas Eve: “Many come only on big holidays, for instance, Christmas Eve, they run the show before disappearing altogether. That is the kind of people we are, euphoric,” says Father Spasa.

“By the Timok river people are different. The language they use is more pungent; they do not trust the priest very much. And, yet, on more important holidays, the church is full. I remember how empty it used to be. I was having a service in an absolutely empty church. Now they keep on coming. They come for holidays as well as on Sundays. They come, children, young, middle-aged, older; but the young ones are more numerous. They ask for advice; they learn things they feel they lack. It is true that no church has been built since 1991 but it is also in-



teresting that people are restoring the church places and gilding the vow crosses. Each village has four to five crosses; they are usually attached to the estates. That is where they gather together. A new cake-maker is chosen every year (meaning, a person to make a ritual cake). People are returning to faith. Faith is slowly coming back.”

Besides the Serbs, the dominant believers (95,48%)<sup>7</sup>, everyone is accepted and free to celebrate its own holidays without any problems. The Romas also come to the church.

Many are not baptized yet but Father Spasa explains material problems implied in the baptismal service. He advises everyone to baptize as soon as possible.

„People find it expensive to pay for baptism. I would do it differently. I would not baptize only a child but the whole family. All those who are not baptized yet I would baptize for the same amount of money as if I were baptizing only one family member. Why not? As it is done now, they give the money for the child but not for themselves. But when you are baptized, you have your own guardian angel to prevent you from becoming desperate.“

He perfectly remembers the previous regime in which faith had been marginalized and he looks forward to the renewal of religious life. „Now people do not have a negative view of faith as they did before; but the parishioners need to make one more step in order to understand the essence,“ says Spasa.

When he got to Knjaževac to do his duties, he was surprised to be constantly hearing from people meeting him: “here it is, the priest, *baksuz* (bad luck).” He felt quite uncomfortable about it so he decided to find out the meaning of it, of hearing from people that he, the priest, as a *baksuz*, brings bad luck.

“I felt uncomfortable and decided to look through all the church books to find out what it meant to be a *baksuz* and why it is related to the priest. Then I found it out. The Ottoman Turks were the ones who called the priest a *baksuz* since he was the only literate person in those days and could follow their movement and spoil their plans. I understood this was something positive about us, priests, but how could I explain it to people – they completely misinterpreted it. Even today you can still hear it, some people still thinking we are *baksuz* in the sense that we bring them bad luck since they related us only to funerals. I have been often asked by people, ‘where are you going to, who has died?’ I explain to them that funeral is not the only task we perform but some people still do not understand it since they are alienated from church. It is also a great problem to have here so many women-fortune tellers. I advise people not to go to them, not to go to these she-devils but still they do and this takes them even further away from the church.”

---

<sup>7</sup> According to the 2002 Population Census; Republic Institute for Statistics (<http://webrzs.statserb.sr.gov.rs>).

To the question about what should be done in order to improve the present state, Father Spasa answers:

“I am objective and critical as much as self-critical. The church has failed a bit. The responsibility is on all of us. Here are people who are pious but even more pagan-oriented than enlightened in the church ways. They are not against the church but they have not learnt many things. For instance, in the village people take food to the graveyard and throw it all into the grave pit, together with the coffin; well, this should not be done. This food that people take to the graveyard should stay at home, for its dwellers – to help them in this way. People do not know it; instead they throw everything into the pit; moreover, they prepare lunch for all and, above all, they have three memorial days (forty days after death, six months after the funeral and a year after it). Each time they bring food to the graveyard to offer to the people who have shown up there; afterwards, they organize a lunch in their home. This is utterly wrong. Neither do they celebrate patron saints’ days properly. Many do it without a candle or without boiled wheat while this is the essence (ph. 7). Neither do they understand fasting. Very often they ask me if they can fast only till 12 am and afterwards eat fat food. People are ignorant about faith. We must engage ourselves more. Look, for example, at the Greeks. I often go to Greece. Each Friday they read the Holy Scripture in the church, section by section, and explain it to people. Nothing like that with us. We must be more active. It depends upon us whether the parishioners will respect us and appreciate our opinions. All depends on what kind of people we are.”

### **ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

The priest used to very actively cooperate with the citizens’ councils in the local communities. He is doing it now when invited. He gives advice to people when they ask him what course of action to take. Thanks to such cooperation, the restoration of the church in Beli Potok has started, among other things:

“They called me ‘a red priest’ since I went to Beli Potok when the Socialist Party of Serbia did its promotion there. They did their job while I did mine. I wanted to use this opportunity when people got together because of the party and explain to them how important it is to restore the church which was in a very poor state, even with the roof torn down. Moreover, we could right away ask the authorities if they could help. Then it all started. The church was soon restored and now Beli Potok has a church. If I had not done it, nothing would have happened. I do not take it to heart their calling me a ‘red priest’; for me it is important that I have achieved what I wanted. I tell them, ‘well, red color is my color, Christ’s color.’ I know I am not a ‘red priest’ since I have never been an adherent to any party. A wise man gave me advice once, ‘what am I to tell you about political parties except that you should never go into the sewage; take care!’ And I have kept on taking care since when you get a stain on your cheek, never again can you wash it off.”

He always cooperated with the President of the Municipality (ph. 8). He is cooperating with him now. This used to be more difficult but still, they respected him:

“I cooperated with everyone. For me all the parties are the same. All of them come to the church. It is irrelevant what party they are for. It is important if someone is a *man* or not. Some of my colleagues were for some parties but I was telling them they should not do it since everyone is to come to the church. People would mark them as being with them or not. They must not allow themselves to be manipulated by others; this they can avoid only if they do not celebrate a party's victory in a village pub. This is not appropriate for us. I cannot single out any party in particular since I have collaborated quite well with all of them. For instance, on Christmas Eve, when we set ablaze an oak tree branch we have all the necessary support. Cooperation is good as far as such support is concerned; but our municipality is poor; very little or no money can be allotted for other activities. Thus, for example, we have asked for a hundred thousand dinars (about a thousand euros) for the celebration of the hundred-fiftieth anniversary of our church; we were offered only twenty thousands. Financial aid we never had to meet our needs; such were the times and so difficult it is even now.”

### **ABOUT THE RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS, CONFESSIONS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

We have asked the priest what other religions are active in his parish, more precisely bishopric. He has told us that in Knjaževac and Orešac there is an Adventist one while in Zaječar and Bor Roman Catholic churches. He has also told us that in Negotin a Romanian Orthodox church has recently been opened up, which is a political thing and that is why a debate about it is still going on. There are also Jehovah's Witnesses and New Believers.

With the other religions and confessions there has never been any conflicts; as for friendships with imams, ministers or Catholic priests, there is no such thing in Knjaževac because there is none of them here. „I would socialize with them of course, if there were any, why not. No matter skin color; neither is faith important; what matters is that you have love and that you do not hate. If you have love, if you do not hate, then you will never do any harm,“ says Father Spasa.

„I tell to the preacher, Adventist, you cannot brainwash someone who is Orthodox. You can do that to others but not to the Orthodox. But still they use every opportunity. When someone dies, they come to the man's family, they somehow force themselves upon others. Fear they use to make you love God. Unlike them, the Orthodox learn that God loves people without making them scared; it is freedom which is propagated, not dependence. But this is all our fault. The church must engage itself more.“

## ABOUT LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN THE BORDER AREA

Father Spasa finds that the life in the border area, in a multi-national and multi-religious community, fosters both personal and group and general development. The role of the priest in the development of the parish and parishioners would, in his opinion, mean that they should be active and pose as examples both in terms of their lives and their deeds. The life in the border area with other peoples and national minorities, faiths and confessions is in itself a treasure that should be cherished.

“Neither is the majority people’s identity endangered, nor is that of the minority nation. No one is endangered. People can live together; there is enough room for everybody. Usually a third party interferes thus causing a problem. Man must understand that the others do not bother him at all.”

The language and the faith are two elements of the national and cultural identity and they are not given once for all; they are liable to transformation (Đorđević 2005). One should keep his faith as well as language, traditional and cultural legacy which is, in Father Spasa’s opinion, very important for preserving the identity of Serbs and national minorities in the border area.

“Yet what does it mean to preserve faith? Faith should be preserved in the sense that you do not hurt others. What matters is that you do good deeds and that you do not ‘measure’ how much you give. When you have, give, God has made man to give. Of course, you should also preserve language in the sense of appreciating others but sticking to one’s own. Many people think they will *become* more cultured and educated if they use foreign words. But one can show his erudition and culture even if he uses Serbian without foreign expressions. We must teach other children to do that. It is important for them to learn who they are and where they come from, what their roots are; thus, they will be more stable.”

After having seen us putting down the first data of this interview, Father Spasa got up and said, “Just let me see your writing; well, you write Serbian; this is good; you should preserve Cyrillic alphabet. It is such nice lettering, we must preserve it. Computer, yes. Cell phone, yes. I accept all new things. New should be accepted, naturally. But you should also cherish what is yours. Cherish your language!”

The underdevelopment of the border municipalities, especially devastation of the village and depopulation of the whole regions are the things that Father Spasa sees as a consequence of the lack of the state care as well as people themselves:

“No production whatsoever. Factories are closed down. No development without it. Here people merely survive. The young are leaving for the schools and many of them never return. The villages are losing

their population since there were no births. Only one child was born and then this child marries the only child from another family and together, they again have only one child which means that one family is made out of two. How can we survive then? Likewise, migration for economic reasons is also taking place. Mostly old people stay in the village. They live hard; neither is it easier for those who live in the Gerontology Center. They often call me from the Gerontology Center in Knjaževac. People tell me, 'Do read to me, priest, so I can die. What else can I do? No one cares about me. Children do not visit me. They have left me here and gone away.' How sad it is. But there are even more horrible cases. They pronounce their parents insane just to take their property and leave them here; some of them rarely come while others do not come at all."

Father Spasa cares about spiritual and physical health of our people. He objects to the fact that the religious instructions in schools is not done by competent people; the instructors are not sufficiently educated and they have 'taken this pathway without proper schooling, just for the sake of their own interests.'" He thinks that something like that should not have happened. The children, consequently, would not understand the essence of the religious instruction.

Likewise, he worries about physical health because of genetically modified food.

"A great evil is genetically modified food. It will destroy both people and nation. Man has risen against man with his science. Man must first understand his powerlessness in order to learn how to use his power."

### CONCLUSION

Spasa Pavlović, a retired priest but still a priest participates in the services in many churches and monasteries (ph. 9). He has been to Ostrog, Chilandar, numerous monasteries in Greece and, surely, all over Serbia. Together with his son, he did the service in the churches in Niš. He gives advice to the young, middle-aged and older people who call him on the phone very often or come to his house and ask him to answer their questions. He gives answers to everyone; he has time for everyone. That is why his parishioners love and respect him. He thinks that the church and the clergy have a great responsibility for their parishioners' spiritual life:

"I expect the Serbian Orthodox Church to further work upon moral strengthening of people, to be more active since the media are of great influence. The church says something but the media turn it upside down. This is not good. This must be prevented. We must guide people to listen to wise men instead of being affected by media. We must all be more active, to gather together more often, to teach our people to understand the essence of faith. We are inactive here while the activi-

ty is the condition for survival and development. We should also arrange for some public gatherings. Likewise, when baptism is performed, or wedding, or funeral service, there is space enough to say so much. We must not only compete the ceremony and charge people for it. We must not be inactive. We must make them interested little more, so that they feel the need to enter the church. Moreover, it is important for us to explain to them that they should learn the ways of behavior in the church. Since they are already there, they should accept certain ways of behavior since they are not 'churchianized' yet."

What Father Spasa stresses is the importance of deeds rather than words:

"In order to succeed in this, it is indispensable to have an authority, naturally both intellectual and ethical. That is something we can achieve thanks to our deeds, our actions, our pious rite performance rather than just doing it, in addition to preaching, caring for parish and parishioners, charity actions for material and spiritual welfare... We can survive only with the faith in action."

Spasa Pavlović is a model priest who lives and works as a defender of the religious, cultural and national identity, as a devout keeper of the Serbian spirituality (ph. 10), aware of the specific traits of the space and the time in which he has committed himself to serving God and People. His religious activities are deeply permeated with the firm belief that one can persist only with the „faith in action“, without maltreating the other and the different, and by a more active religious activities and people's 'churchianization'. That is how things are done for the benefit of all. That is how people are given help to cope up with the life troubles, to cherish and appreciate what defines them without being „blind“ for others. This is the pattern of proper religious activity for the sake of survival and development of the border areas.

## REFERENCES

- Gavrilović, Danijela, Aleksandra Kostić and Dragana Stjepanović Zaharijevski (2011) „Psychosocial Meanings of the Border“ (“Psihosocijalna značenja granica”), *Teme* (35): 4
- Đorđević, B. Dragoljub (2005) “A Few Thoughts about Our Church” („Nekoliko razmišljanja o našoj crkvi“), *Peščanik* 3/2005, [www.ceeol.com](http://www.ceeol.com).
- Đorđević, B. Dragoljub, Đura Stevanović, Dragan Todorović (eds.) (2012) *The Village in the Border Area of East and Southeast Serbia (Selo u pograničju istočne i jugoistočne Srbije)*. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, Zavod za proučavanje sela.
- Zanini, Piero (2002) *Significance of the Border (Značenja granice)*, Belgrade: Clio.
- Cvitković, Ivan (2004) *Sociology of Religion (Sociologija religije)*, Sarajevo: DES.
- \*\*\*(2011) *Census of Population, Households and Residences in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, First Results*. Belgrade: Republic Institute for Statistics



**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. Church of St George, Knjaževac



Ph. 2. Protopresbyter Spasa Pavlović with his wife



Ph. 3. Son, Miodrag Pavlović with his children



Ph. 4. Daughter, Žaklina Vučković with her child

## A PRIEST ON THE BORDER

---



Ph. 5. Spasa Pavlović with his son



Ph. 6. Spasa Pavlović in front of the parish hall





Ph. 7. Spasa Pavlović on the patron saint's holiday – the ritual of cutting the holiday cake



Ph. 8. City Patron Saint's Holiday in Knjaževac, St George's Day



Ph. 9. Spasa Pavlović in Asprovalta (St. Lydia) – baptism



Ph. 10. Spasa Pavlović at the consecration of the cross (St St Kozma and Damian) at the entrance to Knjaževac from the direction of Niš

UDK 316.74:279.17(497.11 Bujanovac)-725 Pavlov B.

Dragan Todorović  
Jovan Živković

**BRANISLAV PAVLOV:  
HEAD OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN BUJANOVAC\***

---

**INTRODUCTION:  
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN SOUTHEAST SERBIA**

The members of the Christian Religious Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Niš are organized into two Assemblies, namely, Niš-South and Niš-North. They are, in terms of organization, related to the province that Vranje, Leskovac, Prokuplje, Aleksinac, Kruševac, Zaječar, Bor, Negotin i Kladovo also belong to. The baptized members and friends, about two hundred altogether, are enabled to meet, since 2005, twice a week in the Kingdom Hall in Skopljanska Street, 3 (Тодоровић 2011).

The Jehovah's Witnesses Assemblies also exist in Leskovac (about 80 believers gather together in a building in their ownership in the unpaved part of Dubočica Street, 131, next to the High School for Commerce) and in Vranje (about 100 believers, also in their own building in Đure Đakovića Street, 23/1); groups for prayers can be found in Aleksinac (20 members), Prokuplje (20 members), Bojnik (ten members) and Pirot (ten members).

The preaching service in the streets of Southeast Serbian cities are done together by brothers and sisters of Serbian and Roma nationality. Equally the Romas are represented also in other activities done by the Witnesses on a daily basis. In two Assemblies in Niš there are some forty members. The Assemblies in Leskovac (since 2006) and Vranje (since 2004) already have the constituted leadership from the Roma members living in Slavko Zlatanović settlement in Leskovac. In the same street in which there is Pentecostal „Tent Church“ lives, with his family, Danilo Veselović and so does, in Vranjska banja, Nenad Bekić. In Leskovac there are twenty-five and in Vranje thirty Romas, members of Jehovah's Witnesses (Тодоровић 2012b).

**BRANISLAV PAVLOV –  
HEAD OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN BUJANOVAC**

Branislav Pavlov was born in December, 1970, in Žablje; he grew up in the village of Kucura, raised by his parents, Mother Ljubica (maiden name

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Živojinović) and Father Milovan. His paternal grandfather was German, named Špele Mihalj, who got killed in the war so that Father took over his maternal family name Pavlov. He has a four years older sister, Sofija.

Branislav Pavlov spent his childhood in Kucura, with his grandfather Todor and grandmother Sofija, a small village in Vojvodina with the dominant Rusyns population and Bosnians originating from the regions at the bottom of Grmeč Mountain. His family belong to the natives of this country. They have always declared themselves as Serbs though the Rusyns also called them Tsigany or Roma though none of them spoke Roma language and though all of them had, for generations, village estates in their possession. Branislav Pavlov comes from a typical working class family that earned its living in the Carnex Company and schooled its children: sister Sofija completed economic-commercial high school while Branislav completed mechanical engineering one.

In Kucura there were three churches, namely, Roman Catholic, Greco Catholic and Orthodox ones. For Orthodox believers, the responsible priest came from neighboring Despotovo though his visits were sporadic, most often on Sundays and when the letters in the religious calendar were marked red (meaning a religiously significant date), partly because of poor interest on the part of local population. Yet, since Branislav's uncle was a caretaker in this church, he participated, together with his maternal grandmother, in religious rites since an early age (also did some cleaning, bell-ringing, etc.). As for religion, though, he knew little (except for making a cross or saying "Amen"). A tragic incident that brought about the death of a close cousin in his later childhood as well as the priest's explanation, in the memorial service, that the man was taken away from his wife and his three children by the will of God, caused his further refusal to go to church.

The first encounter with Jehovah's Witnesses he experienced while doing his army service in 1988 in Pula (Croatia). Everybody made a fun of the soldier who volunteered to do his service to his homeland; yet he adamantly avoided wearing a grey-olive green uniform. During an afternoon rest Pavlov was accidentally eavesdropping while the same soldier was discussing God, Trinity, Jehovah and other biblical topics with another soldier, latent Adventist. None of these did he understand. On his return from the army, his mother had over, in 1991, a group of Slovak women from Bački Petrovac as house guests. These women talked about God Jehovah; it is then that he recalled the conversation between the two young men from his army days. He, his sister and Mother, started their own studies of the Holy Scripture; however, the two women soon dropped it altogether once they found out that this new faith had no similarities with Orthodox Christianity that they had traditionally belonged to. But Branislav did not give up the newly discovered knowledge about God and for two years he traveled, by bus or bike, to the nearby village of Savino and, later on, to some thirty kilometers far Bački Petrovac to attend the meetings of three families, two Montenegro and one Slovak ones. Finally, after having discarded secular vices like cigarettes and drink, in 1993, he became a Jehovah's Witness – Announcer. He also gave up his job



as a physical worker in a nearby construction company and committed himself to preaching: for half a month he did numerous seasonal agricultural works and the other half he tirelessly preached to the people living in the neighboring villages. He also participated in the formation of a cell of believers in Vrbas.

In 1996, Branislav got an offer from the BETEL<sup>1</sup>, Belgrade, to move to Kosovo, to Peć and to proceed with his missionary work there as a full-time Announcer in a special religious service (ph. 1 and 2). He spent three years in a mostly Islam environment learning Albanian. There he met his future wife Irena,<sup>2</sup> that he got married to in February, 1999. He formed a group for biblical studies comprised of Albanians and Romas. Already in March were they forced to leave Kosovo because of the war developments. His home was burned down, namely, the house he and his wife had obtained from the Bosnian family that had accepted the Truth and converted to Jehovah's Witnesses. Homeless, they went to Montenegro, to the city of Ulcinj where, relying on their knowledge of Albanian, they spread their faith among the local Albanians as well as among some forty thousand refugees from Kosovo, especially from the territory of Peć. They were also active in Bar and Podgorica where they formed a separate group.

In the year of 2000, they were assigned the city of Šabac as their new address in the preaching service. They remained there for three years while, at the same time, visiting groups from Valjevo. In the year of 2002, they moved to Čačak where they remained for no less than five years, also covering the territory of Gornji Milanovac, Požega, Užice and Novi Pazar. The following two years they spent in Kikinda (ph. 3); last three years they have been living in Bujanovac (ph. 4).

### **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN BUJANOVAC**

Before Branislav and his wife came to Bujanovac, their brothers in faith from Vranje had held once a week a meeting with some fifteen interested Romas in a private house.

“I have noticed that Romas are very religious people. They believe in everything; they observe Islam and, yet, these days, for example, on St George's Day, they regularly practice the rites meant to be performed on that very day. I make jokes with them, I tell them that they do all this just to avoid hurting some god! They do it for fear of making any god, by chance, angry with them! Unfortunately, they ex-

---

<sup>1</sup> The word has its origin in the Hebrew word *betel* meaning “the house of God.” Formally, this is the official title for units of Jehovah's Witnesses all over the world through which the preaching work is organized and monitored.

<sup>2</sup> Irena comes from Predejane, Serbia. As a daughter of a military man, her life was that of frequent family migration from one place to another (she was, for example, born in Postojna, Slovenia). After her father had got killed in an automobile accident, she moved, together with her mother, to Belgrade where her brother was born. In the eighties the whole family accepted the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses.

press their religiosity in the ways which draw them to trouble, for instance, they deal with spiritualism a lot; there is much bewitching and magic which is a very ugly thing. I was literally stopped here in the street, in Bujanovac, by the people asking me to study the Holy Scripture although they declared themselves publicly as followers of Islam. It means that they kept giving to the hodja the needed material contributions each quarter of a year; it means that some kept on going to the mosque though this attendance was not very popular among them and it possibly was only on Fridays for jummuah, as they say. The attendance became more intensive with the opening up of a Roma mosque in Bujanovac; especially in the last two years there has been somewhat more insistence on Islam affiliation among the local Romas, partly because of that part of the Roma who have shown interest in the biblical Truth that we are preaching.”

Three years later, the existing community is still lacking the status of an assembly though it has grown to thirty announcers and two or three times more of those who study the Bible and try to order their lives according to the required Christian patterns of regular behavior in faith. Except for Branislav and Irena, the recently arrived couple from France with the task to help the community strengthening and a Serbian woman named Biljana Simić, all of them are Roma. In fact, these are several Roma families that have accepted, collectively, Jehovah. There are, among the followers of Truth, very well off individuals, materially well provided for or even rich, just as there are those who lead a very hard life, who live as tenants in other people’s homes and who hardly manage to make ends meet. Before God, though, they are all equal in their love for Him; with joy do they greet each other before the meeting begins, they applaud to the participants in the debates held in the theological school, together they sing songs to Jehovah and explain the quotations from the *Watchtower*, which is official newsletter of Jehovah’s Witnesses at the global level. A part of the city in which religious gatherings are taking place is called “Morava 87”; it is located in a belt where the Roma *mahala* ends while the Albanian one begins.<sup>3</sup>

Interest in discussions is also present among the Albanians in Bujanovac and Preševo, especially among the more educated ones; yet no one has decided as yet to actively attend the meetings and study the Bible not only because of a great number of Romas in the established community but also because of the national and the religious identity intertwined among the Albanian people in the south of Serbia, in Kosovo and Albania.

“In the last three years as I have been living here in Bujanovac, we have traditionally, in the month of March, held our Memorial in the local Cultural Center. We have invited both Serbs and Albanians; we have even printed invitations in Albanian. Still, among more than

---

<sup>3</sup> The settlements inhabited by Albanians are better in terms of infrastructure as confirmed by an asphalt road leading to the Kingdom Halls (as the Witnesses call their holy places), that is a salon on the ground floor of a three-storey house.

four hundred attendants, hardly thirty people did not belong to the Roma ethnic group.

A similar situation can also be found in our immediate surroundings. Let's say, a group of Albanians from Macedonia was dealt with by Italian Jehovah's Witnesses who preached the word of God in Albanian (mastered for that very purpose) and yet, no special results were achieved. I relate this to the specific, local way of looking at religion: as a national minority in this territory, Albanians have closely connected their identity with Islam and, thus, they can interpret the interference of some other religion as an assault upon their nationality. Coming to the Jehovah's Witnesses meetings could represent, in that context, the lack of loyalty to one's own religion.

The same case is with Rusyns who are mostly present in Ruski Krstur and Kucura in Vojvodina, namely the village I also come from. As a small Greco-Catholic community, they are very closed when it comes to accepting some other religious belief though they do not refuse the literature we are offering and they are listening to our preaching. But the conversion to other religion would represent, from their perspective, an act of betrayal of their own nation."

Pavlov performs his missionary activities between Preševo and Surdulica, including the neighboring villages, but the focus is mostly on the work with Bujanovac community, both regarding its maintenance and its further strengthening. In organizational terms, Bujanovac group belongs to the present Assembly of Vranje. Recently they were given a chance to get together in a majestic three-storey house of a brother who is temporarily working in Sweden and who let them use a salon space of eighty square meters on the ground floor (ph. 5 and 6). In this way they made it easier for them to cover considerable organizational costs as well as to solve the problem of gathering together, at one place, an increased group of believers for weekly meetings, on Thursdays and Sundays.

### **PRINCIPLES OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY**

In the charges of the public-opinioned anti-cult movement in Serbia small religious communities are constantly accused of proselytism supported by ample economic donations; in the same way Jehovah's Witnesses are under the severe criticism of both Muslims and Orthodox in Bujanovac. Pavlov does not deny that the faith he belongs to takes care of its believers since without genuine love for those close to you there is no genuine love for God. But he stresses that this care is firstly motivated by the strivings for a complete spiritual renewal of the existing body of believers:

"The response to this question is complex since it assumes the understanding of the spirit of the Holy Scripture. The values stressed in the Holy Scripture are not of material nature; neither do they assume any well-being. Many new religious communities today play this card: they offer to the believers some packages, gifts or humani-

tarian aid. However, Jehovah's Witnesses do not do this; we give our time for free to people; we teach them how to increase the quality of their lives by changing their present habits. This change can, in the long run, contribute to some kind of material success since the people who used to spend their money on cigarettes, alcohol and entertainment can now save the same money or learn how to use it in a much wiser way.... There are schools in which we educate people, for free, how to read and write; in the beginning, we went to their homes but when the number of the interested grew, we have established a whole class and assigned one of our members to work on their literacy.

On the other hand, Jehovah's Witnesses do not leave their followers without bread. As their Head, I am very well acquainted with the ways of life of our brothers and sisters and when all the social help is exhausted, we help each other. This refers to health care if needed. We do not boast about it; the Bible itself teaches us to be modest and satisfied with what we have. I cannot deny that some people, at first, visit our community for this reason: they enter our homes to see how we live, how we behave properly at our meetings, dressed in suits and with ties, how decent and kind we are; they might think that we gain something by this, that we are rich people."

To the question concerning the vital reasons for an increased interest of the local Romas in the Bible studies, the Head of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac replies that in the beginning these are always conspicuous changes in behavior and outlook of the mature population of believers (ph. 7):

"Here, in Bujanovac, people firstly see what their eyes see: they see kindness, goodness and an increased quality of life; this comes first. Even those people who do not come to our meetings defend Jehovah's Witnesses in public places, saying 'They are better than others' and this they claim only on the basis of the perceived changes of behavior."

The preaching is done in Serbian which is not any particular problem for Romas since the majority of them understand it and speak it in daily communication, especially young generation (ph. 8). Once a month it is done in Romany. The increase of the religious knowledge is fostered by some brochures translated into the Arlian dialect (*You can be close to God* and *Who can perform God's will?*) otherwise used for communication among the Romas of the Bujanovac region. Despite the current problems the leaders run into in their evangelical work (incomplete standardization of Romany language), it seems that the future *missionary-ministering needs of local churches* will be the major influence on the intensity of translation of religious service literature.

"I did not support the use of Romany language in the religious service discourse since there is not standardized Romany dictionary; neither are there any precise Romany words for particular biblical questions and religious topics. In time I have changed my mind. Why? Well,

here it is: I observe the reaction of our Roma believers during the religious service in Romany: they feel fine on hearing their language. They are pleased for hearing how efforts are made to explain, even in Romany language, all those biblical things they could only hear about in the majority Serbian language. Though they sometimes admit they do not quite understand particular religious themes. That is why I recognize the obligation to perform, in near future, standardization of Romany language, to define common expressions for all concepts including the most important religious issues.”

Despite some experiences from site research (Todorović 2012d) that could support the thesis that the Roma's joining the religious communities of Protestant provenience was motivated by the national affiliation of their prominent members, Pavlov emphasizes the fact that the believers in Bujanovac made this decision firstly motivated by their inner religious needs, independently of the national identity of their religious authorities.

“National affiliation would be of no importance. Maybe personal characteristics; some people are more reserved while there are people who are open and accessible in communication. We are of all kinds, that is present unlike the importance of national affiliation. I have told you that I have not been taught to be a Roma; neither have I been chosen to come here because I am a Roma. Even when these people here see me, they call me ‘Gadjo’ meaning ‘A Serb has come’ without saying I am their man. And all other people who come from other places are welcome by local Romas with all their hearts, especially when they show love and understanding.”

### **REACTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ACTIVITIES**

Reactions to Roma Jehovah's Witnesses among their co-habitants are diverse. In the city itself there are strictly defined spheres of everyday living between Albanians and Romas: they live in separate *mahalas* (city quarters), the places for going-out and partying are also separate; in a word, they do not mix.<sup>4</sup> Business contacts and common jobs are the only chance for their interests to meet; also, some of them make fun of the unusual practice of local Romas to put on their suits twice a week and to wear a tie and thus dressed up to go to their meetings in the Kingdom Hall as the building in which Jehovah's Witnesses members gather together. Others, on the other hand, welcome considerable shifts in the habits and behavior that are evident in newly-converted members although, officially, many of them have not comp-

---

<sup>4</sup> It seemed so interesting, however, to observe a situation that we observed from the balcony of Pavlov's flat in a building, at the very center of the town, opposite to the City Municipality: namely, general vivacity of an Albanian city wedding was made even more vivacious by Roma musicians playing their instruments.

leted the period of the Holy Scripture study or the announcers have not been baptized yet.

Generally speaking, with further increase of responses to the preached biblical truths, firstly from Roma homes, the Head of the Witnesses accept the possibility of religious intolerance shown to them. Pavlov does not hide in our conversation that in the last six months he has received site reports about provocations towards declared believers, firstly in the service of preaching. Yet he still counts upon positive effects of his missionary work, that is, respect shown to them by surrounding public opinion because of their way of life and the seriousness with which they behave towards others.

“I had an experience,” says Pavlov, “two years ago; I interfered in a most unhappy event happening in a street in broad daylight. An Albanian boy tried to rape a Roma girl. I defended the girl and sent the boy away. The news spread all over our small place. Even police inspectors did not wonder at my reaction knowing that someone who assumes to be a Jehovah’s Witness should react in that way. People have respect for what we are; they do not prevent us from having our meetings; I have already told you that we have been having our Memorial, in the last three years, in Bujanovac Cultural Center. We are happy because of the way people regard the changes taking place in the home of our believers: houses are cleaner, people are more faithful, women are more obedient, children are better in school. Here it is: we openly persuade Romas to send their children to school; they have to accept the state requirements for compulsory eight year schooling; many have changed their attitude to school. Or, though this is not a literal biblical demand, I still say to the young, ‘You cannot be a Jehovah’s Witness unless you have all positive grades in school.’ At their age, their only obligation is to learn, to regularly attend their classes, to be paragons to others in completing their tasks. Now, here they come to boast to me how they no longer have a poor grade in a certain school subject and how they are pleased with it.”

### **COOPERATION OF JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES WITH MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Jehovah’s Witnesses members see themselves as useful members of social community stressing, most of all, the virtues promoted by the Christian teaching and insisting on their observance by the people of Bujanovac and in their own ranks. However, they do not recommend themselves to municipal authorities and actors of local political scene as partners in planning common actions thus paying strict attention to separate biblical mission from daily political developments.

“One initiative on my part which was oriented towards municipal structures, at the time when I officially moved to Bujanovac, was a

petition to let us use a certain municipal premise for our followers' gathering; we would regularly pay the rent. But there was no understanding for it, firstly on the part of the Serbs who headed these institutions; neither was it, later, with Albanians."

Neither in terms of religious contacts are the things any better. Pavlov says that he has informal contacts with the representatives of the *Roma Islam Community*. To be more precise, in 2008, in the Roma *mahala* in the New Settlement a Roma mosque was opened up and named "Dženet (Paradise) Mosque", next to the main City Mosque which is mostly attended by Albanians. Once did a Roma, Ali Dermaku<sup>5</sup> obtain a permission from the leader of the Islam Community Hamdija Jusufspahić that he could do the prayers and bowings since he reads well Qur'an, that is he got the right to perform the duties of *imam* in Roma settlements. When the construction of a religious shrine for the gatherings of Roma Muslims ready to properly observe Islam rites was completed, Ali Dermaku was promoted to the status of a hodja though he has no formal knowledge obtained in a religious school.

The very moment when those Romas who converted to Christianity started to refuse giving usual monthly allowances to the Islam authorities, Jehovah's Witnesses were recognized as a religious group jeopardizing the former almost monolithic affiliation to Islam (with a few Orthodox Romas). Pavlov was criticized for belonging to the "rich outsiders" who buy local Romas with financial help and donations in food and clothes. Younger Romas from the *mahala* in which the religious shrine of Jehovah's Witnesses was situated, were instructed to disturb – by knocking on the widows and making all sorts of noises<sup>6</sup> – the regular meetings as was properly reported to the police headquarters. In the negotiations with Secretary of the Roma Islam Community Nazif Mamutović, attempts were made to draw their attention to the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac were not obliged to ask for any work permission from any religious communities including the Islam Community which should not disturb them in their peaceful observance of the given religious duties. With the priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church they have no relationships established whatsoever.

From other small religious communities, Jehovah's Witnesses are distinguished firstly because of their committed field work, that is, their *preaching service* when they visit city and village households, distribute religious literature and discuss religious subjects with individuals interested in them. In carrying out this task, they meet with all sorts of reactions, mostly negative ones: starting with silent protests because of disturbances to open threats and rare but still occurring attacks at the physical integrity of brothers and sisters in Roma and Albanian *mahalas*. Involved in all this are equally Albanians and Serbs as well as Romas.

---

<sup>5</sup> The first of the Romas in Bujanovac who has gone to *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

<sup>6</sup> Since they know it is a object in private ownership of the man of their own ethnic group, from the same *mahala*, there was no serious disturbance of safety such as breaking glass or ruining the facade.



“You know, I, as a non-Roma, find it difficult to accept that a Roma can threaten a Roma, that he can curse him and drive him away from his threshold. Never before have I seen Romas treating each other in this way.”

Despite all, Pavlov states that all this is due to the ignorance of the way of work of Jehovah’s Witnesses on the part of the majority population and that this kind of treatment they receive will not discourage them in their further religious activities. The preaching of God’s words from the Bible for the sake of providing for salvation of all those who accept religious instruction is what they will go on doing equally among Albanians and Romas. Moreover, they find national affiliation of those they are addressing has no role to play whatsoever but they are aware that more successful results in the mission activities among Romas can be achieved by the believers of Roma nationality and so can, among Albanians, the believers of Albanian nationality. For now, exclusively Romas pay visits to Roma and Albanian homes.

### **JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES’ VIEWS OF LIFE IN THE BORDER REGION**

Now, as an inhabitant of Southeast Serbia, previously as a resident of some other border regions such as Kosovo, Pavlov expresses full understanding of the problems brought about by the life in the fringe geographic regions which are of state interest (ph. 9). He knows all about the troubles of ordinary people doomed to subsist far from urban centers which means poor infrastructure, poor communication links, distance from important health care institutions, unemployment, low wages. Through a special prism all these problems should be regarded with reference to Romas. Uneducated and thus deprived of an otherwise poor offer from the world of employment, they fight for their physical subsistence among Albanians and Serbs who find their fight for supremacy more important than care about poor neighbors of Roma nationality. The situation, unfortunately, does not get any better in the cases when the labor market receives young Romas with completed primary or even high schools. An almost hopeless situation, at least briefly, was improved, by the activities of numerous non-government organizations which offered programs of limited duration. They were concerned with coexistence of members of different national communities and short-term solutions of accrued existential problems. Not rarely have these efforts been an opportunity for new controversies since the privileged members of Roma ethnos achieved their narrow partial interests without caring about the needs of a wider number of their compatriots.

“Listen, this group of ours in Bujanovac is very ‘colorful’ in the educational terms; at least one third of the members are with completed high school, especially young ones. At least in their case the problem of finding a job should not be on the agenda. And yet, what happens? Regardless of their achievement in schooling, they still lack

career prospects here. What motivation is, then, all this for all other Romas who are at present undergoing educational process? When I recommend them to send their children to school, as I constantly do to Roma parents, they reply with a question, 'What will they gain by completing schools? They'd better help me sell stockings on the flea market.' The level of integration into a local community, here, in Bujanovac, does not rise at all with the Romas achieving higher educational levels; they are still marginalized as before (underlined by D. T. and J.Ž.).”

The problem gets additional complexity by an inflow of Protestantism into Roma lives with lasting implications for their identity (Đorđević 2009). The traditional religious-confessional image of the Roma as an inheritor of Orthodox Christianity and Sunnite Islam has been disfigured though the Orthodox and Islam priesthood has never paid any special attention to Romas as actual and potential believers in their ranks (for instance, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islam Community have never established any special bodies for missionary activities among Romas<sup>7</sup>). Local religious authorities stayed away from Roma ghettos in which daily activities were taking place while their confessional brothers looked at them suspiciously during temple prayers or holiday processions (Đorđević and Todorović 2011). The conversion, yet, into various small religious communities has brought to Romas the desired and waited-for respect and attention in the pastoral soul-caring as well as a belief in better future and one's own dignity, in a word, all that has been denied to them in an arrogant behavior of domicile religious authorities (Todorović 2012c). By joining Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac, the Romas have brought themselves into a double-marginalized position: at first, only at the ethnic level, their minority-ism was now also in the religious context.

On his part, Pavlov warns about undue expectations that small religious communities can find, while performing their religious tasks, some special time for social care. He regrets the fact that brothers and sisters are burdened with poverty and paucity and that they are exposed to acts of injustice; yet, the values that the Jehovah's Witnesses teach are not of material but of spiritual character. They transcend this worldly borders and refer to salvation and preparation of the believers for a new coming of Christ. It is good if the believers are educated, informed and generally cultured; this can help them to better understand religious instruction but the Jehovah's Witness-Announcer will not posit as a fake sure receipt for success in this worldly business.

---

<sup>7</sup> A special board for Roma care is established only by Roman Catholics; since the Second Vatican Council they also have an organized care about migrants, institutionalized in the *Code of Canon Law* (1983). It underlines that the host country is obliged to ensure, for migrants and Romas, the right to their own language and spiritual legacy. Finally, Pope Assembly for pastoral of migrants and travelers has recently brought about *Guidelines for Pastoral Care for Gypsy* (2008).

“We do not encourage our young to achieve university education. To get some schooling, yes, but not to strive after some academic education. Why? Because unreal are the expectations from educational efforts in these poor border areas of ours. Listen, I will illustrate the way in which local Romas who are not Jehovah’s Witnesses see their future: girls hope to get married to someone from abroad while boys hope to marry some girl with Swedish or Swiss ‘papers’ allowing them to stay and work in these countries (underlined by D. T. and J.Ž.). Not to mention the dangers to the spiritual health of believers and their relations to God, namely those brought about by excessive engagement in other extra-school activities and excessive aspiration to material goods. What is the value of gaining the whole world if you lose your life?”

The strengthening of the family values coincides with, however, proper biblical behavior that the authorities require in the theological school. The family is the very center of life of a Jehovah’s Witness. Mutual respect between man and wife is expected as well as children care but this cannot be properly done if man yields to vice (drinking, smoking, gambling, drug-taking) (ph. 10). The success of a family is not measured by material possessions; quite the opposite, modesty is a desirable value. Inappropriate is a sexual intercourse in the pre-marital period; as suggested by the Holy Scripture, only a young man and a young girl who are “in God” should get married to each other.

“For us a successful family is the one sitting together at a meeting, father, mother, son and daughter. So as to know the proper places for man, woman and children in the family.”

The compromises are not made when it comes to other forms of religiously expected behaviors. The Jehovah’s Witnesses do not compel Romas to abandon the customs they think they should observe. Quite the opposite: they should abandon non-biblical behaviors not by following an order given by the leader but by the believer’s own conviction that such practice is God-offensive. Of them all, those who want to be baptized announcers must follow the norms from the Holy Scripture meaning St George’s Day is not to be celebrated, the children of the Jehovah’s Witnesses should not play with either a lamb or a kid; neither should they celebrate birthdays and other holidays (Тодоровић 2012a). They should understand biblical background of non-celebrating such things rather than merely following oral prohibitions pronounced by religious authorities.<sup>8</sup> “No one has the right to dissolve God’s word”, stresses Pavlov in his explanation.

---

<sup>8</sup> Jehovah’s Witnesses celebrate only one holiday named the *Memorial of Christ’s Death* and they celebrate it on the night of Nisan 14, the first month of the Jewish year in the Jewish lunisolar calendar, occurring in March/April.

“Nada is a very clever little girl attending sixth grade. Her geography teacher constantly reproaches her, as the best pupil in her class, for not taking part in various school celebrations. Nada has declared herself as a Jehovah's Witness though she has not formally become a member and neither have her parents though they actively study the Bible – but are not officially baptized yet. One day she has brought candies and sweets to school and asked her teacher if she can treat her class friends. In this way she has tried to show how much she loves all of her friends but not on the dates when her birthday really is; so, they should not understand love only on the basis of celebrations organized on precisely defined date.”

\* \* \*

In Serbia, the corpus of believers of minority religious communities is recruited from three sources: 1. by reproduction from the given minority religious community, 2. by conversion of members and sympathizers of the majority religious organization, and 3. by missionary activity in a religiously syncretic ethnic minority – firstly, among Romas.

As a typical example of ethnic and religious minority-ism, for a decade and a half the Romas have been a subject of intensified interest of minority faiths and minority religious communities, especially New Protestantism. In fact, four reasons substantially contribute to the fact that the Romas are a religious-confessional reservoir of Protestantization, namely, 1. racial, national and religious neutrality of New Believers in performing a special service, 2. constant movement of Romas for ensuring elementary existence, 3. Roma's sense of not being burdened with in-depth links with Orthodoxy and Islam, and 4. pressure on the Romas to push them to the fringe of the pastoral mission of local clergy.

A rather modest Romas' joining of the communities of believing Protestants in Southeast Serbia for a two or even three decades has not suggested that it will, in the meantime, grow into an onrush of conversion of a wider scope. The growing Roma believers' movement, in some cases, has taken on the forms of independent prayer's homes in which the Romas have overcome their religious minority-ism and have grown into a majority structure of particular minority faiths and religious communities.<sup>9</sup> The newly-adopted religious identity assumed the process of discarding deeply rooted habits from the ghettoized life in *mahalas*: physical conflicts and quarrels of marriage partners, consumption of cigarettes and alcohol, gambling, fights with police, irregular school attendance, early marriages. The transformed family and harmonious kinship and neighborhood relations, discarding asocial activities, completion of primary school and continuation of (high) schooling, marriage after maturity – these are measurable indicators of advanced emancipation of the Romas from the ranks of minority religious communities in Southeast Serbia (Тодоровић 2012a).

---

<sup>9</sup> More detailed in Тодоровић 2012b.

All these above-mentioned changes are also visible among the Roma-members of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac. The stable core of the baptized members comprises some thirty believers, mostly kin. The Bible explorers are much more and they come from affluent and poor layers; they are the ones that the leaders of the Witnesses seriously count upon in the realization of their own plans for further spreading religious influence. The Romas from Bujanovac, the Witnesses, are also a litmus paper for appreciating the public opinion inclinations as well as those of the representatives of the traditional religious communities towards religious Others in this part of Southeast Serbia.

### REFERENCES

- Dorđević, D. B. „Preobraćanje Roma na protestantizam (Model, činioci, tumačenje).“ U *Konverzija i kontekst (Teorijski, metodološki i praktični pristup religijskoj konverziji)*, priredili Zorica Kuburić i Srđan Sremac, 227–44. Novi Sad: Centar za empirijska istraživanja religije, 2009.
- Dorđević, D. B. and D. Todorović. „Orthodox Priests and the Protestant Roma (A Bit of Empirical Research from the South of Serbia).“ In *Orthodoxy from an Empirical Perspective*, edited by M. Blagojević and D. Todorović, 175–188. Niš and Belgrade: YSSSR and IPST, 2011.
- Тодоровић, Д. „Мале верске заједнице.“ У *Нишки лексикон*, уредник-координатор Драгица Јевтић, 280. Београд и Ниш: ЈП Службени гласник и Град Ниш, 2011.
- Тодоровић, Д. „Роми и прелазак на протестантизам (на примеру југоисточне Србије).“ У *Образовање и савремени универзитет*, том III, главни и одговорни уредник Бојана Димитријевић, 454–471. Ниш: Филозофски факултет у Нишу, 2012а.
- Тодоровић, Д. „Етнографско-социографски показатељи раширености протестантских верских заједница у југоисточној Србији (са посебним освртом на Роме протестанте).“ *Етнолошко-антрополошке свеске* 19 (2012b): 87–111.
- Todorović, D. „Uloga kulturnih faktora u protestantizaciji Roma jugoistočne Srbije.“ *Kultura* 136 (2012c): 376–402.
- Тодоровић, Д. „Роми као пентекосталци у југоисточној Србији.“ У *Промене идентитета, културе и језика Рома у условима планске социјално-економске интеграције*, приредили Т. Варади и Г. Башић, 461–475. Београд: САНУ, 2012d.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. Pavlov with a group in Peć, Kosovo 1996 (standing first on the left)



Ph. 2. Pavlov at his desk in Peć, Kosovo 1996





Ph. 3. Pavlov leads a discussion on the Bible in Kikinda in 2008



Ph. 4. Pavlov makes a speech at the county congress in Pioneer Hall in Belgrade in 2009





Ph. 5. Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, Bujanovac



Ph. 6. Pavlov welcomes believers before Kingdom Hall



Ph. 7. Atmosphere before a weekly meeting in Bujanovac



Ph. 8. Pavlov addressing Romas – Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac



Ph. 9. Talking with Pavlov in his family home in Bujanovac



Ph. 10. Pavlov with his wife Irena





UDK 316.74:271.222(497.11-191.8 Dimitrovgrad)

Jasmina Petrović  
Zoran R. Jovanović

**A PRIEST IN THE BORDER AREA (DIMITROVGRAD):  
THE PREACHER OF GOD'S WORD  
AND A PARTICIPANT IN RELITY\***

---

**INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION**

Dedication to the border area of Serbia and Bulgaria in any form encourages diverse realizations. This is due to the fact that this is an area with layered traces of history and a unique population structure, connected by the overall legacy that helped shape their, in many ways unique, "spirit of place" as a product of interweaving local and global "spirit of the epoch", previous and present.

The above-stated would apply to the municipality of Dimitrovgrad, where, according to the latest census, there are 10,118 inhabitants, of which 53.49% identified themselves as a part of the Bulgarian ethnos, while 27.86% identified themselves as members of the Serbian nation and as many as 15, 15% of the population did not identify themselves nationally (SORS 2013). These statistics might be less interesting if the penultimate census, for example, did not record about 1,600 more people (11,748), of which 49.7% identified themselves as part of the Bulgarian nation, and 25.6% as members of Serbian ethnicity, while 12.5% did not identify themselves nationally (SORS, 2003a). The population is mainly Christian Orthodox – 88.97%, noting that 8.30% of the population did not declare their religion, as recorded in the census in 2011 (SORS 2013). The data show an increase in the number of people who identify their confession and a reduction in the number of those who do not.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to the recent and contemporary history of Dimitrovgrad, it had a great influence not only on the consciousness, but also on the most visible aspects of the life of its inhabitants. One of the reasons of course comes from the periodic dramatic geopolitical delimitation and the separation of Serbian and Bulgarian people in the nineteenth and twentieth century, which left its imprint in the most direct way. This is confirmed by delimitations between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1878, 1913 and 1919 when the Treaty of Neuilly made certain amends, carried out by none other than the International Delimitation Commission, which finally defined the boundaries of the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, to date (Pavlica 2002, 23).

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> The census in 2002 identified 84.2% people of Orthodox faith and 9.6% of those who did not state their religion (SORS 2003b).

One should not neglect the longevity of the effects of the war between the Serbs and Bulgarians at the end of the nineteenth century, and the traces of blood that remained after the Balkan wars and the First World War, when the Bulgarians and the Serbs again found themselves fighting on opposite sides. The events of World War II, when the Bulgarian armed forces in the border area committed many atrocities, were in a way an epilogue to the prologue that started at the end of the previous century (Jovanović 1998, 136-145; Jovanović 2004, 33, 34, 60, 61; Koljanin 2001, 55-63; Živković 1985, Kulić 1992-1993; Kuljić 1977, 141-173; Mitrović 1989, 21-38; Stojiljković 1989, Stojčev 1994, 177-193; Pirivatrić 2008, 265-333).

One should not forget the events associated with the Resolution of the Information Bureau in 1948, which also influenced not only the relations between, by then, communist Bulgaria and Communist Yugoslavia, but also the attitudes of the Bulgarian minority in Serbia, who was in a dilemma whether to resort to questionable political stances of the home country or to those of the country in which they live (Dragišić 2002). A trace was left in the memory of the older generation living in the border area with Bulgaria due to, euphemistically speaking, the discomfort regarding the incidents between 1948 and 1955 committed by Bulgaria – then an Informbiro country – with politics hostile to Yugoslavia and its citizens. (According to available sources, in this period Informbiro countries, with Bulgaria, have carried out over 8,000 incidents on the Yugoslav border, as part of a “special war” against Yugoslavia [Mitrović i Selinić 2009, 33, note 7; *Bela knjiga o agresivnim postupcima vlada SSSR, Poljske, Čehoslovačke, Madjarske, Rumunije, Bugarske i Albanije prema Jugoslaviji*, 1951, 37-39; Cvetković 2008, 61-62]).

Despite the cooperation and mutual solidarity, a Dimitrovgrad life in such social space, laden by sediments of history and a variety of political turmoil, brought waves of mutual distrust of its citizens, the members of the Serbian and Bulgarian ethnic group. A faithful reflection of the drama of life in Dimitrovgrad area is the fact that its population has often fought on opposite sides with their family members (Petrović i Jovanović 2012). Therefore, the data on the ethnic identification in the last census should be closely examined in the light of all past events.

At the same time, however paradoxically, it seems that the communist regime in Bulgaria, like some previous Bulgarian regimes, was in a kind of a “line” that from the last quarter of the nineteenth century coincided with the aspirations of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria, that is, the Bulgarian Exarchate, towards the south and southeast Serbia, the so-called Old Serbia (Lilić 1993, 181-186; Belčovski 1986, 108-116; Popović 1999, 131, 173, 174). The “Serbian side” made sure to make things even more complex in religious terms (as well), under the auspices of the Orthodox Church in Serbia, then – at the end of the nineteenth century – the Serbian Metropolitanate, which has somehow transmitted its own internal problems to the area of the Eparchy of Niš to which Dimitrovgrad has belonged from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 (Kalezić 2002, 1334).



This might not be so important if our topic did not concern the religious life in Dimitrovgrad today seen through the “lenses” of two active priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church, our respondents, who conduct their mission in the parishes which are spread across the municipality of Dimitrovgrad. There is no doubt that the two of them are too familiar with many –isms that have marked the time of their stay and activities in the area of Dimitrovgrad. The phenomena that have a global character, such as secularism with all its shades, are among them, which in a specific way is – as a sort of reaction – followed up by the return to religion (Berger 2001; Casanova 2001; Blagojević 2009; Bogomilova 2003; Đorđević 2009), faith and the world, which in Serbia, among the Orthodox believers, got its own “shades” (Radisavljević Ćiparizović 2006; compare Jovanović 2012).

Objective and professionally prepared researchers are to determine whether “romantic Orthodoxy” really prevailed in the Orthodox Church, i.e. a “religion without faith” and “professional religiosity”, as it was recently diagnosed by Alexander Schmemmann (Schmemmann 2007a, 48, 53, 60, 78, 411, 422, 423, 450, 465; Schmemmann 2007b, 371, 372, Schmemmann 1993), 2; compare Djordjević and Djurović 1993, 223; Bigović 2010, 385, 386; Končarević 2003, 85, 103, 104; compare Živković 2010, 24, 25), or there are areas where certain important messages of the Gospel survived in its original form, in the areas dominated by the members of two or more nationalities, regardless of whether one belongs to the European Union, for example, while the other is wishing to become one.

### **A PRIEST IN THE BORDER AREA**

Priest Aleksandar Djordjević<sup>2</sup> was born in 1936 in village Izatovci belonging to the municipality of Dimitrovgrad and the Pirot District. He comes from the family of priests. As a priest, his father also served in the border area in Izatovci. Regarding the descendants, he has a son and grandson who live in Dimitrovgrad. He was educated in the Prizren Seminary from 1952 and belongs to the first generation of priests who were educated in accordance with a five-year curriculum, as he points out. However, the education process was not without problems, since it took place in a climate of dictated secularization, dominated by communist ideas and the marginalization of religious sentiments and institutions, when the believers and the clergy were often openly persecuted. Father Aleksandar testifies that the Prizren Seminary students were not left out of such treatment of religion by the government, especially those coming from the border area, whose status has been burdened with additional political mortgages.

“I enrolled my studies in 1952. The sixty of us enrolled and look how many of us completed it, only fifteen [he shows the picture of the generation that graduated in 1957 from the Seminary in Prizren].

---

<sup>2</sup> The conversation with the priest Aleksandar Djordjević was carried out on May 27, 2013 in his home.

Because we were from the border zone, the police would come and take us out of our beds and line us up. At the time, there were green identity cards from the border area. Those who had a green identity card then packed and headed straight home. That's how many of us were left. The Udba members did not allow us to stay. They would relocate you, threaten you. It was questionable who was going to stay. He who was from Niš or did not have a green identity card would remain. We escaped as they would say.”

He completed his studies in 1957; he was ordained by Bishop Jovan of Niš (Ilić) on September 5, 1960 in Niš, after which he served six years in Osmakovo, a village in the municipality of Pirot. On Bishop's orders he was transferred to serve in the First Eparchy of Dimitrovgrad<sup>3</sup> in December 1966, since when he has been in the service of his parishioners.

Taking into account the age of the respondent, and the fact that he served during the totalitarian regime and the domination of “secular religion”, the conversation was a good opportunity for the discussion about the position and activities of the clergy from 1945 (we had in mind the ambivalent and conflicted relationship between politics and religion of the time). Simultaneously, the opportunity was used for the respondent to compare relationship of the past and present government towards the Church and its members.

“I was lucky that they did not disturb me. Although the law said that a priest can perform his priestly duties only in church and in the yard, my father had cut someone's slava bread for a year and he was incarcerated for a year. He was in Jugovići. And I, surprisingly, was not disturbed. I've gone to all the Crosses. I was lucky that the Church was of no interest to them. I think that was it. They did not know anything about it. They thought this was how it was supposed to be. They did not go to churches, the priest should go there and that was it. I baptized children in the evening. That belonged to black humor, too. They would come to check whether the children were baptized and ask their grandmother for details. She said, “I do not know. I do not care, I do not know. The young people are not talking. They rise up, drink coffee, and go to work. That does not interest me.” When I arrived, the Head of our municipality was a person named Mitko Manov. He was little hot-headed. I thought when I started (my service, a note by J.P.) that the proper thing to do was to introduce myself to the host. He did not interest me at all, he belongs to a different structure than I do and I have nothing to do with him, because I take orders from my Bishop. I went to meet him out of respect, and he said, ‘Look at this one’. I turned back to see who he was talking to. He said: ‘We are trying to eradicate religion, look at the Russians,’ he began to tell me, ‘he bought some kind of a motor, and he drives from one side to the other all day.’ I said to him: “Listen to

---

<sup>3</sup> Due to the decrease in the number of inhabitants, he later started to take care of the churches and believers in villages Senokos and Smilovo, and later in Peterlaš and Lukavica.

me, you did not appoint me. The Constitution states the freedom of faith and religion. And when you change the Constitution, you write that it is prohibited to go to the Church [...]. I do not know why I even came here. You are of no interest to me'. Then I slammed the door. After that, a man from Tito's office and a man from Niš who was in the CC, Dušan Marinković, Dad's classmate, came and said: 'Stop doing this [...] be quiet. Keep your head down and keep quiet.' I told him: 'I do not want to keep quiet, my father was in prison for a year and a half. I'm not going to keep quiet. I'm not provoking anybody. I'm doing my job. If he wants, he can come to the church, I'm not forcing him. If he wants to baptize a child, let the child be baptized, and if not, it doesn't matter. I'm not forcing anyone. Then the Heads of the municipality began to change. These days a new young priest arrived, we went to the municipality and asked for help, so they gave nuns a power unit and they bought a kitchen and a table for the priest, they helped him a lot."

### **SPIRITUAL FATHER OF DYING VILLAGES AND A TIRELESS RESTORER OF TEMPLES**

Although officially retired, Father Aleksandar leads, as he says, a little less than a third of the so-called First and Second Parish of Dimitrovgrad<sup>4</sup>, retaining the areas with a small number of "living households", not wanting to leave them without a spiritual leader.

"For example, in the areas with those ritual meals, the Crosses. There are areas where only two women or three women come. For Saint George's Day celebration, I have a home in Visočki Odorovci and two homes in Gumanovci. They ask me: 'Why are you going to Odorovci for one hundred dinars?'. I say: 'The money does not matter. I've been visiting that home for fifty years and how can I tell them that I'm not going to come anymore. Well, if you can't, go and sleep there!' I'm going. Wherever they call me. They call and say: 'Only two or three of us will come.' I say: 'We will go out for a walk.' I can not seem to leave them."

Djordjević serves at 13 churches. The largest village – Senokos, is the most distant and "it has only twenty souls in it."<sup>5</sup> In Senokos not a single child has been born since 1944, which means he did not attend/ participate in the performance of the Sacrament of Baptism, because there were none. He keeps going to villages with only one household, such as the village of Gogjin Dol.

---

<sup>4</sup> As stated by the respondent, there used to be 14 parishes in Dimitrovgrad with the same number of priests serving in their own zones and they have now been "merged". Earlier, there were four priests only in Dimitrovgrad.

<sup>5</sup> According to the census in 2011, 29 residents live in Senokos, the youngest four of whom are between 25 and 29 years old. The next age category is comprised of the residents between 40 and 44 years old, there are two of them. The average age of the population of the village is 67.7 (SORS 2013).

“My area has the largest number of churches. For example, I have two in Radejna. One was built in 1876, one is newly built, the church of St. George, where their Cross is.”

The fact that the parishioners live so far away from each other is the biggest technical problem that he is facing, as it is pointed out by Father Aleksandar. He does not complain about other problems in particular, including those of material nature, although the funds for the renovation or construction of 28 churches were acquired through the former residents who, for nostalgic reasons, give their contributions to help preserve the churches for future generations, which only a few years ago were completely ruined.

Since the retirement, he has been living in a private apartment; he used to live in the Rectory in Dimitrovgrad, which was the home of another priestly family as well.

The quality of the relationship and cooperation with his counterparts, ie. the priests from the neighboring parishes and the Diocese of Niš as a whole, is judged as being exceptional. He says that whenever he had needed help with his service, he had received it from the priests from the Parish of Pirot, and the monks from the nearby monastery of St. John.

“We see each other. We cooperate. For example, when we have many obligations, if we need to be in the church, and there is a funeral, we invite priests from Pirot. Now we have the monks in Poganovo and Sukovo. They come, too. This morning a monk from Sukovo served the liturgy here, and I am going there at four [to Monastery of St. Demetrius, a note by J. P.] to consecrate a willow. We help each other here. We are in good terms. I say: it is better when we see less of each other. I always advise people. They get married and they start visiting each other's home every night. And then there is an argument and later they say they are not visiting [each other, a note by J.P.] any longer. I say: ‘you know what, see less of each other and you will be glad when they come to visit you.’ Otherwise, they have an argument and suffer as children as a consequence. Later they often say: ‘Father, you are a prophet. We’ve indeed had an argument’.”

The relationship with the current Bishop of Niš, Jovan (Purić), is also assessed as very fair and collaborative. He points out that the Bishop often practices counseling geared towards the younger clergy at the so-called fraternal meetings. He mentions with respect that the Bishop “writes a lot and works a lot”, and that clergy often contributes to the work by collecting data on religious life in their own parishes.

“This area has the greatest number of ‘religious meals’, ie. the Crosses. Bishop ordered us to immediately record them all. We collected data on each Cross. It's a huge volume.<sup>6</sup> They bring images (with inscriptions on crosses, a note by Z. J.) which I read. There are some

---

<sup>6</sup> We learned that a book about the Crosses in Dimitrovgrad area will soon be published.

in the Church Slavonic and up there by the fountain, in the Arabic language. The villagers know the legend that a landowner, a Turk, had promised the people that if he returned alive from the battle with the Bulgarians he would make [them] a fountain [...]. In this area people used to be very pious as Russians.”

As mentioned already, the end of the twentieth century brought a strong wave of secularization, particularly intense in the post-communist countries. Social stratification which resulted not only from the increased difference in the classic markers of social status of the individual, but also from the horizontal distinctions among citizens based on their political opinion, cultural, ethnic, and other similar characteristics, led to an increased interest in the Church as a possible unifying resource. According to some sociologists, in most post-communist countries, the Church was able to take on this role, due to its traditional cultural-historical mission, rooted in the distant past, but also through the moral authority gained by its behavior during the reign of totalitarian regimes (Bogomilova 2003, 517).

Believing that the stated relationship between politics and the church can be read through the attitude towards the restoration and erection of new places of worship, the respondent was asked whether from the end of the twentieth century any churches have been restored or whether some new churches have been built. According to the testimony, from 1991 onwards, 20 churches have been restored and eight were built on the foundations of the old temples (Borovo, Petrlaš, etc.). Only the church in Donja Nevlja has not been restored, because “there is no one left to worry there.”<sup>7</sup> On how he manages to raise funds for the restoration of churches, Father Aleksandar recounted the following:

“I was able to restore the churches here. In Peterlaš there are only two households and a new church. But we get together and write a letter to all those who have left the area. And then due to nostalgia they start to send [money, a note by J. P]. Yesterday they sent us 500,000 from the Ministry of Faith for the church in Peterlaš. The Patriarch of Bulgaria, the one who died, was a guest in Dimitrovgrad and he said: “This is not working. There is not a single church in good condition. And then I made an effort and all the churches were restored.”

Efforts to restore the churches are usually the result of combining the enthusiasm of priests, the help of the municipality, the contributions from individuals, usually the ones who came from the region. Sometimes affairs did not develop as expected. On one such case, Father Aleksandar recounted the following:

---

<sup>7</sup> It is the church of St. Elias, originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, erected on the foundations of a medieval monastery "Mžaj", according to folk tradition. The controversies related to this temple including its dedication are discussed the text Jovanović, Petrović 2012.

“The monastery of St. Dimitri cost 520 thousand marks. The director of the Utility Company also gave money there. He was a great nostalgic. He helped all the churches. Wherever necessary, he delivered the sand. Up there at St. Ćirik, he brought straw so that if the roof fell it would not break anything. All the bales of straw he and that Montenegrin brought. He helped the church there a lot. And he died young. My conscience is not clear because I did not tell the Bishop to award him with the medal of the second order. Do you know why I did not do that, because they started to go after him as God goes after the devil [...].<sup>8</sup> We bought Italian marble. He bought 200 square meters. And later they put it away somewhere. They told me: ‘Father, they stole the marble.’ I went to see the director (another director, a note by J.P) and he asked: ‘Who bought you the marble?’ And I said to him: ‘Mile.’ He said: ‘Well, go and ask Mile for it.’ Shame on them. The entire Dimitrovgrad knows that the marble was purchased for the church, so we made a fuss, and they bought some from Prokuplje. Our business, as it goes. 400 square meters was bought [by the mentioned benefactor, a note by J. P.]. When he bought 200 square meters, he asked whether to bring it to the church. I told him to leave it in the base, so that when we start the construction, we would take it to the church. Now we have succeeded. Earlier I would be sent from one place to another (when he sought money for the church, a note by J. P). Now they are all built, and they are built with good will. Including all distant churches. The church in Gradištanici for 28 days, the church in Mojin for 24 days, the church in Partelaš for 20 days. In Mazgoš, it lasted a little longer, and they are not very pious [...]. Perhaps some generations will say: ‘They were smart people,’ or they might say the opposite.”

### **ON LOCAL SPECIFIC FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION, PARISHIONERS AND THE RENEWAL OF INTEREST IN RELIGION**

In relation to the sacred, especially in the domain of religious participation, through the transformed traditional symbolism or innovation in this area, the influences of local culture, habits, beliefs, and day-to-day survival are being refracted. Therefore there is a need for knowledge about the specific behaviour of the parishioners towards the sacred. Father Aleksandar made remarks regarding the intertwining of pagan and Christian traditions as part of the rituals practiced by believers in Dimitrovgrad area, and regarding his own relation to it:

“Traditions are almost the same, there are localisms, but essentially the traditions are the same. There are pagan customs that have been retained. For example, even today people are asking for a priest to

---

<sup>8</sup> The respondent mentions the period of the change in the management of the mentioned company, when a change of government and the election of new directors led the review of the actions of the former head of the institution.



break the bottle on the commemoration ritual happening 40 days after the funeral. It is ugly. You hit the cross, lots of glass is being thrown to the ground. Those who mow cut the ribbon, those mowers with the ribbon. Then, the one who carries the cross must not turn. Vlado Georgijev turned to ask how to carry the cross when old women yelled at him: 'Why are you turning back?!' He was puzzled and he dropped the cross and asked: 'Father, what did I do wrong?' I said: 'You listened to silly old women and that's what you did wrong.' Each area has many customs that have nothing to do with the Church, the faith. We argue not to bring food on All Souls Day. For this we argue the most. Intellectuals listen. The rest comment: 'What would the neighbours say?' You do not live for the neighborhood [...]. I succeed with the intellectuals. Bring wheat, wine and a candle. That's it. This is ugly. You're acting against the church. The church says that there is only a soul, not a body. So, you should feed the soul, the body does not need food. 'You are the earth, and to earth thou shall return', this is how it is. Some listen to me, but others do not. They bring food and say: 'Father, come take some, so that he eats, too.' I do not take nothing but wheat, because if they saw me take food, they would see no reason for them not to do it."

Attendance to services according to Father Aleksandar has increased in recent years. In his view, the gender, educational and occupational structure of the people who come to church is uniform. He does not highlight a part of the population as a dominant. The only thing that stands out is that, today, young people in particular come to church. Their attitude toward religion is assessed as genuine and sincere. He also praises the members of the church choir, who prepare by ear, because they think that an ear for music is God's gift and one does not need to waste time on learning the notes. The choir is singing at the city's Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary. Sometimes its members are engaged in other places of worship in Dimitrovgrad area.

"By the way, this had not been so [there were not as many believers, a note by J. P.]. Those who sing at the choir are regulars. In recent times, since they introduced religious education [9] children come too. People come for other reasons. Young people to be precise. Old people do not go to church here. They do not fast. While a man of eighty-some years was paying me for the funeral, when his

---

<sup>9</sup> Religious education in Serbia has been taught in schools in Serbia since 2001, first as an optional subject for students of the first grade of elementary schools and high schools, where the students were able to choose between two subjects (religious or civic education), or select none of them. The following year, the choice between these subjects has become obligatory, since they acquired the status of electives. In the school year 2003/2004, their status remained unchanged, except from the fact that it applied to the third grade of elementary schools. From the following academic year (2004/2005), it was decided that the aforementioned subjects are to be taught throughout the duration of education (more on the introduction of religious education in the education system in Serbia and the controversial reactions, see e.g. Kuburić and Vukomanović 2005, 229-255)

old grandma<sup>10</sup> died, he said: ‘These people are crazy. They send my grandchildren to some kind of religious education, and then they are talking to me about some sort of God.’ One is astonished by such claims coming from someone who had religious education. I said: ‘You know what, you did not say this, the devil spoke from your body. You must have missed a class so you did not hear the priest who gave you religious instruction.’”

In terms of ethnic composition, Djordjević said that the population is predominantly Bulgarian, according to him as much as 98% of it (a false belief<sup>11</sup>), adding that there are members of other nationalities among the workers on the railway, customs, police forces, or the children from mixed marriages, whose number is decreasing. According to the respondent, parishioners do not make differences by ethnicity, and he does not make it as a clergyman. At first glance, it is paradoxical that growing up in the border area and the life in often unstable political conditions are followed by an extremely low level of conflict in everyday life ending in injury to others, that we, unfortunately, are often able to read about in the crime sections of newspapers from other micro-regions. Djordjević is pleased to note the peacefulness of the local population and the correct relationships between different ethnic groups.

“Roma come from these mixed marriages. I know all of them, and we pay no attention to that. The Greeks come to, they drill a tunnel there [<sup>12</sup>], so they come. People do not make differences among themselves. I have spent 44 years here, it's a peaceful population. Only three murders. This is for 44 years, that I know of. Here one can gossip, you might be envied for what you have. But there is no problem when you want to leave the house. I traveled at night and I never got hurt. I traveled through the snow, rain [...] even to Senokos. And my father lived in Izatovci [he also had no problems, a note by J. P.]. There is no antagonism among the nations.”

Father Aleksandar derives his arguments from the fact that these ethnic groups belong to the same religion, with similar language and culture. Regarding the specifics of the religious traditions, he emphasizes only the fact that the Bulgarians do not celebrate the family patron saint. But, he says: “I do not make differences based on who celebrates the family patron saint and who celebrates only St. Nicholas, for example. Wheat is there, a candle, and I make no difference.”

The following testimony concerning the declaration of ethnicity, but also the ethnic mimicry to which a significant part of the population of the

---

<sup>10</sup> In this context the phrase refers to the wife. Otherwise, in southeastern Serbia it is common for older spouses call each other grandma and grandpa.

<sup>11</sup> In the municipality of Dimitrovgrad in the latest census, 53.49% of the population identified themselves as part of the Bulgarian ethnos, while 27.86% of the population identified themselves as members of the Serbian nation (SORS 2013).

<sup>12</sup> The workers employed in the construction of the Corridor 10.

border regions was inclined is also interesting. This form of social behavior should not be surprising since, generally speaking, the entire region experienced the history of solving strategic issues between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and the name of the state which locals belong to changed, with the uncertain fate of their property, often losing their possessions. [...] Thus, the data from the last ethnic identification should be seen in relation to all those events<sup>13</sup> (Petrović i Jovanović 2012, 246). However, it is worrying that despite relatively stable relationships among ethnic groups, the number of people who did not declare their nationality did not decrease, moreover, it has increased, which indicates that there is still a part of the population who fear the possible consequences of a clear ethnic labeling.

“A member of my parish declared that he was Russian. His grandfather and his father and his great grandfather were Bulgarians. The official came and asked: 'What is your nationality?' He wrote a Serb, then a Yugoslav, and the third time he declared his nationality he said: write down Russian. The man asked him: 'What nationality was your father?'- 'Bulgarian' and grandfather - 'Bulgarian' and great grandfather 'Bulgarian'. 'So how are you Russian?', and the man said: 'You're illiterate! We came from the Carpathian Mountains, from Russia. I don't want you nagging me every year. I'm Russian, and that's what you'll write down!' Now I say to him: How are you doing Rus?”

Father Aleksandar points out positive experiences in his service first of all. Even in situations when he met with the non-believers who do not conform to the Church, and when the outrage was directed at him personally, he has never had a conflict with his parishioners. His close relationship with the local population is argued with the fact that the body of his deceased wife lies in Dimitrovgrad, although there is a custom to bury a person in their home town, or the place of residence of the deceased.

“I would like to say very positive things. I've never had a problem. People come to funerals drunk. Sometimes they offend me. I just need to find a balance [...]. I have a positive experience and I confirm this with the fact that I buried my wife here. I was supposed to bury her there in Staničenje, where I have a house. I'm used to these people. It has been four years since my wife died. Now when I come to their houses, they say: 'Don't you leave without telling us to prepare you food to take with you, some meat so as not to trouble yourself' [...]. I've never had a problem with them, nor with the government.”

---

<sup>13</sup> In the municipality of Dimitrovgrad, in the last census, as much as 15.15% of the population did not identify themselves nationally (SORS 2013). Thus, nearly one in seven people have not ethnically identified. If we compare the above data with those from the previous census, we see that the share of the unidentified has increased by several percentage points. The participation of those who did not declare their nationality in the general population in 2002 was 12.5% (SORS 2003).

Residents include Father Aleksandar in solving their problems in a variety of initiatives in the local community. He points out that he only avoids any kind of involvement with political parties, although he is often in a position to join one of the policy options due to his authority with the locals. In these situations he cleverly offers the party promoters to put his signature on a petition to support the party program, while warning them that he will sign all other programs he is requested to sign. He does this because they are, as he says, “all the same to me”. Father Aleksandar, first of all, wants to “be there” for his parishioners and help them solve everyday problems. He points out that he visits distant households with enthusiasm to “cut the bread”. Younger colleagues are advised not to break this tradition, arguing that, to the believers, “it is more important to mention the living in the household” than to listen to the services in the Old Slavic which they do not understand. Because “people can be brought closer in this way, so that they should not stop something that has lasted for 300 to 500 years. Pagan customs should be eradicated with advice, persuasion, and not with rapid prohibitions which distance people from faith”.

According to his own testimony, our respondent was in contact with all of the Heads of the municipality so far, and the collaboration in general is judged as correct; he often helps the researchers who come to visit the churches and monasteries of Dimitrovgrad area.

In Dimitrovgrad, other than the members of the dominant Orthodox Christian faith<sup>14</sup>, rare devotees of the Adventist Church and several residents of Catholic faith live: “When I came, I held weekly services to the Adventists [...]. There are not many left, there are about a dozen. There are a few Catholics who come to the Orthodox church.” Disputes among them have never happened. The collaboration with the members of other faiths or denominations was not specifically established, with the exception of a military friendship with a Catholic priest which he maintained for a while, corresponding regularly. It recently happened that a Baptist from Ohio married an Orthodox Serb. With great pleasure Djordjević says that the children of the man received the sacraments in the Orthodox Church in Serbia.

According to the respondent's opinion, multi-ethnicity is not an issue among the population members in the far southeast. Those who act from a position of sowing hatred are rare, and he gives no importance to them:

“We have some problems with occasional plotting against the Church, such as the local TV SKY, in a very rough manner. They call from personal interests. They speak about a hundred years contract according to the Treaty of Neuilly. Dimitrovgrad has been a part of Serbia for a hundred years, and now they want to change that [...]. I know these people well. Some are children from mixed marriages,

---

<sup>14</sup> According to the last census in the municipality of Dimitrovgrad, 88.97% of the population declared as being a member of the Orthodox faith and 8.30% did not declare their religion, 0.82% are atheists, and the rest (1.91%) are the members of all the other faiths and confessions, including those whose religious affiliation is unknown, or they identify themselves as agnostics (SORS 2013).

living in Belgrade, Vojvodina, asking: 'Do I need a passport to come?' I tell them: 'There is nothing to worry about, we will all die out before someone else comes here'."

A warning that once arrived in Niš, in the Diocese, where he was threatened with death, is explained away by the priest as being innocent human weakness, by no means a deeper problem based on national intolerance:

"It was a telegram saying that I will be killed in Kozarica. The Bishop told me to come to Niš and get ready to go to service to another place, showing me a telegram. I looked and I saw the telegram, it was not signed and I noticed that a 'čis' rather than a 'čist' Serb was written. I said: 'Reverend, this was not written by a Bulgarian'. He said: 'Who wrote that?' I said: 'The priest V. S. who is a Serb and the priest N. who is Bulgarian. Their parishes are small, so if I go away, they can share mine'. This is why I did not want to go. 'I do not want you on my conscience. You have a child, you have a wife', said Bishop. I said that I was sure that no one would harm me. This happened over 20 years ago."

The above is supported by the humorous story from clerical circles, illustrating the human frailties of their members. In addition, he reveals his tendency to preserve and convey the mentality of the people through humor, which he gladly shares with parishioners.

"They force me to write about the humor from this region. But I can not do it being a priest. I know a lot of things from this area, I've been a priest for 60 years. But I can not write this, people would say that the priest started to make fun of them. When I go to the villages, people ask: 'Father, tell me what's new in Dimitrovgrad'. I find something nice to tell them, and they laugh."

One of the questions addressed to the respondent was focused on his view on how the priest can help believers whom he serves. From the responses, it is clear that the priest understood his mission primarily as counseling the parishioners and as the support that he provides with all essential aspects of everyday life, teaching them about faith in direct contact.

"I say to everyone that each person must carry their own cross. Some boast of their children, some complain that they have been abandoned. I keep telling them that nursing homes did not exist when people lived in homogeneous terms, when one knew who the boss of the house was[...]. I help with advice. The humanitarian assistance that I received from the Greeks in the clothes and other things. And I gave them that too [...]."

Teaching about faith is of particular importance to the clergy if we bear in mind that the recent findings of research in religiosity in Serbia indicate the reduction of initially large discrepancy between the indicators of religiosity, especially the indicators of confessional identification, religious identification and religious participation. In other words, while there are differences between the declaration and behavior, those who identify themselves as believers more often take part in some forms of religious rituals (Blagojević 2009; Djordjević 2009). But until such a mismatch exists, there is a space for the action of clergy.

“There are many smart people here, many artists. But people are not interested in art, in theater. They just, because they are scared, they just want to have bread and shelter. They are not interested in the spiritual matters. Even in the religious sense, the older generation, none of them fasts anymore. Instead of the other way around, young people respect this, even the confession, but the older ones do not [...]. It's always the same story. They say that the Bishop ate meat in their house. We do not have time to eat bread that day, and the bishop came to the village on Good Friday to eat roasted pork with us. I tell them: 'Let me give you a small piece of advice. Alright, you do not have to listen to the priest. You do not have to respect the fast and you will have to fast for life. And we tell you to fast only for 40 days.' There I simply say: 'Woman, after preparing meals, when do you wash the dishes fast?' They reply: 'When I boil fruit or something similar. When it's greasy, it is hard to wash.' I say: 'It is the same with the body, that's how you purify the blood. You don't listen to the priest,' I said, 'because you feel like I wish to punish you when I tell you not to eat fat. Look at it as washing the dishes. The church has a great experience, that is why Muslims do not eat pork. At hot places, you eat pork and you die[...]'. I always use na example ... When talking about the afterlife, they used to say: 'Father, I apologize, but stop saying nonsense'. I ask them why. 'Have you seen a sheep die or being taken by a wolf?' I said: 'I have.' Then I ask them: 'Have you seen a sheep that built a bus or is driving a car? It's mindless [...]. It doesn't write books. God created Man, he gave him mind, the power of speech. Do you wonder sometimes about how complex Man is[...], and we still do not know many things, not even about the brain. Think about whether it was if accidental that Man with a brain, speech, appeared on earth, or as one philosopher said, Man is an animal that laughs [...]'. I have some doctors with whom I have discussions [about the miracle of existence, a note by J.P]. I say: 'a heart has no battery and it works for 80, 100 years. The world is created in steps: anima vegetiva, anima sensitiva, and Man created in the image of God.’”

The threat to the identities of ethnic minorities does not exist, says the respondent, just as there is no such threat to the ethnic majority:



“No. Nobody gives you trouble. Serbia is generous, it helps as much as it can. There are some who were expelled from Bulgaria and began to provoke [...]. But this is not accepted [among the people, a note by J. P.]. And then people complain: “Those who don't like it here can go back up [to Bulgaria, a note by J. P.], they should not waste my time, they should go there and ask for a passport’. There are few Serbs and I have counted them, there are about 300 of them. There is nothing that threatens them.”

Regarding the preservation of the identity, Father Aleksandar emphasizes the need to preserve the linguistic identity, the wealth of local dialects, illustrating this with the example that the Serbs from different regions often do not understand each other. He jokingly said: “Not even Goethe could translate the proverb by Vuk Karadžić – Kobasica cvrči, buklija klokoće.”

Underdevelopment of the border regions, and especially the demographic population drain<sup>15</sup>, is associated according to our respondent primarily with the aging population and the economic situation in the entire micro-region.<sup>16</sup> With regret, he emphasizes unemployment as a major problem in his area, especially since it affects many members of the younger generation, which leads them to the “senseless waste of time”. He also states that the agricultural capacities of certain villages are not used precisely because the villages are comprised of elderly people who no longer have the strength to take care of their property.

### **PRIEST SLOBODAN ILIĆ**

With father Aleksandar, in the area of Dimitrovgrad, priest Slobadan Ilić performs clerical duties. He was born in 1977 in Prokuplje (in Toplica District). He has two sons. He graduated from the Theological Faculty in Belgrade and was ordained in 2012. From this time he has been living and working in Dimitrovgrad. With his family he has settled in the parish house, located in the courtyard of the Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary. He serves a parish which consists of the city of Dimitrovgrad and several villages with a total of six churches.

The major difficulties he faces in his work are “the disobedience of the parishioners and insufficient communication with local authorities regarding the priorities”. Like Aleksandar, he emphasizes the quality of cooperation with the clergy from neighboring parishes, as well as relations in the diocese. He is particularly pleased with the cooperation with Bishop Jovan from Niš.

---

<sup>15</sup> According to the results of the latest census in the municipality of Dimitrovgrad, in 13 villages (out of 41) there are less than ten residents (Banski Dol, Bačevo, Bilo, Boljev Dol, Bračevci, Verzar, Grapa, etc.). The village Prača no longer has inhabitants, and some of the places listed with one, two or four residents are getting closer to the fate of the mentioned village, from which only a recorded toponym would probably remain. 6 more villages in the mentioned municipality have under twenty residents (Vlkovija, Gornja Nevlja, Donji Krivodol, Donja Nevlja, Peterlaš, Kamenica). Detailed information in: SORS 2012a.

<sup>16</sup> For more information on the economic situation in the municipality of Dimitrovgrad see Петровић и Јовановић 2012.

In terms of frequency and attendance to worship, he indicates that the parishioners are interested in Sunday services, when there are about 50 of them in the city church, while on major holidays there are many more. Just like the previous respondent, he observes the frequency of the custom by which believers go to the holy places (“the Crosses”), where they organize a lunch and cut bread in a religious ceremony. Such ceremonies are often attended by multiple families.

With the comment that mostly young people from all social and ethnic structures are among those who come to church, father Slobodan notes: “In our church there is no division by ethnicity. There is a high level of awareness that in the church there are no nations”. In accordance with the above statement is the fact that the members of minority groups are gladly received into the church by the dominant ethnic group. Traditions are similar to those in the area where he was born. Our respondent adds gladly that “there is a need and a willingness among young people to no longer practice bad customs.”.

Although he has no personal experience with the age and the so-called spirit of the time when religious communities were marginalized in society, he believes that “there is still a great fear among the people so this is probably the reason why they do not come so often to the church”. As positive experiences of serving in the border area, the young priest lists “the respect for the priest and absolute acceptance by the people”, and he says that there had not been negative experiences.

He has not established the cooperation with residents in the councils of local communities, but he was in communication with the Head of the municipality, who did donate furniture for the parish home, with, as he says, “many more promises”. He has the best relationship with the representative of the Party of the Bulgarians, who – as a believer – often participates in the sacred liturgy. He stresses that the abovementioned person has the need to establish contacts with the Bulgarian church which is helped by father Slobodan as much as possible. With his parishioners, he is planning and organizing the visit of the church choir from Sofia.

Like Father Aleksandar, Father Slobodan says that in Dimitrovgrad parish, the population is predominantly of Orthodox faith. The collaboration with members of other faiths or religions from other parishes has not been established by the new priest, nor does he record friendship with them in his experience. He has no information about the spread of Protestant religious communities.

To the question of whether, in his experience, life on the border – in a multinational environment – encourages personal, group, and general development or prevents it, Father Slobodan replies in a diplomatic manner saying that: “It depends on the politics, but it should encourage it. We should observe and use the novelties from the experience of others.”

His commitment to the faith is evident from the answers to the question of how a priest can contribute to the survival and development of the parish, and the overall prosperity of the parishioners: “By marrying the unmarried, baptizing the non-believers, making the unrepentant repent, by introducing

them to the service in the church so that they can learn about God". His relation to the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional communities is in accordance with the canons of the Church, and this also is the case in the community in which he currently performs clerical duties. Therefore, he claims that "it is impossible not to have minorities and it is necessary to respect anyone with good will, honesty and all the Christian virtues".

As for the Serbian ethnic group that lives in the border area, he believes that the fear experienced in the past times manifests itself to its behavior today, in the preservation of national identity, which sometimes also leads to various exclusions. But Father Slobodan is optimistic about the inter-ethnic cooperation today, especially between the Serbs and the Bulgarians in Dimitrovgrad area, in the environment which is comprised of a specific mixture of the so-called pure ethnic groups. Thoroughly acquainted with the spiritual ambience and historical heritage of the area where he serves, Father Slobodan says: "Surely there must be a root in the past and in others' actions against the Serbs. The fear is felt by the people, but the times are different now and we need to find common ground". He makes a similar point when it comes to the Bulgarians: "A man can not live isolated from the community in which he resides. I do not see their identity being in danger because this is an area where the nations have mixed, the Bulgarians mixed more with the Serbs than with the Bulgarians in Bulgaria, so this is the identity that is now new, but no one is really paying attention to these things, as far as I can see". When it comes to the preservation of national identity, Father Slobodan does not set aside any element of culture as particularly important, but argues that the people in the border area that connects Serbia and Bulgaria need above all the support of all other structures to survive where they are.

\*\*\*

The experience of a seasoned preserver of the faith, Father Aleksandar Djordjević and the enthusiasm of the newly ordained priest, Slobodan Ilić complement each other to contribute to the well-being of the parishioners of the so-called Dimitrovgrad's First and Second Parish. Dedicated to their work, both are trying to help the faithful with their encounter with the sacred, educate potential believers and amend the customs opposing the established canons and traditions of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Both observed an increased presence of younger parishioners in churches, seeing in it a chance for some kind of spiritual renewal of the local population. Their mission, however, does not end in mediating the relationship between the faithful and the holy. When it comes to Father Aleksandar, we notice a huge commitment to the problems of the local population, interest in their lives and the knowledge of the national character that helps him in completing his primary mission to which he has dedicated his life. Advisory work, which he performs almost every day, contributes to the fact that the locals from almost abandoned villages do not feel lonely and abandoned by all segments of society. In this way, the Church plays an important social mission, as one of its primordial functions. In Dimitrovgrad area almost all old churches have

been restored in recent decades; on the foundations of the old churches, eight new churches have been erected, which, together with a stronger confessional identification and an increased response of believers, especially young people, demonstrates that the revival of religion has not avoided the far south-east of Serbia. However, having in mind the intertwining of Christian and pagan customs, frequent ignorance of parishioners regarding the religious symbolism and the meaning of the individual elements of religious practice, and a significant number of people who practice only certain forms of religious participation, the said process can be discussed only as a hint of the renewal of religious feelings of the population living in the border area.

## REFERENCES

- Бела књига о агресивним поступцима влада СССР, Пољске, Чехословачке, Мађарске, Румуније, Бугарске и Албаније према Југославије. Београд: АЈ., 1951.
- Berger, Peter. „Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today.” Special Issue: *Religion and Globalization at the Turn of the Millennium* 62 (4) (2001): 443–454.
- Vlagojević, Mirko. „Revitalizacija religije i religioznosti u Srbiji – stvarnost ili mit?” *Filozofija i društvo* 20 (2) (2009): 97–117.
- Vogomilova, Nonka. Reflection on the Contemporary Religious „Revival”. *Teme* 27 (4) (2003): 513–523.
- Белчовски, Јован. *Историските основи за автокефалноста на македонската православна црква*. Скопје: Студентски збор, 1986.
- Биговић, Радован. „Православна црква и европске интеграције.” У *Могућности и донети социјалног учења православља и Православне цркве*, приредили Д. Б. Ђорђевић и М. Јовановић, 375–386. Београд: Фондација Конрад Аденауер и ЈУНИР, 2010.
- Влахос, Ј. „Богословље литургијске обнове.” *Православље* (1. 3. 2006): 12–14. *Дневник оца Александра Шмемана 1973–1983*, Требиње и Београд: Епархија захумско-херцеговачка и приморска и Видослов, 2007.
- Dragišić, Petar. „Бугарска мањина у Србији и резолуција Коминформа.” *Tokovi istorije* 1-2 (2002): 37-44.
- Ђорђевић, Драгољуб Б. и Богдан Ђуровић. „Секуларизација и православље: случај Срба.” *Градина* (10–12) (1993).
- Ђорђевић, Dragoljub B. „Religiousness of Serbs at the Beginning of the 21st Century: What is it About?” In *Revitalization of Religion (Theoretical and Comparative Approaches)*, edited by Danijela Gavrilović. Niš: YSSS, 2009.
- Живковић, Гордана. „Има ли хришћанске вере без Цркве?” *Православље* (1041–1042) (2010): 24, 25.
- Живковић, Никола. *Ратна штета коју је Бугарска учинила Југославији 1941–1944*. Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 1985.
- Casanova, José. „Religion, the New Millennium, and Globalization. Sociology of Religion.” Special Issue: *Religion and Globalization at the Turn of the Millennium*, 62 (4) (2001): 415–444.
- Кончаревић, Ксенија. „Православље и језичка глобализација.” У *Хришћанство и европске интеграције*, уредио Р. Биговић, 81–107. Београд, 2003.
- Јовановић, Зоран М. „Да нам буду јаснија питања наше вере и струке или о језичким недоумицама и њиховој злоупотреби.” *Теме* 36 (2) (2012): 887–903.

- Јовановић, М. Зоран. *Зебрњак. У трагању за порукама једног споменика или о култури сећања код Срба*. Београд и Горњи Милановац: Библиотека „Браћа Настасијевић”, Музеј рудничко-таковског краја, Културни центар, Републички завод за заштиту споменика, 2004.
- Jovanović, Zoran M. and Jasmina Petrović. „On Certain Christian and Christianized Cults in Southeastern Serbia (An Example of Fostering the Cult of Miraculous Springs and the Cult of the Mother of God the Source of Life among the Inhabitants of Dimitrovgrad and the Surrounding Area).” In *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on the Border*, edited by D. B. Đorđević, D. Gavrilović and D. Todorović, 141–154. Niš: YSSSR, 2012.
- Јовановић, Мирослав. „Југославија, репарације, пропаганда, свакодневица, реклама, детињство... (неколико новијих наслова савремене бугарске историографије).” *Годишњак за друштвену историју* (1–3) (1998): 136–145.
- Калезић, М. Димитрије. „Нишка епархија.” У *Енциклопедија православља*, 1334–1336. Београд: Савремена администрација, 2002.
- Koljanin, Milan. „Један покушај уједињења Југославије и Бугарске (1939–1940).” *Istorija 20. veka* 1 (2001): 55–63.
- Kuburić, Zorica and Milan Vukomanović. „Religious Education: The Case of Serbia.” *Sociologija* 47 (3) (2005): 229–255.
- Кулић, Димитрије. *Бугарска окупација Србије 1941–1944*, том I–II. Београд: 1992–1993.
- Kuljić, Todor. „Titova nacionalna politika.” *Istorija 20. veka* (2) (1977): 141–173.
- Лилић, Борислава. „Бугарска егзархија у нишавској епархији.” *Лесковачки зборник* (33) (1993): 181–186.
- Mateljan, Ante. „Postmoderna i teologija. Postmoderna svijest pred teološkim питањима i odgovor teologije na postmodernu religioznost.” *Crkva u svijetu* (4) (2002): 387–409.
- Митровић, Андреј. „Питање стварања југословенске државе као међуратни проблем у рату 1914–1918. године.” У *Стварање југословенске државе 1918. године*, уредио С. Терзић, 21–38. Београд: Историјски институт, 1989.
- Митровић, Момчило и Слободан Селинић. „Југословенска информбироовска емиграција у источноевропским земљама, 1948–1964.” *Токови историје* (1–2) (2009): 31–54.
- Pavlica, Branko. „Razgraničenje Jugoslavije s Bugarskom.” *Tokovi istorije* (1–2) (2002): 7–23.
- Петровић, Јасмина и Зоран М. Јовановић. „Жељуша (Димитровград).” У *Село у пограничју источне и југоисточне Србије*, приредили Драгољуб Ђорђевић, Бура Стевановић и Драган Тодоровић, 237–262. Београд: Службени гласник и Завод за проучавање села, 2012.
- Пириватрић, Срђан, прир. *Историја Бугарске*. Београд: Clio, 2008.
- Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, Dragana. *Religioznost i tradicija. Vezanost za religiju i crkvi u Srbiji na raskršću milenijuma*. Београд, 2006.
- Радомир, В. Поповић. *Православље на раскрићу векова*, Београд: Богословски факултет СПЦ, 1999.
- РЗС. *Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова у 2002. Становништво. Национална или етничка припадност. Подаци по насељима*, књига 1. Београд: РЗС, 2003а.
- РЗС. *Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова у 2002. Становништво. Вероисповест, матерњи језик и национална припадност. Подаци по општинама*, књига 3. Београд: РЗС, 2003б.

- РЗС. *Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова у 2011 у Републици Србији. Становништво. Старост и пол. Подаци по насељима*, књига 2. Београд: РЗС, 2012.
- РЗС. *Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова у 2011 у Републици Србији. Становништво. Вероисповест, матерњи језик и национална припадност. Подаци по општинама и градовима*, књига 4. Београд: РЗС, 2013.
- Stojiljković, Miroslav. „*Bugarska okupatorska politika u Srbiji 1941–1944.*” Београд: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989.
- Stojčev, Vanče K. „Bugarska u pripremanju za okupaciju Jugoslavije (prilog proučavanju 'velikobugarske ideje' 1939–1941).” *Istorija 20. veka* (1) (1994): 177–193.
- Шмеман, Александар. „Суштинско питање.” *Хришћанска мисао* (6–8) (1993): 2.
- Шмеман, Александар. *Наш живот у Христу. Христов живот у нама*, Избране, досад необјављене беседе, есеји и студије. Београд: Мисионарска школа при храму Светог Александра Невског, 2007.

### PHOTOGRAPHS



Ph. 1. Priest Aleksandar Djordjević at home





Ph. 2. Father Aleksandar at the service, the church of St. Parascheva, the village of Smilovci (the archive of Mr Djordjević)



Ph. 3. Father Aleksandar with a nun and parishioner after service in the Monastery of St. Demetrius (the archive of Mr Djordjević)



Ph. 4. Father Slobodan with parishioners outside the Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Dimitrovgrad – the second from the left



Ph. 5. The Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Dimitrovgrad





Ph. 6. Parish House in the courtyard of the Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Dimitrovgrad, the home of Father Slobodan today



Ph. 7. The gravestone of the first priest with service in the Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Dimitrovgrad



Danijela Gavrilović  
Marija Cvetković

## **A PRIEST ON THE BORDER – TWO SIDES OF A COIN (Babušnica)\***

---

On the basis of all the research into the trust in social institutions conducted in the last few decades, the SOC emerges as the institution which enjoys an undivided trust from the citizens, and one would expect it to exert a significant influence on various aspects of social life. However, when the trust in its priesthood is concerned, the level is drastically lower (Гавриловић 2013). This phenomenon is caused by a number of factors which link the fate of the SOC with the fate of traditional churches at the beginning of the 21st century, the ones which are exclusively connected to the dogma and practice of the Serbian Orthodox Church, but also those which are exclusively connected to the personality of the priest. Traditional churches today face a decreasing number of believers, which makes the role of the priest even more responsible, with their activity being one of the key reasons for the discontinuation of this process. The massive numbers of believers of traditional churches and a relatively weak personal contact between a priest and his congregation could be the reasons behind the fact that traditional churches are the biggest losers in the secularization processes (Hamilton 2003).

### **THE ROLE OF THE SOC PRIESTS TODAY**

Let us start with the analysis of Weber's theses through which he assigns the following characteristics and functions to the institution of the priest: he possesses a charisma in service which does not have to originate from personal traits, he follows the rules of the church and is a part of the church hierarchy, and he is directed toward the every day life of believers (Вебер 1976). We must contextualize these general characteristics and link them to the situation which is connected to the particularities of the organization of Orthodox churches, and a service in the language which is not the native one, but also to the general social affairs both in Serbia and in the border regions.

Under the conditions of a dominant presence of traditional faith, a parson usually visits the homes of believers several times a year, the religious practice including the regular presence at liturgy is at a low level, and the situation in the border regions which relates to the distance from the centre and poverty is only further complicated by depopulation.

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

## **A PRIEST ON THE BORDER**

Our research task dealt with the activities of a priest in the border regions, in our case with a priest who works in the municipality of Babušnica. The completion of this task led us to the following dilemma – should we interview the priest who serves in Babušnica which is the centre of the religious life and who arrived there only recently, or interview the priest who has spent his entire life in Ljuberađa in the vicinity of Babušnica, where religious life is almost completely extinct? We realized that a story about the religious and human life in this region would not be complete without both sides of the coin, without the stories from both priests. Both pictures present parts of the reality in Serbia and carry the characteristics of a small town on the border between Serbia and Bulgaria.

### **A PRIEST IS A PRIEST, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT HIS NAME IS**

Both priests welcomed us heartily and warmly, the younger one in the drawing room of the new and spacious parish house, while the elderly priest first showed us the neighbouring houses where only a few of the oldest residents still lived, with many of them empty, before leading us into a decrepit parish house. The problems which we encountered trying to make contact with a priest in Babušnica, a small town in the vicinity of the Bulgarian border, are indicative. Namely, no one knew the name of the priest, the people told us that “a priest is a priest, it doesn't matter what his name is.” This is the first indicator of the closeness of the congregation and the pastor in this part of Serbia, and we believe that it represents a general trend in the majority of towns and villages.

Nevertheless, we made contact with the young priest, who started serving in Babušnica only recently, owing to the generosity of the officials of the municipality of Babušnica, which again speaks volumes of the relation of the authorities toward the representative of the SOC. We got in touch with this young parson over his mobile phone number. We received a recommendation to also talk to the parson who had spent his entire working life in the vicinity of Babušnica, in Ljuberađa, and who enjoyed his retirement in the parish house next to a small and pretty church. We got in touch with him by calling him on his landline telephone. These two priests display two images of religious life in the municipality of Babušnica, and in the border municipalities in general. We leave it to the readers to decide which of these two images has a greater potential for becoming the dominant one in the future.

We visited both of these priests on Sunday and attended the liturgy. The pretty church of “Saint Nicholas” and the even prettier parish house are located above Babušnica. In front of the nicely decorated church, which is relatively new as we have gathered, and a stately parish house, there is a board with the inscription which says that these buildings were funded by the state of Serbia. We could not find any signs of life around the church some fifteen



minutes before the liturgy, however, around thirty believers appeared right before the its start. It was interesting to see that there were some young children among them, and what was also unusual was a small choir which followed the priest's service actively. They knew the words of the songs and the course of the liturgy, meaning that they were there often. There was no liturgy in Ljuberađa on that same day, and not only on that Sunday, the situation has been the same for years, with an elderly person visiting on a rare occasion, even at the great Christian holidays. The priest opened the church for us, telling us that he was the only one still visiting the church and serving the liturgy despite the fact that people hardly ever attended it, usually forced to come and pray for someone's health.

Babušnica left an impression of a sleepy small town where the activity which we observed in the church belonged to rare signs of life, while only some ten kilometres away Ljuberađa felt completely eerie and reminded us of a setting for a long-finished film. Empty houses on high street, multi-storied, empty shops of former craftsmen, showed that this was a lively settlement once.

## **TWO SIDES OF A COIN – THE YOUNG PRIEST IN BABUŠNICA**

The priest who serves in Babušnica was born in 1984 in Zavidovići, Zenica-Doboj Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He married recently and he is expecting offspring. He completed secondary education, the Serbian Orthodox Theology school "Saints Cyril and Methodius" in Niš. He is a final year student at the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade. He was ordained in 2012. He has been living in Babušnica for only six or seven months now. A pretty, new parish house is located next to the church in Babušnica and he lives there with his wife. His parish encompasses Babušnica and several surrounding villages.

"There are some village priests, but I cover the larger part here. I cover this here, so to say, the town of Babušnica and maybe half of the villages. The other half is covered by a retired priest, who still serves."

The church in Babušnica was renovated some five or six years ago, and there are no newly-built churches. He is satisfied with the relationship that he has with his colleagues and the Bishop of Niš Jovan (Mladen Purić, secular name).

The very beginning of the priest's story illustrates the quality of religiosity in this region.

"The church was derelict and renovated only five or six years ago. The last priest who served here did that during World War II. And he was taken by the Bulgarians into custody or something similar. The story goes that he managed to escape and move to another region, under a different identity. And so on. And there was no service in this church since then, up until some six or seven years ago. The-

re is a church in the village of Draginac. There is a church where service was performed even during the communist era, having in mind that it was merely a continuation of some form of church life. The people here are only now returning to their patron saints. Every day there are new people who are coming with the desire to register for the patron saint that they would like to celebrate: they don't know what a saint's day is, what it implies. When I ask somebody: What saint's day do you celebrate? They say: I celebrate the first of May. They mean if they sit down to eat, drink – that is a saint's day. They are only now returning slowly. There were a couple of State Security Administration officers here who were very strict in spreading their ideology. Thus, people were often beaten up, incarcerated, and the like. They were scared to death. And then it was easier for the people who feared something to just put it aside than to risk it all.”

The attendance in the church is the biggest when great Christian holidays are celebrated, especially those which are the most common patron saint's days. He says that the attendance is constantly increasing. He believes that the reason for the low level of religiosity in this region lies in the political situation during the times of socialism.

“Since communism was highly prominent here in its most terrible, most adverse form for the church, the people are still recuperating from it. Back then, in this region in particular, it was practically forbidden to perform service.”

When he describes the composition of the congregation, he talks about women being the majority within churchgoers. There are a lot of children, which we noticed too. He says that religious education conducted in the primary school is the main reason behind it. In religious education, he sees an opportunity for the revival of religiosity and transfer of religious values.

“Perhaps women come in greater numbers. There are a lot of children too. This is thanks to religious education. Religious education is the chance for the return of the faith to the people, for the people to once again come closer to the church. Because children learn about religious topics in the church. I bring them here from time to time. They learn a song or two, and they are glad that they can participate in the church, sing what they have learned in class, and see what we have talked about in practice. So, there are children here, too, thanks to religious education. If there were no religious education, there would hardly be any children here.”

The education structure of the congregation is varied, there are no rules, there are educated and non-educated people of different professions. The church is visited by Serbs, Bulgarians, and Roma. The priest notices different manners of religious practice in relation to the ethnicity, even though

all of the believers are Orthodox, regardless of them being Bulgarian, Serbian, or Romani.

“The situation is pretty colourful here. Apart from Serbs, there are a lot of Bulgarians who come here, too. And I think that they are even more active than our people. There are also a lot of Roma who come here. And they, too, stick to every word that the priest tells them. And they are more prone to accepting correctly what the priest tells them to do than our people. Because when I tell them ‘it is so and so’ they know that ‘it is like that’ and there’s no other way. They take what they like, what seems agreeable and mystic to them. However, the majority of the believers are Serbs.”

It is also interesting that Roma and Bulgarians adopt patron saints and start celebrating the days dedicated to them. They are all equal in the church and there are no prejudices and divisions which stem from different ethnicity. Serbs as the majority accept believers from minority groups.

“As far as that is concerned, there are no prejudices in the church. Really, people proceed one after another, they take communion from the same spoon. At least I haven’t noticed that someone detests anyone else. Perhaps, but only to the smallest extent, do children divide among themselves in the school. One sits with someone in particular, the other one also. That kind of division. But I haven’t noticed nothing of the sort in the church. Bulgarians have accepted everything that we Serbs do. They even celebrate patron saints more than our Serbs do here. And exactly as they are told. However, if one wants to analyze it more profoundly – according to some people – the majority of the Bulgarians living here have Serbian origin. Numerous people have told me that during those hard times a lot of Serbs changed their surnames from –ić to –ov. And some of them remember that two or three generations ago they were of Serbian origin. Something like, his grandfather’s tombstone reads –ić, and he is now –ov. They say: I am Bulgarian. So, there’s that also. Perhaps a lot of them inherited their patron saints from those days, from previous generations, before they became Bulgarians. Then again, there are some who take their patron saints after our people.”

In an attempt to comprehensively display the type and forms of religiosity present in this region we asked about the presence of local particularities, pagan and secular flavours.

“A kind of a cult related to food for the deceased is particularly present here. The people take some food to the graveyard, put down plates for the deceased, for them to eat, too. There is an empty place at the table during lunch for the deceased, and it is filled with a piece of everything that is served, like – take some of this, take some of that, etc. There is a lot of that.”

The priest believes that the only way to uproot this practice which is deeply embedded in Serbian folk religiosity and to bring believers closer to church religiosity can be found in the education of younger generations in the spirit of the SOC.

“We priests fight against it as much as we can, but it is very hard. So, the chance again lies in the younger generations being served everything the way that it’s supposed to be. They can hardly correct their parents, but they will know when they grow up what is right and what is proper. Perhaps, the only way would be to forbid people from doing that. To put an end to it all and to say that there’s no other way. But one can hardly forbid something here. I can’t do it as a priest. But who can? Maybe the local authority or something like that.”

We asked the priest if there were any religious customs specific for this region. He said that he himself tries to note them down, but that the depopulation of the villages causes religious rites and customs to disappear.

“There are religious processions, but people have nearly abandoned them. I have dealt with that topic recently, trying to note it down while there are still people who remember it, to have it written down somewhere. The surrounding villages are desolate now, temples have come to ruins. Partly because of the elements, partly because of the people. Apart from those temples, there are two or three of the kind that they call ‘crosses’. One cross is called the Mother of God, another is Peter’s cross, etc. And then people gather there for those holidays, light candles, pray. But this was the case back in the day. Now even that barely happens.”

The young priest believes that religious freedoms have brought about the opportunity to practice and revive religion, particularly in this region. The multinational environment contributes to tolerance.

“Maybe it is a positive side that people learn tolerance, because from the church standpoint we are all God’s people, regardless of the nation, colour of skin, etc. And where there are more nations living in a single community, these aspects are more pronounced and people are more aware of the fact that they have to live together with one another, and that they are all equal in a way.”

This is a positive aspect of his service in Babušnica. However, the border regions hide underwater rocks of communication for different ethnic groups.

“There is this, if I can call it, mortgage of history which causes people to be burdened by some things where certain Serbs talk about being killed by Bulgarians whenever there was a trouble, a war going on. I’m sure Bulgarians speak in the same vein. So there is that thing certainly.”

Life on the border can be a double-edged sword in relation to the sustainability of national identity in his opinion:

“A double-edged sword. Where the situation is pretty mixed, or where an even small number of some other nation, its members are present, there is a possibility that its identity will disappear. But if the ratio is fifty-fifty, there, in my opinion, this national identity grows stronger. Because everyone wants to preserve their own and to be identified against the other because of it. That’s why a lot of people often take up the faith, etc. Not because of the faith it-self, but exactly because of that national identity. However, here in this region, in Babušnica, I think that the identity is disappearing, rather than becoming stronger. Because here Bulgarians, Serbs, and Roma have merged somehow and nobody pays much attention to who is who, even the Serbs who have taken up Bulgarian surnames and are aware of that fact do not care about being this or that. While that other case is present in some other regions such as Bosnia, where Serbs, Muslims, and Croats are clearly delineated. And they stick firmly to these divisions in their own national communities.”

He singles out the language as the most endangered part of the identity of the majority. When we talk about the identity of the minorities, he believes that they have enough guaranteed rights, but that assimilation is an inevitable process.

“I think that our state grants enough rights to national minorities, and I can’t see them being endangered. Now, the mere fact that they live among the majority of some other population, that they themselves try to adapt somehow to the majority, maybe that is where some discord, so to say, may be found. Some form of assimilation has to exist.”

He notices that national identity is not a priority in the lives of the people. It is not a part of their active life strategy. Such data can also be found in quantitative research (Гавриловић 2013).

He does not agree with such processes. He believes that one should work on the preservation of elements of Serbian national identity. He is more sensible to the sustainability of this than the identities of the minority populations.

“Well, for one thing it’s the language, cultural heritage, customs, tradition. That is something that has kept our people alive through some other times when the national identity was endangered. But I feel that the people our now slowly losing the battle. Mainly due to globalization. People simply don’t care anymore. It’s the battle for mere survival. People are only thinking about how they can earn some money, survive, and then they don’t care about being this or that.”

He cooperates with the authority. There is no difference related to cooperation with the right-wing or left-wing orientation. They are all equally open to cooperation and help. They are aware of the significance that the church enjoys. The young priest is aware of that as well.

“We cooperate. They help with what they can, concerning the renovation of the church and maintenance. They are usually full of understanding. Whether it is so because of the political points or something else I don’t know, but they do help. If it is widely known that the church is the institution which enjoys the greatest trust from the people, then they know it too. But I don’t see anything bad about giving the church the position that it already occupies in people’s lives with such a high percentage of trust, that only means that the church should be respected as something that people truly trust in. It is the same people that constitute this state.”

There are no other religions in his parish. Though, an odd case is sometimes mentioned. Yet, that is a rarity. There is no organized religious life of other religious communities. Although today he is not in such a position, he nevertheless used to cooperate with priests of other confessions, and teach religious education with them in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were no problems. They had, as he calls it, a “common language”. True believers communicate easily (Šušnjić 1998).

The people from this region succeed in life with difficulty, even though they do not lack the abilities that the people from other parts of Serbia have.

“If they have a smaller chance of success it is because we are quite remote here, this being a dead-end of the country, etc. But I don’t see the multinational environment being the reason for that here, it is more the poverty, the small number of voters. That immediately means smaller investment, etc. Talented children certainly have less opportunity.”

He thinks about the causes of backwardness and underdevelopment of border regions, about demographic emptying. He tries to find the causes. He identifies industrialization as the main one.

“I have thought about it a lot, since all of the villages in the surroundings are almost completely empty. The main reason was industrialization. Meaning that industrialization brought the masses from villages to these, let’s call them, slightly bigger centres, small centres like Babušnica. And then later on, when those companies closed down, people moved on to bigger centres such as Niš or Belgrade. So nobody returned to villages. They left their property devastated. People usually think that way: if I return now, I’ll need a couple of years to get it all back to the former condition. They don’t have the funds for that, etc. So, industrialization was the initial reason for pe-



ople to move from the villages, and then this economic crisis when all these companies started shutting down. They are leaving the villages even today. They come here to bury their father or their mother, for example, and then they go back again.”

He is aware of his role and he is trying to find a way to contribute not only to the religious but also to the factual salvation of this region.

“All I can say, I can say during my service. Because if I do my part of the job, my service the way it’s supposed to be done to enlighten the masses and spiritualize them, etc., I consider that doing a great thing. So, if everyone else does the same thing in their own profession, the best, the most honest thing, that should be good enough then.”

### **A PRIEST ON THE BORDER – THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN**

The priest who serves in Ljuberađa which is only ten kilometres away from Babušnica greeted us in an unbelievably beautiful natural setting, in front of a small church and a decrepit parish house. Two worlds only ten kilometres away. There was no liturgy that Sunday, there are almost none these days. We were rare guests to stop by, and the priest and his wife found our amusement at the nature there as a mockery of sorts. They told us that it is difficult to live in such loneliness even though the nature is so pretty, and that they remember the times when everything was full of people, pupils in the nearby school, and that now all has died out. Ljuberađa is not completely depopulated, although the number of people is dwindling rapidly, there are still some young people, yet none at church.

The priest was born in the village of Donji Sarač, in the municipality of Bujanovac, the district of Vranje, in 1940. He now lives with his wife, his daughter and son having started their own families, and he has two grandsons and one granddaughter. He emphasizes proudly that his children have gained higher education.

He finished the secondary school: “The school of Theology in Belgrade in Karaburma. And I also finished high school.” He was ordained in 1963.

At first, he served for several years in Veliko Bonjince, then moved to Ljuberađa in 1964 to the church of “Saint Nicholas”, where he has remained until today, for some 45 years. The parish house is his family’s home. He is the witness of changes and the disappearance of a specific world. His parish encompasses the villages of Berduj, Bogdanovac, Brestov Dol, Valniš, Vrelo, Gorčince, Grnčar, Dol, Linovo, Ljuberađa, Radinjince, Strelac, Studena. Apart from the church in Ljuberađa, there are churches in the village of Gorčince – a temple dedicated to Saint Parascheva of the Balkans, Strelac – the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and Studena – Saint Nicholas.

Wanting to see for ourselves whether the processes of the revitalization of religion were present as the trend implied, we asked him about the newly-built churches only to find out that nothing is being constructed, but that the church in the village of Gorčince was renovated and now under the pro-

tection of the state. Yet nothing is being built, as he says, “there’s none to build them for.”

The priest points out to various problems, but the major ones are those which relate to finances.

“There are none. Maybe only two children born in the last ten years here. And not only that, there are villages like Studena, Vrelo. That’s two. Dol, that’s three. Brestov Dol, four. Bogdanovac, five. Linovo, six. They never ask for the priest, not for funerals, not for saints’ days. They bury themselves. They’ve just started, they are alone and there’s no one to do it. They gather by themselves, and bury the deceased in the front yard. The last time someone died there and they asked from Modra Stena for somebody to go there and dig the grave. There’s no one to do that. They bury themselves, I tell you, without a priest, without anything.”

He rates his cooperation with other colleagues and the bishop as good. He has not had an opportunity during his working life to cooperate with priests from other churches, nor has he met them. There are no members of other religious communities in his surroundings, they are all Orthodox.

The decline of religious life, which is above all conditioned by demographic decrease, is the strongest impression and the key to the explanation of all spheres of life, thus the religious one, too.

“There are only few left. On Sundays sometimes and holidays. One or two persons come. There is a man here from Gorčince who used to be a regular visitor. Now he is sick, too. One died, one got sick. So there are none left. I perform service on my own, for the sake of the service itself. Apart from that, there are no visits.”

The rare believers remember religion only when they are in need of something, in some sort of a crisis. These are usually the elderly. There are some younger people in Ljuberađa, but they do not go to church. When asked to describe the believers who go to church, the priest replies: “Well, the elderly. Or when someone is sick, they come to say a prayer.”

There are no differences as far as gender is concerned. The impression about the ethnicity and religious practice is interesting, though. This priest also says that the members of other ethnic groups practice their religion more diligently than Serbs.

“These are Serbs. There are no Bulgarians here. There are Bulgarians in Babušnica, the ones who moved there from Zvonačka Banja. Here are only Serbs. There used to be some Roma living here, but some died, some moved out. When they were here, they went to church, they were Orthodox. They respected their faith more than our Orthodox did.”

The priest claims that there is no ethnic animosity. He has never noticed such a thing.

“No one chases Roma away when they come. They are Christians, Orthodox, so nobody chases them away. None of the other believers. They celebrate their patron saints, the Roma, and other Orthodox people visit them. Weddings. When one of them organized it, he was a teacher, and all of the Serbs went there. He married a Serbian woman.”

Religious processions and other customs have died out. Saints' days are now celebrated more freely than during the socialist era. It is also interesting that the priest (and our other interviewees to whom we talked about other matters) emphasizes repression and rule of fear in this region during the times of socialism, probably because this is a multiethnic border region. The people were wary of priests and they treated them badly. They were calling priests names. This caused the religious customs to die out, too. Villages used to celebrate their saints' days. People would gather around, spread a white sheet, and prepare lunch together, usually near the cross which represented something sacred. The celebration. Then a State Security Administration officer would run his horse over the meal. People would get terrified. In the nearby village of Grnčar a church was demolished. They tried to tear it down during the service so that the priest and the gathered believers would die. The priest believes that these are the reasons behind today's lack of churchliness in people, “they are disaccustomed”, he says. Now things are completely different, but there are much less “folk”, the priest laments. Today the authorities cooperate, the president of the municipality visits the church.

There are no other religions in the parish. They are disposed rather adversely toward Protestants, Adventists in particular.

“There's none here. None. Some Adventists appear now, Saturday worshippers. They appear. Only the police drove them away. We informed the police about them and they drove them away. They distributed books for free. There's this one man, but he doesn't do anything, in Gorčince. He got married. He brought some woman from somewhere and she was an Adventist. So she later converted him, too.”

Since he did not move around a lot during his serving time, our interviewee did not have the opportunity to cooperate with priest from other religions.

Assessing the reasons of depopulation and dying out the priest says: “It is miserable here.” He believes that only those who cannot leave stay behind. The youth leave to gain education and never come back. This has traditionally been the region of migrant workers from which the working force has constantly drained away.

He thinks that there is not much that priests can do. They can baptize people without any compensation and that is what they do. Sometimes even in a group, without any compensation at all. He does not believe that there is anything else that can be done.

### **RELIGIOSITY IN BABUŠNICA – DYING OUT AND A NEW LIFE**

On the one side – in a quite small, but still a proper town, there is a renovated church, a new and pretty parish house, a young enthusiastic priest and a small flock of believers, full of children. On the other side – in a village, there is an empty church, an aged priest, a decrepit parish house, and depopulation which hinders any form of life, even religiosity.

Perhaps, the best diagnosis was given by the priest's wife from Ljuberađa when she was seeing us out: "Now priests are offered more, and who would even consider coming here if the conditions were not good."

It seems highly unlikely that religiosity can be revived and brought under the wing of the church, as our interviewed priests would like, at least as unlikely as it will be to renew the border region in the municipality of Babušnica, whose greatest problem is depopulation.

### **REFERENCES**

- Вебер, Макс. *Привреда и друштво*. Београд: Просвета, 1976.  
Гавриловић, Данијела. *Доба употребе: религија и морал у савременој Србији*. Ниш: Филозофски факултет, 2013.  
Hamilton, Malkolm. *Sociologija religije*. Београд: Клио, 2003.  
Манић, Форски Драгослав. *Лужница – монографија у слици и речи*. Београд: Спринт, 2001.  
Тодоровић, Драган. *Лужница – Географски приказ*. Врање: Клуб младих уметника "54", 2009.  
<http://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babu%C5%A1nica>  
Šušnjić, Đuro. *Religija*. Београд: Ћигоја, 1998.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. In front of the church in Babušnica



Ph. 2. The priest during his service



Ph. 3. In front of the parish house in Babušnica



Ph. 4. The priest from Babušnica – family





Ph. 5. Interview



Ph. 6. In front of the church in Ljuberađa



Ph. 7. The priest in the church – Ljuberađa



Ph. 8. Next to the church





Ph. 9. In front of the parish house in Ljuberađa



Ph. 10. The priest with his wife



UDK 316.74:271.222(497.11 Crna Trava)-725-662

Suzana Marković Krstić  
Aleksandra Kostić

## **THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CLERGY IN THE BORDER AREA OF CRNA TRAVA\***

---

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

*The Bible,*

The First Book of Moses or Genesis 2005: 2

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper addresses a very important socio-psychological issue of the role of the priests in the border areas of south-east Serbia, with a special look at the activities of priests in the field of Crna Trava. Priests, in addition to teachers, have always been respected as preservers of tradition, the cultural heritage, religion and customs among the Serbian people. The significance of their activities in the border region of Crna Trava is especially emphasized due to the excessive depopulation and the aging of the ethnically homogeneous population. The municipality of Crna Trava, based on data gathered during the last census (2011), has only 1.663 inhabitants spread over 25 villages with an average population age of 53,7 (RZS 2011, 460-461), while in 1948 there were 13.614 inhabitants living there. As a result, depopulation and aging, due to a low birth rate and intense migration, are the basic characteristics of the inhabitants Crna Trava from the mid-20th century which lasts to this day.

The migration of population from the villages around Crna Trava during the post-war period referred primarily to the working male population, and then to entire families who left their home towns. Thus many villages were left without any biological potential, any young and reproductively able members of the population. At the same time, the dominant influence of the socialist idea, the realized and encouraged process of secularization, have co-

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

ntributed to the “distancing” of people from the church and the clergy, leaving the churches “empty”, void of any believers. While, on the one hand, due to their search for work and a more secure existence, the inhabitants of villages and village domiciles left the area, on the other the increasingly smaller number of parishioners have been distancing themselves from the representatives of the church and their faith. The result has been the lack of ability of the clergy to perform its spiritual activities and activities revolving around enlightenment, the closing down of churches and the departure of the clergy.

Changes after the 1990s and the new social context have contributed to the reverse process – the return to the church, the celebrations of patron saint days and practice of religious customs, which has gained a positive but also a negative connotation. The positive connotation is reflected in the renewal of churches, the revival of the spiritual and traditional, where special emphasis has been placed on the socio-psychological dimension which marks the renewed gathering and integration of families, cousins and friends during local or family patron saint day celebrations, while the negative connotation can be recognized in the current trend of individual relationships towards celebrations. Namely, due to years of the break with “the past”, a price is paid in the sense of a lack of knowing about tradition, in the form of celebrating patron saint days in an altered, unsuitable form (the family patron saint day, instead of being joyous and dignified family occasion, a time to remember one’s ancestors and an expression of the desire for happiness and the health of the descendants, is now turning into a trendy party) (Bojić 2009, 7).

This paper starts out with the hypothesis that priests in the border areas can, through their activities, contribute to the cultural and spiritual development of the people living there, the acceptance of the reproductive model which includes the birth of more children, all in the context of the preservation of the family, tradition and faith as the axes of social life.

### **THE CLERGY: BELIEF IN THE SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT OF CRNA TRAVA**

On Lazarus Saturday, April 27, 2013, one of the authors of the paper<sup>1</sup> interviewed the bishop’s deputy in Vlasotince, Zoran Stojanović and the priest Hadži Milorad Maksimović in the parish house (ph. 1 and 2), next to the church of the Holy Spirit in Vlasotince (ph. 3). Even though they were in the final phase of the preparation for the liturgy (an event which was supposed to bring together around one thousand people and children from Vlasotince in the vicinity of the church), they participated in the conversation with their full attention and with respect. This was not the first time that the author has met with these priests. The first meeting with them and introduction to their dedicated work was in the churchyard of the St. Nicola’s church in Crna Trava, on the day when the village celebrated the Martyr Prokopije on July 21, 2012 (ph. 4 and 5). They officiated the liturgy in this church (which is curre-

---

<sup>1</sup> Suzana Marković Krstić, PhD.



ntly undergoing reconstruction) for the first time in more than seven decades and they were performing a group christening for around eighty inhabitants of Crna Trava and their guests (ph. 6).

The bishop's deputy in Vlasotince, Zoran Stojanović, was born November 4, 1951 in the village of Grajevac, which is a part of the municipality of Leskovac and the Jablanica district. He has two married daughters, a son and two granddaughters (ph. 7). He earned his degree at the orthodox seminary of The Holy Hierarchs at the monastery Krka near Kistanje in the Šibenik-Knin county. He was ordained in 1976, and has been living in Vlasotince since 1980, where the parish home is located. He is the priest in the following village parishes: Crvena Jabuka and Crna Trava (along with Milorad Maksimović) and in four churches: the church of St. Constantine and St. Helena in Crvena Jabuka (Babušnica), the church in Dobroviš (Vlasotince; ph. 8 and 9), the chapel in Rakov Dol (Babušnica), the church of the Holy Spirit – the Holy Trinity in u Kalna (Crna Trava).

Priest Hadži Milorad Maksimović was born October 23, 1954 in the village of Donje Korminjane, which is located in the municipality of Kosovska Kamenica in the Kosovo-Pomoravlje district. He is not married and has no children. He earned his degree at the seminary in Belgrade, was ordained in 1993, and has been living in Vlasotince since 1989, where his parish home is located. He is the priest in the village parish and four churches: the church of St. Nicolas in Crna Trava, the church of St. Panteleimon in Brod, the church of the Ascension of Our Lord in Dobro Polje and the church of the Holy Ascension of Our Lord in Krivi Do.

In their parishes there are no newly-built churches that date after 1991, and the most frequently encountered technical and material problems which the clergy face are accessing the remote locations where the parishioners live (physical inaccessibility), the lack and inaccessibility of the local roads, poor traffic infrastructure. During and after World War II, as Zoran Stojanović mentions, the final members of the clergy were banished from the border villages of this area, leaving the places of worship, which in turn went to waste over time, due to a lack of upkeep, and the inability to renovate them.

“Priest Sima Ivić, born in Crna Trava, was the parish priest from 1930 to 1941. After the Bulgarian occupation started in Crna Trava, he wouldn't sign the agreement to carry out church services in accordance with the rules of the Bulgarian church or sign a document stating that he was Bulgarian. For that reason he was banished from Crna Trava and never resumed service there. From 1947 to 1956 he was a priest in Predejane, and later in the village of Rudare near Leskovac. The Bulgarian authorities, after the departure of priest Sima Ivić, brought in a Bulgarian priest, who soon left the service in Crna Trava, when he realized that all the people there celebrated their family patron saint days and St. Sava. He realized that the people of Crna Trava were Serbs, and not Bulgarians, as he had been informed prior to his arrival in Crna Trava” (Stanković 2006, 550-551).

After World War II, all of the churches in the municipality of Crna Trava and even further than that ceased performing church services. Most of the churches were torn down by the Bulgarian soldiers, the church books were burnt, and the remaining churches over time caved in on themselves.

Although there are no newly-built churches in the area of Crna Trava, the inhabitants of some of the villages during the end of the 20th century got organized and with the help of the state restored the churches in: Brod, Crna Trava, Dobro Polje, Rupalj and Kalna. Thus, backed by the decision of the (then) orthodox Christian bishop of the diocese of Niš, Irinej (in 2006), approval was given for the place of worship of St. Panteleimon in Brod (which was restored in 1995) to be declared a monastery (ph. 10).

On the issue of the collaboration with his colleagues and other priests from the neighboring parishes and the entire diocese, priest Zoran Stojanović points out: “It is customary for us to work together, due to the nature of our work, usually once a month, here there is a sense of unity, but ‘up there’ here is no socializing, there is no one to work with ‘up there’ – you’re on yo-ur own.” “Up there” we are isolated, alone... Milorad Maksimović also lives here – he doesn’t live “up there”. In Crna Trava we are usually together”. So, when there are church council meetings which include the participation of a great number of the clergy there is intense cooperation and communication between them. However, in the case of Crna Trava, as well as the other churches in the villages which are suffering from depopulation, as a special problem we need to emphasize loneliness, and not only of the members of the clergy.

The relationship between the bishop’s deputy Zoran Stojanović and priest Hadži Milorad Maksimović with the bishop Jovan Purić II, PhD (his given name is – Mladen) is exceptionally good. Namely, even though hierarchically conceived of and organized, it is based on mutual respect, and understanding.

The parishioners in Crna Trava and its surrounding area attend services during the big religious holidays, usually during the bigger village patron saint days. Once a year, the inhabitants of Crna Trava and their children and relatives living in other regions and more distant cities take part in liturgies, so “the church comes alive”. The service then is attended, according to Zoran Stojanović, by a great many people:

“This summer there were more than 150 people in Crna Trava, and more than 100 in Dobroviš in Crvena Jabuka more than 100, and around 50 people come in the other places. These are primarily people who have moved away. Otherwise, during the year, especially in the winter, the number of people visiting the area is very small. Usually the more educated people come to church, doctors, professors, teachers and children; in the afternoon there will be more than 1000 children here, the churchyard will be full. The Roma come as well, they are also orthodox Christians – there are no others, they have been introduced to the faith and they come on Good Thursday and on patron saint days, rarely coming on other days. The older people rarely come, we don’t have as many elderly people, they can no longer come, usually the younger and more educated people come.”

Considering the fact that the members of other minorities cannot really be found in the ethnic structure of Crna Trava, we can only conclude that the Serbs make up the majority of the believers in the parishes where Zoran Stojanović and Milorad Maksimović serve, and that to a lesser extent we also “find” the Roma.

The believers who are not Serbs are not very different from the other orthodox believers in the church. On the one hand, the members of the clergy carry out religious ceremonies and celebrate holidays with them in the same way as they do with the Serbs, and on the other hand, the Serbian believers accept the others “as their own”, without any difference and without any divisions into “us and them”. That is why priest Zoran Stojanović makes the following point:

“We cut the cake for them just like for any of the other believers, both for the Serbs and for other believers (mostly the Roma population). Everyone is tolerant of them, although it would not be correct on my part to say otherwise. It is better for us to help them and keep them in the orthodox faith than for them to join a sect. We hold on to them and help them because we do not want to do more harm than good, if we don’t help them— we make two evils out of one (poverty), we would be letting them join other groups for some small sums of money or a pack of cigarettes. The Roma are God-fearing, they are respectful – we never separate them from our other believers. At the same time, the Serbs do not avoid them, on the contrary, our people are even more tolerant of them than of their own people. They are orthodox Christians, they share the same faith as we do, have the same names. Here, in this environment, and even wider, as far as I know, there are no problems; in this environment there are no rejections, no one is shunned, humiliated and I am not painting a pretty picture here, it is all true.’

The priests Zoran Stojanović and Milorad Maksimović are very active during the celebrations of the local holidays and the performance of religious ceremonies. The parishioners are eager to invite them to various celebrations, patron saint days, weddings and christenings, but also to political rallies, as well as to production facilities or their family homes to bless or cut the patron saint day cake. Furthermore, they are welcome guests at schools during the traditional school patron saint day (St. Sava). This is how they maintain their relationship with their flock, which for them, and for the flock, has both a social and spiritual significance. They mostly go to the villages in the parish in their own cars, even though “poor roads or even a lack thereof” is one of the reasons of their scarce meetings with the inhabitants living in more remote villages. Thus priest Zoran Stojanović points out:

“Wherever there is need of a priest, not only me, but other priests as well, wherever we are called, that is where we go. Any celebration is made complete through the cutting of the cake. During the celebration, or a political gathering, we as the clergy as summoned to bless

the proceedings. Anyone who wants to, calls us to attend these events – we refer to them as *new festivities*, unlike the *old festivities*, renewed celebrations beneath the cross, church processions. When the church processions were renewed in the villages, water is blessed and the cake cut. Many young children come then, there are more young people who are very interested in what is going on, much more so than the older ones. This happens in *living villages* where there is renewal, where there is a steady birth rate. In those villages there are many people, especially young ones, who take more part in the ceremonies.

Many people celebrate patron saint days here. They are very important for priests, both in a material sense and for maintaining contact with the believers, with the families. It is a permanent and unavoidable bond between the priest and the believers. We have lists of people who call us and expect us, we enter their homes. Here in Vlasotince we go to the homes of at least two thirds of the town, but not as much in the “upper” part. Not as much in Crna Trava... There are no people “up there”. I used to perform baptisms in Crna Trava once... Now we go to Brod for each St. Panteleimon day, and just this summer on July 21st (Prokoplje) we attended the reopening of the church in Crna Trava after seventy years, and we also visit the schools. We had two weddings of the younger inhabitants of Crna Trava. Five-six years ago we married them in Brod. We were supposed to baptize two children, but there were no means to do so and so on their birthdays we baptized them and that was the first christening in Crna Trava. I came to Crna Trava as a young priest, and there were much more people there at the time, now only a few of them are left. Now we are called to funerals. Mostly we are called by the more educated people to the funerals of their parents. The other older people rarely call us.”

When the priest Zoran Stojanović compares the earlier period of marginalized faith and that of today, when the religious communities are free to act and religious life is renewed, he points out significant differences. While in the post-war period there was persecution, disrespect, even punishment of those who celebrated their patron saint days, practiced religious ceremonies and went to church, today the situation is quite different. He thinks that the more significant turnover occurred after the social-economic changes and the introduction of the multi-party system after the 1990s, which were key to the development of a more tolerant relationship of the “non-believers” towards the believers, towards various religions and members of religious communities, but also for a higher degree of tolerance in the other spheres of social life.

“There is a certain increase in the population nowadays, an improvement (increased interest in the church and for religion). What is important are the political events during the 1990s, as well as the introduction of the multi-party system. Those who had not celebrated religious holidays before are now finding their way back to the church. There are more and more young people attending church. After

all the political turmoil you can tell that there has been a change among the people. A freedom has been given, and a man can now choose. It is our responsibility to do as the Apostles tell us. The church traditionally does its work and we, the clergy, do our tasks. We do notice and increase among the younger generations and educated people. There has always been tolerance among us, but with the dissolution of the one-party system, the tolerance towards believers has increased. No one is persecuting anyone else. No one has the right to convince you of anything, I too as a priest do not have that right. On the other hand, faith is not a problem for anyone, nor is it an obstacle for gaining employment, if one is a believer it does not mean that he cannot be a doctor or a professor, or that he will not be given a job. Those times are far behind us. This means an improvement in every respect, at least in this area.”

The memories of priest Zoran Stojanović include more positive experiences of serving in the border areas were noted, when the young priest, along with other priests, would visit the homes of the parishioners during religious holidays. He is especially fond of the memory of visiting Crvena Jabuka, on the day of St. Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena (June 3):

“When I was a young priest we used to go to Crvena Jabuka, we would go each year on the day of the Holy Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena while there were families who celebrated it. We didn’t need much to have a celebration at that time. I remember a breakfast eaten on a tree stump, consisting of canned food and bread... However, the people have moved on... Since I’ve been the priest here, no child has been christened, no songs for it sung...”

As far as his negative experiences related to his service in the border area are concerned, priest Zoran Stojanović points out that he had not had any, thanks to, on the one hand, the fact that the people in this area are very peaceful, hardworking, honest and God-fearing, and on the other hand, his attempts to listen and understand each man in his parish. He notes that during World War II and after its end there were cases of persecution, even the murder of priests.

“When I first came here not a lot of people were interested. Even though I am quite sociable, friendly, priests were not very welcome at that time. I personally never had any problems, but there were extreme cases. During and after the war there were problems. In 1942 a priest from the church in Brod<sup>2</sup>, who was a descendent of the impe-

---

<sup>2</sup> That all of this data are correct is confirmed by the following text: “The first and final priest until 1995 in Brod – Nikolaj Špakovski, was born in 1893 in Russia. He comes from a family of counts and is a descendent of the imperial Romanoff family. He came to Vlasotince in 1919 and was educated to become a priest. Based on the plans for the Serbian Orthodox Church dating from 1924, priest Špakovski was ordained as a deacon in 1924 and became a priest in the parish of the Church of Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena in Crvena Jabuka. He went to the church in Dobro Polje in 1926. He came to Brod in 1930 and stayed there until 23/24. 2.

rial family of the Romanoffs, was shot by partizans in the vicinity of Gradište. The priests in Dobro Polje, Kalna, Crvena Jabuka after the war had to have special passes from the police in order to complete and perform religious service. We never encountered such problems.”

In the case of the relationship with the local authorities, the priest mentions that there was exceptional cooperation and mutual understanding. In the local communities, people make agreements and organize themselves, so that the initiatives to renew a church in certain villages are more frequent (in Kalna, Krivi Dol). Thanks to that, some churches have been renewed (Brod, Dobroviš, Ruplje, Dobro Polje), while some are undergoing reconstruction (Crna Trava). There is excellent cooperation with the president of the municipality, which is reflected in the joint attempts to realize the plans to renew the churches in Crna Trava and Kalna. As far as the representatives of political parties are concerned, he did not want to single anyone out:

“Why should I single anyone out and say that they are more worthy? The church is mother to us all, that is why it should give to everyone, to all the children. When a mother has a healthy child who is developing well, and the other is sickly, not developing properly, she wants the other one to prosper as well, she helps it; she does not love it any less, on the contrary – she even helps it more. Let them accept the ways of the church, the church has nothing to do with it. *The church comes first, then the family, then work and finally money.* A person can have a large salary and lots of money, but that does not mean that he will be happy...”

In the parishes where Zoran Stojanović serves there are no other religions being practiced except the orthodox Christian one, there are no other Christian confessions in the area so we cannot speak of any conflict with any other religions in this area. It is believed that there is no reason that could explain any conflict at the inter-religious or inter-confessional level. It has been pointed out that difference is not an obstacle for cooperation, quite the opposite, it could be a reason for greater understanding at the inter-confessional level. He points out that he has a catholic friend Ilija Torbica, whom he met through a priest serving in Leskovac and Niš. He had a close friendship and cooperation with him in everyday life, outside the church and religious context.

Apart from Ilija Torbica, he mentioned his cooperation with a businessman from Italy Nutricato Fiorentino, who built a modern factory in Vla-

---

1942, when he was apprehended by partisans, convicted and executed by firing squad in Gradište (Lopušnja) on 28. 3. 1942. Under the pretext that they found hidden guns and ammunition in the church in April 1944, the Bulgarian army tore down the iconostasis and all the icons, broke the bishop's desk and threw it into the Vlasina river. Finally, they set the church books on fire. They also set the priest's home of fire and all of the adjoining facilities. This devastated church the inhabitants of Brod locked up only for it to be demolished again in 1945. There were no church services held there until 1995, when the church was restored” (Stanković 2006, 558).



sotince and hired approximately eighty workers<sup>3</sup>. What is interesting is that this businessman, who is himself a catholic, opened up the factory with the blessing of the orthodox priest and in accordance with orthodox customs, and that he adopted St. Michael as the patron saint of the company.

“Fiorentino lives in Vlasotince. He has done wonders here. A very friendly man. When opening the factory, for the Catholic Christmas he handed out gifts to everyone, and then adopted St. Michael as the patron saint, and today he cuts the patron saint day cake in accordance with the orthodox tradition.”

Based on the priest’s experience, life in the region of Crna Traa has its advantages, but also its disadvantages, which refer to the possibility of the personal, group or general development. The advantages can be recognized in the “vicinity” of the border with Bulgaria and another country in which, viewed from this side of the border, better solutions could be found for the poor financial situation of the people living close to the border. On the other hand, “crossing” the border has a negative demographic consequence, which is manifested in the form of depopulation, the aging of the population and finally, villages without any inhabitants (a demographic breakdown).

“Crvena Jabuka is closer to the border than Crna Trava. From the church yard you can even see the border. The shortcoming of this area is depopulation. This is clear to all of us. A Bulgarian can cross the border without a rifle, and even if he did enter Crvena Jabuka – he would not meet anyone. I went to the quarry up there and saw several people, and when I reached the church in Crvena Jabuka, I didn’t come across anyone. Naturally, any type of cooperation is good and should exist. I will recount an event which will illustrate this, which has actually been recounted in the books. One of our more wealthy parishioners gave as a present a Gospel made of iron to a church near the border, a Bulgarian church. He paid ten or twelve gold pieces for it, and when he later went to visit this church in Trn, they did not welcome him as they should have and he like every Serb took offence and took back his gift, returning it to Crvena Jabuka. That is proof that there was some kind of cooperation, proof that it existed even back then. He gave them around ten gold pieces, and we ignore the rest of the story. There is also something connected to Kalna... The church is on a hill, and when the bell rings, it can be heard in Trn, since the border is only a few kilometers away. If there is no one on the other side, if there are no people, who are you going to cooperate with – you can’t build a relationship with noise. The basic problem is that there is no one to communicate with, for decades no

---

<sup>3</sup> During the 1990s Nutricato Fiorentino came to Vlasotince, the owner of the Italian company Grupo Fiorentino, and set up a production facility for ready-made clothes. He opened a modern plant in Vlasotince and hired approximately 80 textile workers. This company makes coats, suits, pants and shirts for world renowned brands such as Timberland, Trussardi and Gucci. Grupo Fiorentino exports the complete production line to Italy and then sells it around the world.

children have been born, there is no one to have children with. I wish there were, at one time there was much cooperation... it is a shame for this country, for our part of the world, that we have experienced such a demographic demise, that there are no christenings, no people, no children... visiting those areas I hardly met anyone, in the spring, fall, winter, there is no one there. Only during the summer do I see someone who has come to enjoy a few months out of their retirement. There have been attempts at cooperation, a quarry was established, and that is the only place you can see people.”

One of the possibilities for human survival in this area would be the opening of more jobs in the wood industry, the opening of a production facility for organic food. The survival and development of the parish is also based on the encouragement of the people who live close to the border to stay on the border, not to leave their homes, and start and keep their families and raise numerous offspring. In its system of values, the family has the most dominant significance, right after the church, also including children (one for the state, one for the home, and a third for God).

“If there were some kind of wood processing facility, if in this area we could be provided with a source for providing a living for people, *my role would simply consist of encouraging those people to have large families. This is our role, we have a social role to play. The church comes first, then family and the birth rate, then one’s job, money. The church should encourage people. It has a moral dimension to it. Our future lies in the family, in posterity.* That a man and woman have two, three or five children. Great minds were not born as only children. Not in situations where there was one, which is almost the same as not having any at all, but somewhere where there were numerous children – as our elders used to say: one for the state, one for the home, one for God, a minimum of three. Primarily, our future lies with the family, in preserving the family as an institution, the basic cell, since society is only as healthy as the family is. The increase in the birth rate is very important, an increase in the number of children born is of the greatest importance, but without material support there are none, since the most costly product today is a child. There are so many mothers, women, there is such beauty there but they cannot raise children. Round here we are a cul-de-sac in a way, all the roads lead to Belgrade and Vojvodina, Subotica... All the gods, everything is there, as if it were Rome, and here we have nothing. How will these people traverse the road of life if they do not have the basic infrastructure, not to mention pavement. There is no way “up”. And let us not deceive ourselves – everyone is talking about our villages, villages, and when they need us we are not there. If you can’t reach a particular location, how are the people going to survive?”

As to the question of whether life on the border/the border area with other peoples and national minorities, religions and confessions, in their own opinion, is a form of wealth which needs to be nurtured, or is the greatest threat to the survival and identity of most peoples and minorities, the priest responds:

“I don’t think that it is a danger, it is more of a cultural wealth. They are also orthodox Christians and in a cultural and ethnological sense we are similar. That’s the wealth, that we belong to the same faith. I believe that generally speaking pluralism, a majority, always means wealth. Individualism is individualism, I am and our church is, for a community. And a community is only as good as it is healthy. We want a healthy community, to live in the Lord together. Even the Greeks emphasized that a healthy community means wealth.”

The priest Zoran Stojanović does not think that the identity of the Serbs, as the majority living on the border is endangered. He has no such experience. He does not believe that anyone is endangered in the Crna Trava area, since everyone can live in accordance with their cultures and ethnic norms and beliefs and “be his own man”. In order to preserve the national identity of the Serbs and national minorities in the border areas, it is considered that, in addition to faith, an important factor for the biological survival is the provision of material goods for human life. In addition, it is necessary to stimulate birth, build infrastructure and prompt economic development. These are, in his opinion, the corner stones for the survival of people in this area and not “a story of national minorities, since everyone will be better if the means for normal life will be provided.”

In the case of underdeveloped border areas – especially the depopulated villages and the depopulation of entire regions – it is believed that the reasons are multiple, including among other things poverty, underdeveloped infrastructure and low birth rates.

“There are learned people who attend church and village patron saint days. On those days an entire village will celebrate on that day near the church. In addition to the religious, spiritual content, there is also a cultural manifestation. We have folklore and folk dances to preserve our cultural heritage. Once we finish our part, the children play, making it a cultural experience and manifestation.

To conclude our conversation: The apostle obeyed the Lord – he did not trick man like Eve tricked Adam – that is obedience. Monks and bishops insist on the Lord having given everyone freedom and saying – all sorts of prayers are positive, people can find themselves in their good deeds; if a man feels love for his faith and what he does, for something, he will be successful in his activities.”

### CONCLUSION

People want to understand themselves and the world they live in. They seek meanings, explanations and the definition of life. At a certain time, in a certain location and in a specific culture people form their view of the world. For some people, priests can be active participants in this process. In accordance with the role they have been assigned, priests can help us understand the important segments of life, offering the idea of the unity and cooperation, altruism and empathy, offering a stable social support system

for overcoming stress and emphasizing, primarily through their activities, the values of *equality, and humanity*.

The conversation with priest Zoran Stojanović has confirmed our expectations of his involvement in things based on the complete and full understanding of the way of life of people in the Crna Trava area. Fully aware of his social and spiritual role in all this, in a, by all accounts, specific region, led by values of *equality, internal harmony, salvation of the soul and happiness*, he does not divide people into believers and “non-believers”, “us and them”, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, living on this or the other side of the border. Zoran Stojanović, actually, manages to find a balance between the interaction between social-historic and current social factors on the one and individual-developmental experiences of the individual on the other. He knows that both intrinsic and extrinsic religion function as an effective psychological mechanism for the regulation of interpersonal relations and intragroup cooperation and orientation, independently of whether religion is the product of man’s evolutionary adaptation (theories of evolution) or of something else.

Even though priests are often ascribed with a lack of understanding of everyday life and a greater awareness of the spiritual dimension of life, our analysis of the conversation with Zoran Stojanović indicates his extraordinary ability to note and understand people in the Crna Trava area. He has both sympathy and empathy for their problems, needs and interactions. Thanks to his social skills he is able to maintain, nurture and keep up good social contacts with all the people in the area, independently of any of the differences between them. Priest Zoran Stojanović also knows that verbal promises are not sufficient for gaining people’s trust in this region. He does not accept the role of an “observer” and instead attempts through his activities (in accordance with his faith in God and the positive outcome of what he is doing), to guide people towards the solution of their problem, where there is special emphasis on the significance of cooperation and reproduction of the population which is the basis for the biological survival and social-economic development of this area.

The interviews with priest Stojanović has rekindled the faith in the importance and benefit of dealing in general human values, within merely superficially various social entities.

### REFERENCES

- Бојић, Миладин. *Српске славе и празници*. Београд: Завод за уџбенике, 2009.
- Валчић, Даница. „Црква Светог Николе у Црној Трави.“ У *Власотиначки зборник 2*, приредили В. Стаменковић и др. Власотинце: Културни центар, 2006.
- Ранковић, Љубомир, ур. *Библија. Стари завет. Прва књига Мојсијева која се зове Постање*. Шабац, Ваљево и Београд: Глас Цркве, 2005.
- РЗС. *Старост и пол. Подаци по насељима*, књига 2. РЗС: Београд, 2011.
- Станковић, Срећко. *Брод. Село код Црне Траве*. Београд: Културно просветна заједница, 2006.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. The conversation with priest Zoran Stojanović in the parish home in Vlasotince (Lazarus Saturday, 27. 4. 2013)



Ph. 2. Priests Zoran Stojanović and Milorad Maksimović in front of the parish home in Vlasotince (Lazarus Saturday, 27. 4. 2013)



Ph. 3. Priest Zoran Stojanović in front of the church of the Holy Spirit in Vlasotince (Lazarus Saturday, 27. 4. 2013)



Ph. 4. Priest Zoran Stojanović at the first liturgy after 70 years in the church yard in Crna Trava (St. Prokopije, 21. 7. 2012)





Ph. 5. Priests Zoran Stojanović and Milorad Maksimović in the churchyard of the church in Crna Trava (St. Prokopije, 21. 7. 2012)



Ph. 6. A group christening in Crna Trava (St. Prokopije, 21. 7. 2012)



Ph. 7. Priest Zoran Stojanović and his family at his daughter's wedding in the church in Vlasotince (20. 7. 2006) (his daughters, son-in-law, wife, son and granddaughter)



Ph. 8. Priests Zoran Stojanović and Milorad Maksimović in the church in Dobroviš (The Assumption, 28. 8. 2012)





Ph. 9. Priest Zoran Stojanović in front of the renovated church in Dobroviš  
(The Assumption, 28. 8. 2012)



Ph. 10. The temple of St. Panteleimon in Brod near Crna Trava (renovated in 1995)



UDK 316.74:271.222(497.11)-636  
316.74:271.222(497.11 Surdulica)-725-662

Ivana Ilić Krstić  
Vesna Miltojević

## **ABOUT PRIESTHOOD IN THE BORDER MUNICIPALITY SURDULICA\***

---

### **GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BORDER MUNICIPALITY SURDULICA**

Surdulica is in a region of southern Serbia, in Pcinjski district on the state border with the neighboring Republic of Bulgaria. TO the south it borders with the municipality of Vranje and Bosilegrad to the west with the municipality of Vladicin Han in Pcinja's District, in the north with the municipality of Crna Trava in the Jablanica's District. The municipality is located in the basin of the river Vrla, in the Masurica's field and partly on Vlasina's upland in the upper basin of the river Jerma and Bozicka. Surdulica's municipality ranges over the border with Bulgaria with a length of 42 kilometers, an area of 628 km<sup>2</sup> and an altitude of 475 meters to over 1,500 meters above sea level. The town leans on high mountains Vardenik (1875m) and Cemernik (1638m) (Strategic Development Plan of Surdulica 2007-2011).

The town of Surdulica is located in the eastern part of the Masurica's pit on both sides of the river Vrla, the right tributary of the South Morava river. In a place where Vrla comes out of Vardenik's gorges and then flows through Masurica's valley, the settlement Surdulica was built. The settlement terrain has a noticeable slope to the northeast and southeast. The space can be recognized by its visual values, characteristics and remarkable landscape beauty.

Up to the eighties of the 19th century Surdulica was a compact village with three smaller areas: top, bottom and Gypsy area. Then Surdulica developed rapidly since it became the center of Masurica district. Surdulica became Moravian town type and established the fourth area – Bazaar. After World War II, with regulation of the rivers Vrla Romanovska, in 1958, it develops rapidly and the settlement gets industrial look. Starting from the 1960. it gets new areas with names: Vlasina's road, Masurica's road, Romanovska's road, Suvojnica's road, Kupinska's mahala, Bazaar mahala and Gypsy mahala. The town is formed in line with the roads concentrated in the center of its borders, with a defined center. Based on the evidence of its regular structure street and block form, the settlement was formed according to a plan.

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia (179013)*, carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

According to the census 2011<sup>th</sup>, 20319 inhabitants, 10059 men and 10269 women live on the territory of municipality of Surdulica, in total 6517 households. Period between the two censuses of population decreased by in 1871. Out of the total population of 10915 (53.72%) live in Surdulica in 3475 households, and 9404 (46.28%) of the residents in the surrounding neighborhoods, mostly villages in 3042 households (National Statistics Office, 2011). Surdulica and whole Pcinja's area is a multi-ethnic community of Serbs, Roms, Bulgarians, Albanians, Vlachs, Gorani, Yugoslavs, Hungarians, Macedonians, Muslims, Russians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Ukrainians, Croats and Montenegrins. According to census data from the 2011<sup>th</sup> as well as in the whole Pcinja's area the most common ethnic groups are Serbs, Roma and Bulgarians (Радушки 2013, 24). The municipality has a 16233 (79, 89%) Serbs 2631 (12,95%) Roma, 734 (3,61%) Bulgarians (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012, 86-87). The largest population of 86,61% said his Christianity. Of these 86,40% Orthodox Christians, Catholic 0,08%, 0,07% Protestant, and 0,06% others (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2013, 52-53). Based on statistical indicators the increase in population can be seen in the period 1948-1991. Surdulica, then shows a decrease until 2002. and an increase of only one resident according to population census in the 2011<sup>th</sup>.

### **RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IN THE MUNICIPALITY SURDULICA**

There is a number of religious buildings in the municipality of Surdulica. The oldest building, with the features of monument is a monastery in the village of Paglia, built in the 12th century. In addition, the church in Mackatica, Vlasina's Reed and Kolunica from the 18th century, and the church in Jelasnica and both temples in Surdulica are from the 19th century. The St. George temple in Surdulica was restored in 2002. All objects have cultural, historical and environmental significance. According to the priesthood it is necessary to build a new church near the Surdulica's, industrial zone which would serve about 700 homes, and the majority of existing religious facilities need renewing and upgrading.

There are two churches in Surdulica, the Church of St. George and St. Panteleimon. Church of St. Panteleimon was built in the 19th century on the foundations of the church of St. Roman visited by Kanitz on his journey. According to his record the church was built of trahida, 10 m long and 6 m wide, with walls 90 cm thick and a semicircular apse (Каниц 1985). Church of St. George is placed in a southeastern part of the city, not far from the center. It was built in the period 1895-1897. with contributions of the citizens of Surdulica. It was consecrated on St. Archangel Michael Day in 1897. when it started to work (Koprivstica-Surdulica: Bridge between states). On the land where the church is located, there are also: Administrative building, the old tower that has been converted into a room for the lighting of candles and the green open spaces – recreational areas.



Table 1

Religious buildings in the municipality of Surdulica

<b>Settlement</b>	<b>Name</b>
Surdulica	Church of St. Pantelejmon Church of St. George
Jelasnica	Church of St. Virgin Mary
Suvojnica	Church of St. Trinity
Vlasina Rid	Church of St. Elijah the Prophet
Bozica	Church of St. Peter and Paul Church St. Nicholas
Kostresevce	Church of St. Archangel Michael
Klisura	Church of St. Trinity
Strezimirovci	Church
Topli Do	Church of St. Procopius
Palja	Church of St. Virgin Mary
Kolunica	Church
Mackatica	Church
Kalifer (kod bolnice za TBC)	Church

Source: Strategic Development Plan 2007-2011 of Surdulica

**INTERVIEW WITH NEBOJSA STOJADINOV  
PRIEST FROM SURDULICA**

The interview with the priest Nebojsa Stojadinov was conducted in the Surdulica's church of St. George, before the biggest orthodox holiday, Easter 2 May 2013th year, on Thursday (ph. 1 and 2).

The interview was supposed to start at 11 hours after the morning service, but the morning service led by priest Stojadinov lasted longer and was ended by the appropriate priest's speech on the eve of the biggest Orthodox holiday. The priest finished his service with speech about the finding of our inner peace and serenity, because only when we find the peace we are good to ourselves and others and the Lord God. However, clerical work was not finished with the speech. After the service people one by one came to the priest to confess on front of the altar. We were asked to leave the church and wait outside as to not disturb the act of confession.

The most interesting fact was that almost all the believers who confessed were under thirty years of age apart from an elderly woman in black, especially because the confession as a "sacrament" has long been marginalized in Orthodoxy (Благојевић 1995, 84-86).

After finishing the act of confession, the priest took off his robe and came to shake hands with me and after that we started the interview. A middle-aged man, who humbly prays for his flock without a hint of pride in the singing and addressing God in this holy day, even before the interview began had left a strong impression on me. The warmth and cordiality in the voice of

this man show that the priesthood entirely suits him. We sat in front of the dormitory church and started a conversation. Prepared according to the instructions, I asked the priest to say a few words about his previous life's journey.

“I was born in Surdulica in 1971. years, my parents are originally from Klisura, a village located on the border with Bulgaria. When I was only six months of age, my parents moved to Belgrade, father had a construction business as usual for people who are originally from this area. So I was able to go to school for priests in Belgrade.”

However, according to the priest Stojadinov, “man proposes, God disposes” and fate brought him back to his native homeland and Surdulica, where he still works and lives with his family (ph. 3). His wife, professor of Serbian language, is also from Surdulica. They have three children: a nine-year old daughter and two sons, 7 and a year and a half old. He talked about his priestly fate and the start of service in Surdulica.

“After the enthronement of Bishop Pachomius Vranje in 1994. year, I began to attend lectures held this clergyman, after acquaintance there was a friendship and the Bishop suggested I go back and take in Surdulica parish. After my wedding, namely August 31st 2003, I was ordained a deacon and then a priest, and since then I have been doing the priesthood in my hometown Surdulica.”

### **ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS OF SURDULICA'S PARISH**

According to priest Stojadinov, Surdulica's municipality itself has five parishes, one is pure country and four are combined, each priest has the part of the city, a village near the town and a remote mountain village in his parish.

“I must emphasize that the bishop Pahomije of the Vranje's parish made this kind of division among the clergy, so everyone is equal and no one is privileged by the proximity of the parish, but all priests have the same treatment by the Bishop.”

There are fourteen churches and a monastery in the municipality. There are two in the town, twelve in the villages and one monastery of the 12th century which is located on the border with Bulgaria, Presentation of the Virgin, known popularly as “Palja”.

The priest said that new churches hadn't been built since 1991. in spite of the clear need for new facilities. A growth in the number of believers who attend church is seen, especially after the regime change in 2000. The reconstruction of the town church of St. George, in which he held liturgy that day, had begun 2002 and was finished in 2006. This sanctity got a whole new look according to the priest. The church tower, which was located outside the church, burnt down in 1996 and at the suggestion of the Bishop the new was built within the church (ph. 4).

“Local authorities have helped to restore the ceiling as much as their financial capabilities allowed, most of the costs were submitted by ministry and the church itself. The donations of good people help also.”

According to the priest's observation, the difficult economic situation in Serbia is felt in all segments of society. The Serbian Orthodox Church is not immune to these economic ills. She is faced with many material difficulties, from the impossibility of construction of new buildings for which there is really a need, to the inability of even the renewal of existing ones.

### **COOPERATION AND QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PRIESTESS**

Stojanov is unhappy with the general situation in the Serbian Orthodox Church. In his opinion, the various statements, apologies and slanders among the clergy create an ugly picture of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a relationship between the clergy weakens its reputation and the people's trust. On the other hand, situation on local level is completely different. He speaks of his colleagues with a lot of respect and has nothing but praise. Their cooperation is not only a professional, they are also friends. They often play basketball together because this is a form of recreation. He praises Bishop Pahomije, not only as its spiritual leader, but also as head of all his fellow priests.

“I have good and collegial relationships with all my colleagues. I can emphasise friendship with Serbian Mufti Muhamed Jusufspahić junior. I don't judge people according to their religious beliefs, the most important is the kindness that people have in them.”

### **PEOPLES OF SURDULICA'S PARISH AND THEIR RELIGIOUS LIFE**

In the words of the priest Stojadinov, believers are members of all demographic structures. Surdulica, as a border municipality, is characterized by having members of the Bulgarian national minority in the area, but in the religious sense the differences are minimal because the Bulgarians are Orthodox Christians. As the priest says the only difference is the Gregorian calendar which is accepted by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the manner of execution of some parts of the liturgy. Among the believers there are a lot of Roma. According to him, not all members of the Roma population are baptized, but most of them are Orthodox Christians. He continues that there are villages around Surdulica in which all Roma are of the Orthodox religion.

“A few years ago a favorable climate was created and all Surdulica Roma were ready to be baptized and accept Orthodoxy. However, this did not happen because of conflicts among the clergy on this issue, and the Roma community abandoned this plan.”

The majority of the congregation, according to the priest's observation, are the middle-aged, and they are the most regular at liturgies, while older people are generally present in the Church at the largest Orthodox holidays. Regarding the educational background of believers, there are all profiles without any exceptions or rules, which was not the case under communism. State officials were not part of the religious community, which has changed today.

“Today people are more free to express their religion. After the 2000th the number of believers who visit the liturgy has increased. I do not consider this momentary or trendy, because it is not for me to judge what is the relationship between the believer and God. I'm just a broker who has a duty to direct the believers to the right path, and every reason leading man in the church is a good reason.”

Prevailing believers are Serbian nationality, followed by Roma and Bulgarians. Among members of different nationalities there is tolerance, good communication and cooperation, the church also has the same treatment to all its believers. Holidays are celebrated in communion with a lot of tolerance and understanding in the words of the priest. Customs are discussed with a touch of religious skepticism, because he believes that local people give too much importance to customary beliefs than the Orthodox church practices. As an example, the importance of the position of the towel in the act of baptism, which in church's practice does not have any role. Regardless of this view he still shows the importance of customs to preserve the identity of the people, especially in border multinational environments.

### **CHURCH AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The church has always had to cooperate with state institutions, sometimes more, and better, and sometimes less and worse, depending on the time and the political situation. The experience of priest Stojadinov is that the church had a very good cooperation with the previous government, during whose mandate the reconstruction begun in the Church of St. George. He particularly emphasized the role and work of the previous mayor Dr. Stanislav Momčilović, who was the most responsive to the needs of the church and provided maximum financial assistance.

“The present government is either lacking in understanding or money for the needs of the church. Today, the local government provides financial support, probably in accordance with their capabilities, but there were far better times. I want to emphasize the cooperation of the church and clergy with the local population to rebuild churches. A good example is the involvement of villagers in rebuilding the church in the village of Ghat 7 km from the Bulgarian border. An important role was played by the President of the local community within the organization of church renovation in this village.”

## **OTHER RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE MUNICIPALITY SURDULICA**

In the municipality of Surdulica according to the priest Stojadinov apart from Orthodox Christians there are so called Sabbath Unions, namely Adventists from the order of Protestant churches. The church and believers are free to operate in the city, have their own church premises and the priest comes once a week from Leskovac to maintain services. Stojadinov continues that the believers are Serbs from Surdulica and there are ten to twelve of them. He says that there are also Jehovah's Witnesses, "who come from Leskovac and try to preach their teachings from door to door."

As far as the cooperation with the leaders of other religions and denominations is concerned the priest speaks with a lot of respect, their meetings are full of tolerance and understanding, but also formal and not substantial. They usually meet at the celebrations of national holidays or local events. The priest is particularly proud of its long-term friendship with the Serbian Mufti Muhamed Jusufspahić younger. He speaks of him as an extraordinary man and a friend. He speaks about the activities of sects with a certain distance. He believes that their action is present but it is far from being effective in this region where the deep roots of Orthodoxy and the Serbian tradition exist.

## **ABOUT THE LIFE AND WORK ON THE BORDER**

Stojadinov believes that living and working in a multinational environment is a real welth, "because we are all equal before God." Although Surdulica municipality is a multinational environment, there are no major religious differences due to the fact that both the Serbs and the Bulgarians are Orthodox Christians. Religious intolerance is not present, colorful folklore contributes to the cultural richness of the area. According to the priest, the role of spiritual leaders and pastors is a very responsible and exalted task.

"A priest has to guide his congregation responsibly and carefully, since it has been entrusted to him by God. He must be familiar with the current events, who was born, who died, whether some adversities occurred and if somebody is ill. He also has to advise, comfort and guide his congregation."

Working in border areas has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are the diversity and richness of traditions, folklore and traditions, while the cons are more related to a geographic area relief. The area is mountainous and in some parts of the road infrastructure is poor and in the winter it is not possible to get to some of the villages and hold liturgies. He sees progress and development in this area through the cooperation of all institutions at local and national level. Stojadinov says that the strategy is needed which will actively involve all institutions in the promotion and development of this multi-municipality.

“I am particularly pleased with the fact that there are more and more young people who are religious and who attend church regularly, which is why we need to build another church at the exit of Surdulica towards Vladicin Han. The future of this region is in the nurturing of faith, tradition, folklore, language and even the cult of the dead that is so common among the Serbs.”

### CONCLUSION

The ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Serbia is very versatile as a result of turbulent past of the area. Serbs are the majority, while next to them there are 37 ethnic minorities. Population in Serbia is mostly Christian Orthodox. Serbian Orthodox Church, autonomous since 1219. has played an important role in the development and preservation of Serbian national identity. Romanians, Bulgarians and the majority of the Roma population are also Orthodox. Besides the Serbian Orthodox Church, there are also other religious communities in Serbia: Islamic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and others.

A spirituality of the population in the past was taken care of by almost exclusively religious institutions. Serbian Orthodox Church, which, especially in the period of Turkish rule, operated in extremely difficult conditions, had a key role in the preservation of national identity and the spirit of Serbian people. The few religious buildings (constructed mainly from wood or other available material) were subjected to arson and destruction, but people kept rebuilding and building new places of worship.

In the municipality of Surdulica Serbian Orthodox Church plays a dominant role in the preservation of national identity both Serbs and Bulgarians, Roma as well as Orthodox. Its most important role in the preservation of national identity in this region was during the rule of the Turks. Due to the loss of the state people kept their national identity through Orthodoxy. In the municipality of Surdulica, according to locals, there are many walls of Orthodox churches and monasteries, which were burned and destroyed under Turkish rule. Some have been restored to their original foundations, as a monastery, “Paglia” in the twelfth century. Many lost track because Turkish soldiers, by inhabitants’ telling, burned monasteries and then extracted stones from the ground and scattered them around the surrounding hills, to destroy the “roots of Orthodoxy” that was deeply rooted in the area. In this period of history, activities and role of the clergy in this area were probably limited, but no less important for the preservation of national identity.

The second period of limited activity of the clergy, refers to the period or after the two world wars. This period is characterized by formal religious rights and freedoms. During socialist Yugoslavia, where religion was constitutionally defined as a private affair of man, there was shocking falling in interest in the church and religious ceremonies. However, latent religiosity maintained in Serbian homes through a variety of religious and traditional ceremonies. At the beginning of the 80s of the twentieth century, the popula-



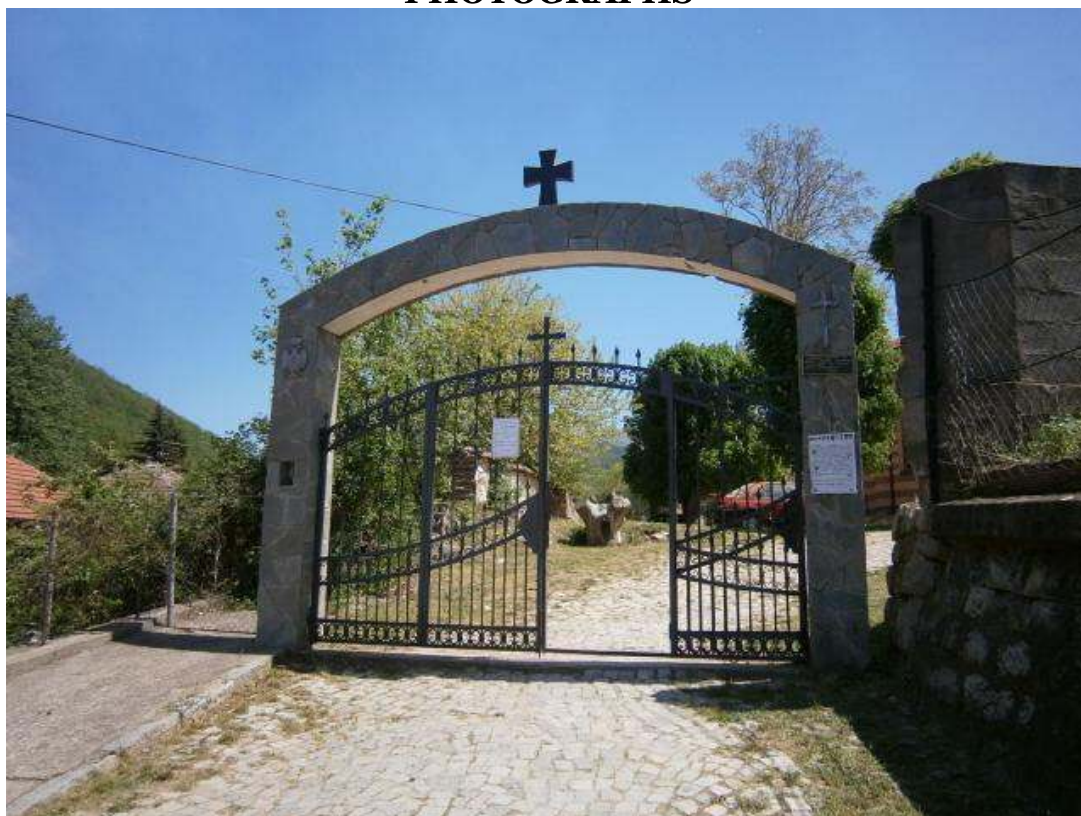
tion was noticeably coming back to church when it comes to renovation and construction of new church buildings. From this period, growing and strengthening the role and importance of the priest calls has grown and strengthened in the whole former Yugoslavia, and in the municipality of Surdulica as well.

Regardless what the Serbs and Orthodox Christianity are dominant in this region, the role of the priest is seen as the work of both, the spiritual growth and the promotion of a culture without violence, a culture of solidarity and tolerance, equality and partnership, genuine coexistence with others and close to others.

### REFERENCES

- Благојевић, Мирко. *Приближавање православљу*. Ниш: Градина и ЈУНИР, 1995.
- Каниц, Феликс. *Србија, земља и становништво од римског доба до краја XIX века*, књига II. Београд: Српска књижевна задруга и ИРО „Рад“, 1985.
- Радушки, Нада. „Национална припадност становништва Србије по попису 2011. године.“ *Српска политичка мисао* 20 (39) (2013): 11-28.
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. *2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia. Population. Ethnicity: Data by municipalities and cities*. Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2012.
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. *2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia. First Results*. Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011
- The strategic development plan for 2007-2011 Surdulica*.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. The Gate of the St. George church



Ph. 2. The Church of St. George





Ph. 3. Church shelter



Ph. 4. The Altar in church of St. George



UDK 316.74:271.222(497.11 Bosilegrad)-725:929 Stojanov Z.

Dragan Todorović  
Dragoljub B. Đorđević  
Neven Obradović

## ZORAN STOJANOV: A PRIEST FROM BOSILEGRAD\*

---

### ABOUT THE MUNICIPALITY OF BOSILEGRAD

A cross-border municipality of Bosilegrad is situated in the furthest southeastern part of the Republic of Serbia, in the Pčinj County, next to the Bulgarian-Macedonian state border (130km from Sofia and 200km from Skopje). In the north, it borders with the municipality of Surdulica, in the west with the municipality of Vranje, in the southwest with the municipality of Trgoviste, in the south with the Republic of Macedonia (9km in length) and in the east and southeast with the Republic of Bulgaria (54km in length). The highest mountain top is Besna Kobila mountain with its elevation of 1,992 metres. (<http://www.bosilegrad.org/sr/OBosilegradu.aspx>).

According to the census from 2011, the total population from 37 populated areas is 7,979. In the urban settlement of Bosilegrad, there are 2,530 citizens (31.7% of the total population), and other settlements are inhabited by 5,449 citizens (68.3% of the total population). The municipality of Bosilegrad is characterised by a vast demographic drain, and it is considered *an underdeveloped region* which is shaped by extremely poor infrastructural, material, economic and human resources (*the Spatial Plan of the Municipality of Bosilegrad*). The municipality sees its chance in the development of tourism, the production of healthy food and manufacture production, as well as in the strengthening of the international regional cooperation by implementing mutual projects with the Bulgarian municipalities (the town-twinning with the municipalities of Blagoevgrad and Kozloduy has already been done).

The urban centre of Bosilegrad lies in a spacious valley where the Božička River and the Ljubatska River merge and further flow as the Dragovištica River. The municipality also includes 36 rural populated areas: Barje, Belut, Bistar, Brankovci, Bresnica, Bucaljevo, Gložje, Goleš, Gornja Lisina, Gornja Ljubata, Gornja Ržana, Gornje Tlamino, Gruinci, Doganica, Donja Lisina, Donja Ljubata, Donja Ržana, Donje Tlamino, Dukat, Žeravino, Zli Dol, Izvor, Jarešnik, Karamanica, Milevci, Mlekominci, Musulj, Nazarica, Paralovo, Ploča, Radičevci, Rajčilovci, Resen, Ribarci, Rikačevo and Crnoštica.

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

## ABOUT FATHER ZORAN STOJANOV AND THE PARISH

Neven Obradović interviewed Father Zoran Stojanov in the rectory in Bosilegrad on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2013; the conversation lasted for three hours, between 12pm and 3pm. The priest showed a remarkable interest in the conversation and he answered exhaustively on the asked questions.

Priest Zoran Stojanov was born in 1967 in Bosilegrad (ph. 1). He has one male offspring (ph. 2). He graduated from the Faculty of Defense and Protection of the University of Belgrade<sup>1</sup> – now he is a student of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the same university. He was ordained a deacon in 2010, a priest in 2011. For a short period, he was also serving in the monastery of Holy Prohor Pčinjski.

The parish which is in his jurisdiction is officially called the Third parish of Bosilegrad, and it covers urban as well as rural territories and includes eight churches (ph. 3, 4 and 5). He boasted about the fact that four of them were built or renovated after the 1990s, when a return to religiosity started in the Serbian territories: in Donje Tlamino, a church dedicated to Saint George was built from the foundation up, just like the churches dedicated to Saint John of Rila and the Holy Trinity; the Church of Saint Pantaleon, which was near collapsing, has been rebuilt. There are 35 temples in the parish of Bosilegrad and the biggest problem, which the cult servants are facing, is a chronic deficiency in the necessary material funds for everyday maintenance.

“The most common technical and material problem is money. Considering the fact that we have 35 churches, if one dinar is put in each church, and being that there are 365 days in one year, you can see how large the expense is, and how much money we need.”

He cooperates very well with other elders from the parish; when needed, they help each other in their duties, especially with the visits to the rural areas, whose distance very often requires a whole day commitment. The obligations regarding ordinance do not leave much free time to socialise with the Orthodox clergy in the neighbourhood, the closest one being the parish of Surdulica.

He has harmonious relations with the Elder of the church municipality, Bishop Pahomije of Vranje, (Tomislav Gačić), mostly because the cooperation is strengthened by the fact that Father Zoran has a role of the secretary of the church and municipal governing board. Furthermore, he is willing to confirm that, during the whole 20th century, no one from the episcopal throne of the Eparchy of Vranje has done more for the church municipality of Bosilegrad than Bishop Pahomije!<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Now, this is a highly respected Faculty of Security Studies which is attractive for students.

<sup>2</sup> His claim about Bishop Pahomije Gačić is somewhat disagreeable with the prevailing opinions about him in the public. An interesting fact is that his words about Pahomije concur with the opinion of the pastor from Trgovište, Radovan Milošević (Đorđević and Zdravković 2013).



“I can freely guarantee that no bishop has done so much on the territory of the church municipality of Bosilegrad, if, of course, we exclude those years before World War One and Two and the Balkan wars in these areas. During his time, a new church in the village of Tlamino has been built; the Church of Saint Philip and the Church of the Ascension of the Lord in the village of Rajčelci have been renovated, as well as the cathedral in Bosilegrad, a further implosion of the Church of the Holy Trinity, an imposing object measuring 760sqm, in the village of Izvor has been stopped. The Church of Saint Philip in the village of Belut has been renovated, as well as the Church of the Ascension of the Lord in the village of Donja Ljubata, and the Church of Saint Archangel Michael in the village of Gornja Ljubata. As far as the church in the village of Paravo is concerned, the construction was started and finished all at once. The Church of Saint Pantaleon in the village of Rikačevo has been renovated from the foundation up. The Church of the Holy Trinity has been built in the village of Ploča. And as far as the organisation of the very liturgy is concerned, until 1992, you had to be very lucky to come across the serving of Liturgy, not to mention the morning and the evening service, vigils and the like. All in all, we have a good relationship and I am truly grateful to be able to cooperate with one such Archpriest.”

### **ABOUT PARISHIONERS AND A RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Without reaching out to precise statistics, but using a rough estimate, mister Stojanov says that the Municipality of Bosilegrad has around eight thousand inhabitants, out of whom more than a quarter fictitiously live at their home addresses: the reason is either the schooling of the young in big urban centres or labouring of the adults in Macedonia and Bulgaria. The urbane center includes around two thousand people. During the important religious holidays, the Cathedral of Bosilegrad is visited by a thousand believers – the visits are significant in the other churches in the parish as well. An entirely different situation occurs when the affiliation to Orthodoxy is to be confirmed during those days that are not “red-letter days” in the calendar: for example, you cannot count the regular visitors of morning and evening services on the fingers of both of your hands.

“As far as the Cathedral in Bosilegrad is concerned, during the important holidays such as Christmas Eve, Christmas, Good Friday or Easter, around 1,000 believers walk through the cathedral. We keep an approximate record based on the sold candles; on average, one believer lights between seven and ten candles and that helps us to see how many believers approximately go through the cathedral. As far as other churches are concerned, during important holidays, they are also very visited; the churches are full. Morning and evening services are the same as in the Church of Saint Marco in Belgrade; there are five to ten believers and there is nothing we can do. Well, actually, we can, but that requires a more profound performing of pastoral duties in the field and of our work as clergy and many other factors. But, if you

take a look at much larger towns such as Vranje, Vladičin Han or Surdulica, which have much larger population, and if we take into account that our budget is around 1,560,000 dinars, the attendance is more than we have expected.”

People with grey hair are the most zealous during liturgies. Their religious consciousness and practice was not clouded by the repression which was applied after World War Two, when the communist government rigidly sanctioned the mentioning, let alone the practicing, of religion. Today, many older people are joined by the young who were not shaped by the socialist ideology but by religion classes during their regular education. Women are in greater number than men.<sup>3</sup>

Priest Zoran is aware that the guilt does not belong exclusively to the inconsistent practitioners of Serbian Orthodoxy. Pastoral missions require a very committed work among the congregation and it should include more clergy, the lack of whom is present not just in his eparchy; a better financial support for the maintenance and functioning of sacral objects is understood. There are a lot of tasks and the most important step in their solution is the objective analysis, facing with the real condition in the field and the beginning of a long-term action regarding the restoration of the religious life among Serbian Orthodox population along the state border with Bulgaria.

A border line between Sofia and Niš, which includes the area of Bosilegrad, is referred to as “Krajište” (*the border region*) among the local population and it is characterised by a specific speech, culture and folklore. Nationally, the local people declare themselves as Bulgarians and that does not bring them any difficulties; they are even a majority. They live in harmony with their neighbours, the Serbs, and there is no record of any disputes based on ethnicity. For priest Zoran, both nations are brothers in the Orthodox faith and as such, he welcomes them equally in his cathedral. To some extent, however, the Orthodox believers from Bulgaria keep the religious life in Bosilegrad vital,<sup>4</sup> while religion appears as the mediating factor in the improvement of good border relations between the two states.<sup>5</sup>

“I can tell you one thing right now, in the last three years we have an increased number of visits by our brothers and sisters in Christ, from the Republic of Bulgaria; this started around 2009. Two to three buses arrive during the week, and if we assume that there are on average 40 people in one bus, that is not a small number. This probably occurs because there is a certain hunger for religion which is a consequence of even stronger discipline and repressions which were present in

---

<sup>3</sup> About the restoration of Orthodox religiosity more in: Dorđević 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Archpriest Rajko Glišović, the Elder of the Church of Saint Petka and a clergyman and administrator of the female monastery of Saint George in Temska near Pirot, has testified about the buses full of believers from Bulgaria visiting Serbian churches and monasteries. More about that in: Todorović 2013.

<sup>5</sup> This is contributed to by the good relations between Serbian and Bulgarian Orthodox churches, because there are no “open questions” between them.

Bulgaria during communism; and, partly, this perhaps comes from tourist motives. What I, as a priest, find very symptomatic is the fact that there are over 50, maybe even 100 people from Bulgaria who come to me to confess.”

Besides Bulgarians and Serbs, there are also Roma people among the more devoted parishioners. They live in Laloš Mahala and they receive a Christian Orthodox priest into their homes, while often trying to overcome their brothers in faith in certain forms of confessional expressions. As far as other religions and creeds are concerned, there are few Catholics and Muslims in Bosilegrad, as well as religious communities of Protestant origin, but their representation is minor and it does not undermine the predominance of Christian Orthodoxy.

The saints’ feast days of Saint Prophet Elijah and Saint Archangel Michael are celebrated in more than twenty villages, so the three pastors from this parish are hardly able to visit all the homes of believers. As a step forward in the believers’ habits, Father Stojkov has noticed that the hosts nowadays bring the cakes specially made for saints’ days to church for the cutting ritual, while, in earlier days, this was performed within a family at home. On the other hand, they adjust themselves to the folk rituals which have remained from the pagan times, such as the visit to spiritual places called “obročiste”<sup>6</sup>, which are regularly visited by the locals during the Saint’s feast days and which are properly consecrated by the priests.

Today, a religious life runs freely, which is most surely favored by a turn in the state climate regarding the whole religious and church complex. Although, in the old days, the church bells were scarcely heard during the liturgy in the villages of Bosilegrad, regardless of the modest possibilities of the expression of religious content, the spirit of Orthodoxy was deeply rooted into the lives of the faithful population. After the 90s of the previous century many things have changed: firstly, the number of clergymen who are willing to commit to the pastoral work increased, and then the shrines in the remote villages have strengthened financially.

“Specifically, in the church municipality of Bosilegrad, until twenty years ago, the church bell was hooked under the parish court and children were playing football there. Until 1993, you would have to be very lucky to come across the serving of a liturgy, because the pressure and the repression in these small communities were so tough, that I can say in full right that the damage we suffered in those fifty or sixty years will not be able to be reversed in the next two hundred years. Fortunately, thanks to the bravery of the local people and the ingenuity of the priests, children were very often baptised together with the consecration of the water in the homes of believers. Even today, if you start checking the church books, you will rarely find a child that was not baptised, even in Bosilegrad itself. The example is the village of

---

<sup>6</sup> The places where there used to be churches, and now only a remaining rock or votive cross testify about that. More in: Hristov 2004; Đorđević, Gavrilović and Todorović 2012.

Ljubata where the departed archpriest Aleksandar served liturgies during all important feasts; on Sundays there were always liturgies and the temple was always full. Still, now when the religion is freely practiced, the pastoral work is much more profound; we have cadres of better quality and we can make better influence on believers, starting with resolving the most ordinary individual problems of believers to solving much bigger problems that trouble the entire community. Most surely, we are now an indispensable factor in social life as well.“

If there is something that Priest Zoran is complaining about, within those changed conditions of church activities, it is the unequal treatment of priesthood in the urban areas and the border areas by the Holy Synod and the state. Namely, a year ago the Serbian state accepted, by a special statute, the obligation of paying taxes and fees on the level of a minimum wage for the priests and the clergymen of traditional churches and religious communities. Among 2,000 persons, the members of the Serbian Orthodox Church are the most numerous, and the provisions are linear, regardless of the real incomes. Besides, the Serbian Orthodox Church is a regular user of budget funds in the form of donations, which are set aside for the improvement of religious education, protection of religious identity, nurture of religious freedoms and tolerance, and the construction, renovation and maintenance of the churches and religious objects. Despite a negative image which is spread in public for an alleged large acquisition of wealth based on the charges of religious services, the improvement of priests' material conditions in the border areas can significantly help in the conduction of missions among the believers. This is so, because the money given by the villagers during religious holidays, when they most frequently appear in churchyards and monastery estates, does not even provide for basic existential needs of the active clergymen in rectories, let alone a financial support for larger church ventures in the field.

“The most negative things are material problems. The last legal or sublegal regulations, I am not sure which one, imply that the pension and disability insurance for all priests from Subotica to Preševo are being paid for linearly, which, in my opinion, is not right. It is not the same being a priest in Bosilegrad and being a priest in Terazije or in Grocka, and the incomes are not the same either; therefore, we are burdened with additional financial problems. Therefore, our Holy Church has to find a model for marginal areas, especially the south-east of Serbia which is extremely poor, and maybe this can be done through state authorities. I have to single out a good period during the government of Vojislav Koštunica, when Mr Radulović was a part of the Ministry (of Religion) and when we received a significant material help. The state could now also intervene in the same way in order to facilitate our mission.”

## ABOUT THE COOPERATION WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Do priests in marginal areas count on the cooperation with the local authorities, and thereby count on their help, until anticipated larger moves by the highest state authorities are put into effect? Father Zoran says that the church municipality in Bosilegrad fully participates in the work of the city council of the local offices, and that everyday communication, concerning important official questions, exists between the church and the municipal office, and the very president of the municipality, Vladimir Zaharijev.

The life of the church prelature in secular society includes contacts with the highest politicians. A pluralistic political system in the post-socialist period in Serbia has produced a number of political entities which are indifferent to Christianity and spirituality, but also some with the prefix of “demo-Christian”. In *Bases of Social Conceptions of the Russian Orthodox Church* (2007) the relationship between the church and politics is thoroughly analysed. Priests are not allowed to participate in a political fight, campaign and agitation for any political option, but the believers are permitted to participate in politics and to be members of political blocks. The church does not object to the performance of political and governmental activities which are based on the basic Christian, spiritual and moral principles, primarily within Christian branches of larger political associations. In the last two decades, it has become fashionable for political parties of those provenances on the republican and municipal level to choose a Christian saint to be their patron and to celebrate patron’s day, when the presence of the local clergymen is implied. The Serbian Orthodox Church does not avoid such contacts, and believes that in that way it affirms Christian values and spreads influence of the Church within the public sphere, but it is aware that those contacts may partly undermine the reputation of an institution which common people trust in. Priest Zoran reveals to us that he himself belonged to the political world before he replaced his secular clothing with clerical one, and that he knows very well the mechanisms of political action, but that now, as a priest, he feels closest to those political currents that have programmes which pay attention to the protection of vital national interests of the whole Serbian people, and especially the people from Kosovo and Metohija.

“These questions seem to have been written for me (he laughs), because I literally came from one political group into the Church; of course, I cut all my links with politics and I resigned from all potential political functions. The interesting thing is that those people who were my most bitter opponents in politics are now my best and most devoted parishioners. Still, I, as a priest, am not interested in and I don’t have desires to bother myself with politics. We communicate with political groups as much as we need for the proper functioning of the church. For example, there is not a single political party on the territory of Serbia, especially those parties which are Orthodox, which does not celebrate its patron’s day. They also have their programmes, and some of those programmes, with regard to social issues, include

church, and we cooperate with them in that sense. If I could mention someone specifically... I find acceptable all those politicians and groups who take care of our crucified Kosovo which is the cradle of Serbhood and Orthodoxy. I simply cannot communicate with those political groups and leaders that go towards a certain global view and towards that kind of broadness which kills us and which maybe in a way acts satanically.”

### **ABOUT LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN THE BORDER AREA**

Father Zoran does not consider the life in the border area as a handicap: a meeting between different cultural patterns creates a possibility for new findings and it encourages individuals to make a creative exchange. National minority of Bulgarians in Bosilegrad represents a majority of population with a multi-decade intercultural experience of living together with the Serbian people. History was not always on their side; borders were drawn by those who won victories after large armed conflicts, but the people knew how to save interpersonal relationships during peacetime from devastating nationalist influences. In the forgotten corner of Serbia, being left on their own, the Bulgarians and the Serbs have built friendships, bridges of cooperation and tolerance and have taken care of their own cultural legacy and tradition, but they have also created ethno-linguistic and folklore peculiarities which are not present in any other part of the Balkans.

Father Zoran is not concerned about the survival of either Bulgarian or Serbian identity: he says that they will be preserved in the future, no matter whether they will have support from the Serbian or the Bulgarian states or not. Still, he does not want to behave as a foster parent to “the Serbs from the tri-border region”, so the state should take more care about two moments: 1) the affirmation of this territory in the public media and 2) learning and education in native language. Primarily, because of the fact that the spoken language in the described area gained the specificities of the mixture of the Serbian and Bulgarian languages a long time ago, and is known by the name “Šopski”. It could testify about the closeness of the cultural legacy of those two nations, but also about the loss of the Serbian language as the identity emblem of the Serbs.

Leaving the state to take care of the strategic national interests, Priest Stojkov does not grant amnesty to church structures for active involvement in resolving everyday problems of the parishioners. And, they have piled up and gone to extremities. In the recent past, poverty and unemployment were singled out in colloquial conversations, but nowadays, the lack of prospects for young people has given birth to new deviant forms of behaviour that used to represent exclusively urban vices – alcoholism and drug addiction. Therefore, the role of a priest does not stop anymore at the reading of prayers and the introduction to the holy secrets of the church, but also includes the fight with addiction disorders which stand for a threat to the vitality of the existing body of believers.



Another important problem, that this pastor from Bosilegrad points out, is the concern about the preservation of family, because there are more and more divorced marriages among the population of Bosilegrad. Hand in hand with the absolute decrease in the population of the entire region, excluding the municipal center and the suburban area of Rajčilovci, the destruction of families can take the last remaining locals on their way to Belgrade or Sofia.

“Sooner or later, the Church will have to go into battle with addiction diseases/disorders – alcoholism and drug addiction. It is already involved to some proper extent, because that epidemic is spreading, especially in these border areas, where you could not even think about such things twenty years ago... This is a problem we have to take care of in a more serious way, but also we have to work on the preservation of family because, nowadays, every second or third marriage is broken or close to being broken, so here we can help through pastoral work.”

### CONCLUSION

*The border region of Bosilegrad*, with the administrative centre in Bosilegrad, is the name of the area which borders with the valleys of Vranje, Kyustendil, Radomir, Trn and Leskovac. It belongs to a specific geographic area situated next to the tri-border of Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia, between the Balkans Mountains and the Rhodopes Mountains (Nikolić 1912; quoted in: Ivkov, Pašić and Ćurčić 2008, 85). As a synonym, it is known around the world by its folklore music, songs, dances and a folk costume which is specific to this region and known as *saja* (Ivkov, Pašić and Ćurčić 2008, 85). It is characterised by a heterogeneous population and customs which over the years acquired entirely specific forms of expression (“džalamare”, “sedećar” songs, koliada, “todorica” festivity, “litije” – a form of procession...). It could even be said that within the triangle of Bosilegrad, Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka, one and the same people with the distinctive name “*Šopi*” live there – partly Bulgarians, partly Serbs and partly Macedonians – with a recognisable language which is a mixture of the spoken languages of these three nations. All these features can serve as a key to overcome the marginal position which *the border region* has on the map of the Balkans, primarily by preserving it from oblivion and representing its characteristics as unique cultural events in the tourist offer.

### REFERENCES

- Đorđević, D. B. (ed.) *On Religion in the Balkans*. Niš, Sofia: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, „Ivan Hadjyiski“, 2013b.
- Đorđević, D. B., Gavrilović, D. and D. Todorović (eds.). *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on the Border*. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 2012.

Đorđević, D. B. and D. Zdravković. „Administration in a remote region – Trgovište.” In *A Priest on the Border*, edited by Đorđević, Dragoljub B., Todorović, Dragan and Miloš Jovanović. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 2013.

Христов, П. *Общности и празници. Служби, слави, събори и курбани в южно-славянското село през първата половина на XX век.* София: НО „Марин Држин“, 2004.

Ивков, А., М. Пашић и Г. Турчић. „Игре и обичаји из босилеградског крајишта.” *Зборник радова Департмана за географију, туризам и хотелијерство* 37 (2008): 84-91.

*Основи социјалне концепције Руске православне цркве.* Нови Сад: Беседа, 2007.

Todorović, D. „Rajko Glišović: A Priest from Temska (Pilot).” In *A Priest on the Border*, edited by Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Dragan Todorović, and Miloš Jovanović. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 2013.

<http://www.bosilegrad.org/sr/OBosilegradu.aspx>.

### PHOTOGRAPHS



Ph. 1 Father Zoran Stojanov



Ph. 2 Father Zoran Stojanov with family in front of the parish house



Ph. 3 The Church in Bosilegrad

## A PRIEST ON THE BORDER

---



Ph. 4 Father Zoran Stojanov in front of the Church in Bosilegrad



Ph. 5 Father Zoran Stojanov at the altar



UDK 316.74:271.222(497.11-12)-725:929 Milošević R.

Dragoljub B. Dorđević  
Danijela Zdravković

## ADMINISTRATION IN A REMOTE REGION – TRGOVIŠTE\*

---

“The people from Pčinja are not good when it comes to applauding to political speeches because the blisters on their hands hurt, only those who don't work or don't believe applaud. The ten commandments are now reduced to two words ORDER AND WORK, first get yourself in order and then start working on rebuilding ourselves – and then on rebuilding the society itself.”

Father Radovan Milošević

### THE TASK

Our task was to present the activity of an *Orthodox priest* in Trgovište, a specific border municipality in the southeast of Serbia, which most often occupies the last position in the lists concerning development or demographic movement. Is the administration of an Orthodox personage in such a poor region any different from the one in a wealthier area, what are the advantages and disadvantages, and how is all this – the position of the “Serbian” Orthodoxy, the state of the Eparchy of Vranje, the quality and quantity of believers, the remnants of folk religiosity, competing religious organizations, dialogue, and ecumenism, service on the border... – perceived by the priest who has spent his entire life there? Furthermore, it is important to find out what this Orthodox hierarch thinks about general social issues, cooperativity of political structures, cross-border cooperation, and the prospects for his birthplace. And what the Serbian Orthodox Church (hereinafter: SOC), Orthodoxy, and priests can do to improve or hinder the current situation.

### TRGOVIŠTE

The municipality of Trgovište is located in the farthest southeast of the Republic of Serbia, in the District of Pčinja, situated within the area of 370 km<sup>2</sup>, right next to the Macedonian border, and its neighbouring municipalities of Bosilegrad, Vranje, and Bujanovac. The terrain is typically rural: a hilly

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

area surrounded by mountains and plateaus, filled with diverse plant and animal life. The mere centre of the municipality, the small town of Trgovište, lies at the confluence of three rivers – the Tripušnica, the Kozjedolska, and the Lesnička – which all form the Pčinja, that further flows into the Vardar. According to the 2011 census the population is 5226, which is less than a half of the 1948 population. There is no doubt that only on the basis of this data one can conclude that the negative demographic changes (migrations, low or negative birth rate, mortality rate higher than birth rate, demographic emptying, lower nuptiality and higher divorciality, etc.) are pronounced in this border municipality (Petrović 2012, 261).

Trgovište belongs to the group of 40 most underdeveloped municipalities in the Republic of Serbia. It is far from the main railways and roads, and it is characterized by an extreme demographic emptying of the population. The municipality is connected to the Corridor X, the municipality of Bosilegrad and Kriva Palanka – the border crossing is still not open – by regional roads. In Trgovište, almost the entire population engages in one of the agricultural branches, even though the structure of the employed according to the working status is as follows: there are 980 people working in state institutions, 18 people running their own businesses, 120 people are employed in the private sector, and 400 people are individual agricultural labourers. As far as the economic status of the employed is concerned, there are 780 workers, 18 employers, 120 people work in private companies, while 680 people are unpaid family workers. *The average salary of the active population is 27,000 dinars.*

Statistical indicators show that the municipality of Trgovište is plagued by serious problems on every step, and that there are no clear indications of the situation getting better in the near future, which places this border region in the group of those areas that are in dire need of some kind of help from the state.

### THE PRIEST

Danijela Zdravković visited *Radovan Milošević*, the local parson, on Saturday, 11 May 2013, in the church of Saint Nicholas in Trgovište. The in-depth interview was conducted in the parish house from 9.30 to 12.00 (ph. 1). The priest was extremely polite, ready for conversation, and open to all sorts of questions. This is a welcome surprise, having in mind that Orthodox dignitaries are sometimes not really in the mood for the exchange of opinions, particularly for the purpose of a scientific research and with sociologists of religion.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Milošević was born on 1 March 1955 in the village of Donji Kozji Dol – municipality of Trgovište, District of Pčinja; he is married and he has two adult daughters (ph. 2 and 3). One should know that Orthodox churches

---

<sup>1</sup> We waited for a dozen days for the permission to visit Radovan, i.e. it took us that long to be granted an audience with the secretary in the administration of the Eparchy of Vranje. We would like to thank Sunčica Denić, professor of the Teacher-Training Faculty (Vranje), University of Niš, on her role as an intermediary.



require marriage as a condition for ordination to the first priest rank; until that moment one remains a deacon. He completed the first four grades of the “Saints Cyril and Methodius” seminary – a secondary school – in Prizren, in Kosovo and Metohija, while he finished the fifth grade in 1975 in Sremski Karlovci (“Saint Arsenije Sremac”). He had the honour of being ordained, on 12 February 1977, by Irinej (Gavrilović), then the Bishop of Niš, and now *the Patriarch of Serbia*, who was also the student of the Prizren seminary, its professor and rector at the time of our priest’s studies.

He has lived in Trgovište since he was born, not counting the time that he spent studying and serving in Golemo Selo (Poljanica in the vicinity of Vranje), from 1999 to 2004.

### **THE PARISH – TROUBLES – THE BISHOP**

Today his parish house is in Trgovište and he serves six churches on the territory of the municipality from that starting point. He is in charge of one parish, as he says – rural in character, since it mostly encompasses villages, yet partially urban if the centre of the municipality is considered a small town. Since 1991 not a single new church has been built in the parish.

There are so many troubles even without the newly-constructed buildings. The existing temples should be renovated and adapted, icons should be procured and interior walls decorated, and finally the facade should be completed on the church of Saint Nicholas in Trgovište (ph. 4 and 5). Let alone the work that should be done on the parish house, which is often, if we are not mistaken, the primary interest of the Orthodox priest (ph. 6). It should be furnished with necessary furniture: there are two extra rooms and a bathroom for priests who are not from Trgovište, and who will follow in father Radovan’s footsteps, since he has only four years left before retirement – the priest has been a loyal servant of the SOC for 36 years. He lacks computers and typewriters, technical and material support of every kind from the Eparchy and Patriarchate central. He does not shy away, somewhat resigned, from saying that there has never been any real support. Who would have thought that metropolization was only characteristic of lay structures, while the sacred ones, indeed, took care of their provinces!

He is particularly sad about the squalor of cemeteries, which are truly a disgrace compared to the exemplary state of the Catholic and Protestant ones, and he would do anything necessary, even engage the local population, to secure their maintenance (ph. 7).

He does not gossip about the Bishop of Vranje, Pahomije (Tomislav Gačić), who has for years now been under close scrutiny by the mass media concerning an unverified accusation of a sexual assault of a minor child. And he would certainly have reasons to complain:

“I have a correct relationship with the bishop, even though he has moved my service and appointed some of my activities to priest Randel Veličković, who also serves in the municipality of Trgovište. There is

no competition between the two of us, I have relinquished my position, and we now share the temples, cemeteries, and mahalas. We cooperate with the Eparchy of Vranje, but they only issue orders, without ever providing some actual help for this poor and remote region. They show up only when there's an important event happening – usually in the monastery of St. Prohor Pčinjski.”

### THE CONGREGATION – THE PAST – THE RENEWAL

He was not really talkative when it came to his congregation and, since he did not study the sociology of religion, nor was he ever obliged by the church authorities to provide a precise individual-social matrix of the believers, he described the congregation in few words. Yes, the Sunday and holiday services are well attended; the doors of the church of Saint Nicholas are open on Holy Saturday for everyone, and that is the most attended day in the year service-wise. On Sundays women and younger people go to the church, while almost everyone comes during the religious holidays, even children (ph. 8).

Alongside Serbs, the dominant group of believers, there are ten households of converted, Orthodox Roma – “They all have surnames ending in ‘ić’.” No other members of minorities exist, who would have been gladly accepted, as the priest believes, and Serbs would have without any restraint perform religious rites and celebrate holidays with them. For him, a much more stressing issue is the problem of a lot of unbaptized people in the parish, who never go to the church.

It is important that he acts as the majority of priests – which is a characteristic of all Orthodoxy – and respects the local holidays and customs:<sup>2</sup>

“I was born here and I have spent the majority of my service here, the local holidays and customs are a part of me and they are celebrated in great joy; the temples and we, the priests, always provide a religious background and context. In our region the Lazarice custom is particularly well preserved, because these people got used to a tough and hard life in the mountains, and that's why they all rejoice together at the awakening of the nature and expect its help in providing sustenance and survival.”

Father Radovan, an elderly gentleman, remembers the previous system well, and how the church was marginalized and forced out of the public space, with believers on the fringe of society. He endured all those troubled times himself, thus he should obviously look forward to whatever sort of renewal of religion and religiosity.

In 1938 the church of St. Nicholas was built, but it did not serve until 1997, when it was consecrated by the bishop of Vranje. The socialist authorities and the local population, who were not familiar with the dogmatics or apologetics, nor had any religious teachers, boycotted the church and the

---

<sup>2</sup> More on religious and folk customs in the border regions in: Đorđević, Gavrilović, and Todorović 2012.

service performed in it. To them a priest was not a personage, nor did he enjoy great respect and trust. Even the doors were closed when the priest started going around the town to bless the water before saints' days or great holidays. *Faithlessness* was here supported by a strong communist foundation – the regime used to force it among the local population by any means possible.

The things are starting to look better now, but the priest does not see a bright light at the end of the tunnel:

“Now the poverty has taken over and the villages are dying out, thus the religious life can't be renewed because there are no people and there's no youth, everyone has moved out. The work of the religious communities is easier now – the Patriarch used to address Tito personally for just about anything – and today the situation is a bit more flexible and freer, everything is done through the eparchies.”

Starting from his own case – “When I was admitted to the seminary in Prizren, the people in the village thought that I was deranged for coming under the wing of religion” – he exaggerates a little with his statement that socialism in Serbia, unlike in other places, caused devastating consequences to religion and that the negative image has never actually improved. It is true that the communist ideology made most damage in Orthodox countries, partly due to the fact that Orthodoxy was susceptible to it, and not only because of the cruel imposition of Marxist and scientific atheism – the latter never truly developed in Serbia and Yugoslavia (Đorđević 1989, 141-150; 1997) – yet, it is also true that a noticeable return to religion and the church has also occurred (Blagojević 2011, 89-100; Đorđević 2013b).

## AUTHORITIES

The authority is god-given, priest Milošević knows that well, every authority demands loyalty, some of them demand blind obedience, while there are still those who prefer conflicts. When the SOC and the state, certain bishops and leading politicians, collide at the highest level, it is no surprise then that such things happen at the local level too. (“I have had unpleasant experience with the local population as well, those hardcore socialists, as well as with the former municipal government, which came from the ranks of the SPS.”)

It seems that the following has been forgotten:

“In the socialist regime, a strict difference was made between the so-called *negative* and *positive politization* of the church, where, certainly, only the political engagement which displayed loyalty to the ruling structures was tolerated. In modern societies, this principle is no longer valid and religious communities can legitimately take even sharp positions in the public space, particularly when crucial decisions are at stake. Why would anyone take that away from the SOC (Ђорђевић, 2013a, 13).”

Father Radovan, even if he does not actually cooperate, still attends civil councils in local communities. He is also in contact with the current and the former president of the municipality of Trgovište, since the Church Council now too operates within it – priest Randel is a member now, earlier it was our interviewee. A closer cooperation has been established with the current president Nenad Krstić, a representative of the Serbian Progressive Party, as well as with the president of the assembly, Saša Zlatković, a member of the Socialist Party of Serbia. The election of new people occurred after the death of the former president Radoslav Jordanović. As the president of the municipality, Krstić has managed to secure 340,000 dinars, in building materials, for the restoration of the temple in his birthplace, the village of Donji Stajevac.

He admits bravely that he cooperated best with the former president of the assembly, Darko Tomić, a member of Koštunica's party, since he did the most for the temples and believers, and even renovated and consecrated the town hall.

However, the citizens of Trgovište are mainly supporters of the SPS and they cannot be found in other parties in greater numbers. Jokingly, but with a lot of seriousness, he makes his point by stating that “the people from Pčinja are not good when it comes to applauding to political speeches because the blisters on their hands hurt, only those who don't work or don't believe applaud. The ten commandments are now reduced to two words ORDER AND WORK, first get yourself in order and then start working on rebuilding ourselves – and then on rebuilding the society itself.”

### THE BORDER

The long-time service in the border region should provide for both positive and negative experiences (Cvitković 2013). Three are the positive ones.

First, father Radovan became familiar with the spiritual strength of the highlanders, the primal nerve of survival, and his religious mission:

“I see and check my own contribution to faith and service to God in the spiritual strength, the soul of the people from Pčinja who are still here, in a remote mountainous region, yet disoriented in time. You could've reached that conclusion yourself, by observing the trader in the nearby shop who looks through you without caring for your presence or showing interest in the reasons behind your visit here. The local population is abandoned and forgotten, as if time stands still, and my religious mission is to repeat over and over that one can survive only through faith in action, help, forgiving, love, and endurance.”

Second, he has experienced multiculturalism and “*soft*” borders between Serbs, Macedonians, and Bulgarians, which is the benefit for all:

“Second, during the time of socialism I also served in the villages in Macedonia, ten of them, I baptized children, entered people into the church books, and there were no boundaries for priests then. The cooperation with Macedonians and Bulgarians was of great importance for the survival of these people, both because of the education and the trade and mixed marriages.”

Third, a positive experience of priest Milošević relates to the dialect that he still uses when talking to the local population. It turned out to be a great advantage in relation to other priests who came here from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Šumadija, Belgrade, and Vojvodina, and who were never accepted well by the people from Pčinja.

His negative experience concerning the service in the border and/or near-border regions is related to, what else than, his visits to the Republic of Macedonia, now an independent state:

“There have been several unpleasant events at the crossing of the border, especially because I’m a priest; I am a civil person for them and not a servant of religion and the church which is separated from the state.”

Today the borders are “hard”, particularly for the SOC priests. Due to the canonical conflict between the SOC and the so-called unrecognized Macedonian Orthodox Church, Serbian priests are not welcome on the territory of Macedonia. Everyone is at a loss.

## OTHERS

On the territory of Trgovište there are no other religions, confessions, and religious communities – therefore, no religious-confessional conflicts or cooperation. This is why priest Milošević *does not have a genuine experience* of interreligious and interconfessional relations; he has never had friends among the imams, pastors, or Catholic priests.

Of course, there could have been some among the Protestants, if Jehovah’s Witnesses managed to “sow their seeds”, but the people from Pčinja did not “falter”:

“There were such attempts here in Trgovište as well, they came here a number of times, in the port of this church where we are now; those were Jehovah’s Witnesses and they gave some seeds to the local population (carrot, radish, tomato, cabbage...), and then returned later to give them advice on how to cultivate those vegetables, and that’s how they managed to get into people’s houses and do their thing, but this tough Pčinja mentality didn’t accept it and there were no attempts from then on.”

Trgovište is not a multinational environment: there are no other peoples and national minorities, apart from some Roma who declare themselves

Serbs. Even if there were different religions and ethnoses, father Radovan would see no danger to the survival of Serbs and their identity in them. He finds the reasons for it, and he says that without restraint, in the internal Serbian lies and theft, from the top of the state to individuals at the local level.

### CONCLUSION

Administration in a remote region, such as Trgovište, is a multiple challenge for a religious community and its officers. From the list of future obligations, that was delivered to the Serbian Orthodox Church by one of the authors (Ђорђевић 2013a, 13) – “I expect that in the near future the SOC will pay much more attention to the more sensitive and crucial social issues, ranging from misery to caritative care, from human to union rights, from endangering the environment to emptying of border eparchies... And certainly morality – as the main topic for the church – since it is its comparative advantage.” – it is as clear as day that the Church should help with the following two, *the reduction of poverty and prevention of emigration*.

Mr. Milošević recognizes the same things:

“There is no development here whatsoever, mere survival, we wait and keep the border regions for settlement, because if this crisis continues... I have no hope that my personal and even the development of my children will improve since the terrain is hard and inaccessible, there’s no labour force because it doesn’t get renewed, children are not being born. Baptisms and weddings are a rarity in Trgovište (ph. 9 and 10), but funerals are frequent events and that’s where the local population usually gathers, so we can’t really talk about development.”

This very sensible and lucid Serbian Orthodox priest accurately singled out several causes for the underdevelopment of border regions – particularly the devastation of villages and emptying of entire regions: 1. shutting down of factories; 2. economic crisis; 3. education outside of the settlements and in the diaspora; 4. better employment conditions in the diaspora and Vojvodina; 5. lack of care from the state; and 6. insufficient cross-border cooperation (cultural, religious, educational, trading, tourist...).

Certainly, as an Orthodox clergyman, he has a somewhat narrow perspective on his vocation and stands firmly on the position that a priest can best help the survival and development of his congregation and parish only by working on the spiritual strengthening of the people from Pčinja, in order for them to go on and overcome the hard times that have befallen the tenacious Serbian people.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> “I have dedicated my service in faith and the church in the border region to the Serbian people, who are now not only the majority but the only ones left in Pčinja. This speaks volumes of them being a fearless people, hard and resistant, who moved here in the migrations from Kosovo and Mehtohija with blood on their hands in the First Serbian Uprising, and have remained here as a protection ever since. If this were a plain, it would have been settled by other peoples long time ago.”



## REFERENCES

- Blagojević, Mirko. Orthodox Religiousness at the End of the First Decade of the 21 Century. In *Orthodoxy from an Empirical Perspective*, edited by M. Blagojević and D. Todorović, 89-100. Niš and Belgrade: YSSSR and IPST, 2011.
- Cvitković, Ivan. *Encountering Others: religious and confessional identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2013.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. 1989. „On Marxist Atheism Again.“ *Syntesis Philosophica* 4 (1): 141-150.
- Ђорђевић, Драгољуб Б. (прир.) *Искушења атеизма*. Ниш: Градина, ЈУНИР, 1997.
- Ђорђевић, Драгољуб Б. 2013а. „СПЦ и Бриселски споразум.“ *Политика*, 25. мај, стр. 13.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. (ed.) *On Religion in the Balkans*. Niš and Sofia: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and „Ivan Hadyiski“, 2013b.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B., Danijela Gavrilović, and Dragan Todorović (eds.). *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on the Border*. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 2012.
- Petrović, Pero. „Stanovništvo kao potencijal regionalnog razvoja u Srbiji.“ U *Regionalni razvoj i demografski tokovi*, 253-261. Niš: Ekonomski fakultet, 2012.

## PHOTOGRAPHS



Ph. 1. Danijela Zdravković and Radovan Milošević in the parish house



Ph. 2. The priest, the priest's wife, and their daughters



Ph. 3. The priest and his wife



Ph. 4. The Church of Saint Nicholas in Trgovište



Ph. 5. Father Radovan in front of the Church of St. Nicholas



Ph. 6. The priest in front of the parish house



Ph. 7. A procession



Ph. 8. Father Radovan at the altar





Ph. 9. Father Radovan and the rite of baptism



Ph. 10. Father Radovan and the rite of wedding



Dragan Todorović

## **RAJKO GLIŠOVIĆ: A PRIEST FROM TEMSKA (PIROT)\***

---

### **THE VILLAGE OF TEMSKA**

The preserved material evidence testifies that several settlements in the Municipality of Pirot existed even before the coming of the Turks to the region. One of them is *Temska* in whose immediate neighborhood there used to be a medieval city of Temac, precursor of the present-day settlement. The legend says that the city was captured by the Turks from its ruler, Despot Stefan the Tall, so as to ensure the passage of their army through the region (Milićević 1884, 179; quoted from Stojković 2010, 22). Temska is located at the bottom of Stara Mountain, at 15km from Pirot. Through it runs the River Temštica, a right tributary to the River Nišava. It is of compact type; it has several *mahalas* and it is the third settlement, by population number, in the Municipality of Pirot (today less than thousand people). In its economy the dominant production are farming and ranching, most of all, small cattle breeding; as for other professions, stone-cutting is also notable (Stojković 2010, 40) though the number of craftsmen is decreasing.

Some important places in the village include more than a century old primary school “Teacher Stojan”, a small hydro-electric plant and the monastery of St. George as an important spiritual and cultural center of this region of Southeast Serbia. Its residence housed, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a monastic school as the only educational institution in the region. Folk legacy testifies that the foundations of an original 11<sup>th</sup> century shrine were used for building new ones by the nephews of Tsar Dušan from the Dejanović family in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (today’s church was built in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century). The church interior walls were painted with frescoes in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Serbian zografs (wall painters). A special place in the narthex is allotted to the illustrated Life of St George (Popović 2003). The iconostasis, decorated with woodcarvings as well as the residence originate from 18<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery yard comprises the grave of Captain Milutin Karanović who got killed in the Serbian-Turkish War, in the fights for liberation of Pirot, in 1877, at Nišor. The patron saint day of the monastery is St. Djurdjic; it is celebrated on November, 16 (Kostić 2009, 73). In the seventies (20<sup>th</sup> century), impressive archeological studies were accomplished as well as conservation of frescoes and the architecture of the shrine which is today under the protection of the UNESCO.

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

The church authorities of Pirot work within the bishopric of Niš. Pirot is one of the archbishopric regency comprising 16 parishes; in addition of the settlements of Pirot region, it also covers the area of the Municipality of Dimitrovgrad and part of Knjaževac Municipality (Stojković 2010, 76).

### FATHER RAJKO GLIŠOVIĆ

Protopresbyter Rajko Glišović was born in 1936, in the village of Pretoka (Knić, Gruža) in the area located between Čačak, Kraljevo and Kragujevac. His two daughters presently live in Kragujevac while his son who lives in Pirot.<sup>1</sup> He is also grandfather of four granddaughters and one grandson (ph. 1). He completed the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade in 1960. He was ordained a Dean on October, 14, 1962, in Plaško (present day Croatia) while in Karlovac he was ordained a priest of Upper Karlovac Bishopric.

Since August 9, 1976, Glišović has been living in Temska as Head of the Church of St Parascheva (Petka) and Spiritual Advisor and Administrator of women's monastery of St Greatmartyr George.<sup>2</sup> Truly, he did not come to Temska on his own free will: former Serbian communists from Croatia accused him of working against the state and exiled him to Serbia (ph. 2).

His parish comprises an area of almost sixty kilometers, from Sopot to Ravno Bučje near Babin Zub.<sup>3</sup> The general impression of this region is that of dying off of its population with the last household being abandoned and with no sign of any possibility of changing the present population policy. In a melancholy voice, the parish priest informs us how a small town of Kalna is largely devastated; in Mirkovci only three believers' homes with six people have remained, Adrina Reka has only one believer; Janja has five of them; in Ravno Bučje there are only nine souls while in Crni Vrh only fifteen remaining houses invite the clergyman. In Temska itself, in only one part of the village, from the entrance to the primary school, seventy houses are devoid of people.

There are churches in Topli Do (St Parascheva on the very state border, near the border post, just beneath the top of Mount Midžor<sup>4</sup>), in Zas-

---

<sup>1</sup> His son, after the death of Father Rajko's wife, in 1996, came back from Niš where he was a dean at Bishop Irinej and got employed in the old church of Pirot so as to be close to his father in his days of loneliness.

<sup>2</sup> Tears emerged in Father Rajko's eyes while he was describing how, in the mid-seventies of the last century, when he got to Temska, 17 nuns of Russian origin who had found a refuge in the monastery after the October Revolution in 1918 greeted him there. For many years they kept a complete monastery economy (gardens, vineyards, cattle and vegetable fond). The last nuns died in the early nineties and were buried on the monastery graveyard. At present, prioress Efrosinija and nun Nedelja are living in the monastery.

<sup>3</sup> The village of Kalna and its surroundings (Janja, Šesti Gabar, Vrtovac, Sinovac, Čuštica) now belong to the Municipality of Knjaževac while, up to 1947, they were part of the Municipality of Pirot. The borders of the church parish, however, did not change so that it is still served by the same parish priest.

<sup>4</sup> Father Rajko gladly remembers the times of his arrival to this region when everything was teeming with people in Topli Do. Two teachers were engaged to work with village children

kovci near Babin Zub (St Trinity), in Sopot (St Prophet Elijah), in Rudinje (St Trinity<sup>5</sup>), in Cerovo (St Petka), in Stanjince (St Kirik and Julita<sup>6</sup>), in Izvor (St Trinity), in Kalna (St Greatmartyr Panteleimon), in Čuštica (St Apostles Peter and Paul), in Barta Berilovac (All Saints) and in Crni Vrh (St. Elijah). All of them were built before the early twenties of the last century and the renewal of religiosity in Serbia; no new one is built (ph. 3).

The material situation in the parish is poor. Nothing much can be expected from the old men who had remained in the village homes in the sense of supporting church life while in the past everything was teeming with activities (ph. 4, 5, 6 and 7).

“Well, you see, in Temska since the beginning of this year six houses have been emptied, all of them devoid of people; no prospects whatsoever. I have no villages any more; they are gone for good. Few people are left, increasingly poorer. No childbirth on my territory; only one child was born lately in Temska; no single child was born in the villages.”

No older priest than Father Rajko in the neighboring parishes. He keeps friendly relations with everyone; everybody knows him since he has been in the Church of Temska since 1976 (with no breaks). Despite all this, Sunday religious service is attended by few believers only.

“Here, in Temska, people come twice a year to church. More of them visit the monastery but these are mostly people from Pirot and Niš. No better is the situation in the other villages; they come once a year on the church day, five to six old men, and that is all.”

Though the times have changed and no one is forbidden today to observe his ways of worship, he objects to the unchanged habits of the local people from remote and passive areas such as not inviting the priest to perform a funeral service to the deceased.

“In Orlje hardly anyone calls the priest to a funeral, unlike Bazovik, Rudinje and Sopot. Likewise in Topli Do and Zaskovci. No one forbids them to do anything; they can worship without fear; yet, no one invites the priest to his house. It is simply like that. Who used to do it is still doing it now; who has not done it before, no change can force him to change his behavior.”

People were afraid, in the socialist times, to openly express their religious beliefs. The churches were not attended. The rites were done fast and

---

while today there are only 14 houses with people living in them. In the days of former Yugoslavia, it was the most developed village nicknamed “Little Constantinople.”

<sup>5</sup> In Father Rajko’s opinion, this is the most beautiful church in the whole state. It was built in the Byzantine style from the patterned stone and painted with natural colors. It is devoted to the Holy Trinity.

<sup>6</sup> In the vicinity of Stanjince there is a monastery of St Onuphrius.

in secrecy, away from the spying eyes. The secrecy turned into a habit so that the villagers even today move away from the path when they notice the priest's mantle. They do not have their water blessed. They do not cut the patron saint's cake in the church. They do not invite the priest to their homes in Easter times. Father Rajko says that 137 houses in Temska celebrate the patron saint's day of the Holy Archangel Michael yet no one brings a cake before the altar. Simply, they cut it on their own, in the evening, in their homes. And yet, they bring food, in ample quantities, to the graveyard on the All Souls Day.

“I was in Šesti Gabar, they knew I was there. Two women told me there had been two funerals but they did not want to hear about a priest! Yet, they carry a cross, they observe a forty day memorial – I do not know what these people want! I am telling them things but they do not listen to me. I have never asked any money from them, any single coin, only what they wanted to give to me (underlined by D. T.). There are wealthy ones who hide and run away from me. In Orlje people are, for instance, rich; they have houses in the village and in the town but their habits are bad. It will be hard for any priest to stay there for good after I am gone. The only chance is for the Bishop to annex all this to the monastery and appoint the monks to preserve the faith; otherwise, all this will be ruined (underlined by D. T.). I do not interfere in the Bishop's decisions but it was easier, in my time, to work with full villages; people are here no more. We have survived so far because the Bishop of Niš, Irinej, supported us with all his heart; he is our present Patriarch. People have given up faith; they do not call a priest (underlined by D. T.). Otherwise, no one makes me any problems; I cannot object to anything; I can walk late at night or walk on foot anywhere, but when it comes to religious rites, they only say, ‘Father, you should come when we call you; otherwise, do not come.’”

People do not change. Neither does their religious instructor change his habits. They have it deeply stored in their collective memory: an image of his giant-like body on a small red moped, in summer heats and in winter cold. Neither was it difficult for him to walk for seven hours, one way, in order to get to Jabučko Ravnište beneath Babin Zub, just for the sake of seeing off the deceased ones to their last journey.

Father Rajko is pessimist regarding the possibility to somehow change the deep rooted habits of the villagers. The pagan rites persist by inertia as if the decades and centuries had not passed by. The first to respect is the word of hunched-back and scarf-wrapped old women; the priest's word comes second. Older people stick to the behavior patterns passed on from one generation to another; as for new generations, willing to adopt proper religious teachings and behaviors, they are not here. They left their native hearths a long time ago. “The habits preserve faith,” repeats Father Rajko Glišović referring to the genuine Christian customs, based on Orthodoxy instead of paganism.

“To tell you honestly, these people are stubborn; they do not accept when you tell them how to do something. I am telling them, I am showing them how to do things properly; I do it nicely with everyone; but here only old women are obeyed. As an old woman says, so it is – who cares about priest, or bishop! (underlined by D. T.). It is well known here. When you go to the graveyard, take some wine and wheat – this is a memorial. But here they put piles of food on the grave! The dogs spread it around all the day long. This is pagan behavior, not Orthodox. I criticize them all the time. This is no good. This is a sin. Better give it to some poor old woman or children to eat it for the sake of the soul of the deceased – but no one wants to listen to me. When Bishop Irinej got to our village, the village laughed, ‘The priest has brought the Bishop to teach us and to charge us his services!’”

As for collaboration with the municipal services, it comes to mutual respect but there are no material allowances for supporting and promoting religious life. Father Rajko confirms that he has never asked the state for anything:

“When I got here, to Temska, for the first time, I immediately initiated an action to repair the ruined church and build a parish home and other auxiliary buildings. Many people here, together with those from Temska living in other regions, contributed; I made a note of every donation and read before all the names of the donors and what the money was used for. Bishop Irinej offered his help then but I said, ‘As people need a church and a priest, so they will help.’ And helped they did. Without their help there would be nothing here. People were better when I got here than they are now! (underlined by D. T.). On St George’s Days there were lambs turning on a spit; the priest used to take rear jaws and a front shoulder blade or half of the breast; thus I used to gather two bags of grilled meat and cheese that I could not eat in a year’s time! Now there is nothing. No people are left, they have all gone away (underlined by D. T.). We have recently counted the remaining people: in Topli Do only 32 people are left, in Zaskovci 22, in Mirkovci 6, in Tovarnici only five souls. No cattle is left, either. Topli Do has not even hundred sheep. When I got here thirty years ago you could not count them, so many were they!”

The local community chose St George’s Day as their baptismal holiday. He was invited to come to the monastery to cut a cake. Democrats are the loudest party at the local level but party affiliation is of no serious consequence in such small places. A usual phenomenon is the turning of the “party coats”, all for the sake of preserving power.

Among the parishioners there are no other nationalities apart from Serbs and a few Romas. There is a separate Roma graveyard close to the monastery, some two hundred meters away from the Serbian one.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Roma population represents a single source of population renewal: only Roma children are born. The primary school in Temsa has 22 pupils in the eight (final) grade; the majority of children are Roma. One pupil comes from the nearby Cerovo and two come from Sopot.

“All local Tsiganies are baptized, both newcomers and natives. Neither do they come to church. I do all the rites for them: I bless their water, I bury them, that’s it. In the area there are about 70. They respect me. These are not bad Tsigany. The native ones usually rent some land and work on it; there are also those that the Municipality has placed in empty houses. I have become friendly with them since in my native Gruža there were never any Tsigany. Look, one of them is helping me with the works in the church; together we paint the walls and the wooden things with a new paint to prevent humidity. No difference is there when they come to communion or on some great holidays; for me, they are all the same.”

The believers are exclusively Orthodox; no Roman Catholics or Muslims are there.<sup>8</sup> Father Rajko admits that in Oreovica there are newcomers (guest workers, *Gastarbeiter*) who have returned from abroad. In addition to fashionable new habits, they also brought to their homeland another religious faith. These are Jehovah’s Witnesses; three households are their followers but no one takes them seriously. Nor does anyone listen to their proselytizing, at least that is how our interviewee estimates the situation.

The nature of this region has affected the dwellers to develop the characteristics that could ensure their survival under the conditions of scarcity. Father Rajko is critical when it comes to the parsimony of the local people.

“This is a quiet area and people are good. No one will harm you. But people are stingy, or better to say, mean (underlined by D. T.). I bless his water and he gives me a few coins. When someone gives you one hundred *dinars* (about 1 euros) it is like he is giving you the whole house! I do not remember ever getting any larger sum of money from anyone. Or a handful of beans or two corncocks. Listen, the other day I visited the whole of Cerovo on my moped and I made, in toto, 750 *dinars* (about 7 euros). Not even to cover my fuel expenses! But yet, I feel pangs of conscience if I fail to visit them! Another priest, when I am gone, will be sure not to go and see them, I guarantee it. But local people do have money, it would be untrue to say otherwise! Here it is, a woman in Šugrin was found, post mortem, to have hidden a full bag of folded banknotes; yet she had lived in an almost empty house, she had lived in such a misery! God forbids that she has given a candy to her daughter or granddaughter! I served in Istria, North Dalmatia, Lika and even in my place in Gruža but nowhere have I seen such misers as in Pirot region!”

### CONCLUSION

The background area of Pirot shares the fate of rural Serbia: a drastic decline of rural population and dying off of rural settlements. The real possibilities for stopping the overall demographic processes are endangered firstly

---

<sup>8</sup> We were surprised to hear this data regarding the closeness of the border with Bulgaria but Father Rajko claims that among his own rural parishioners he has never had believers of other nationalities except for Serbian and a somewhat small number of Romas.



by the unfavorable age structure of population. The dwellers are mostly of older age; they live either alone or married to a partner of similar age. In such households there are no work able persons. Mostly they live on raising some cattle, on primitive work on land or modest pensions. A gloomy picture of the rural population in Temska is slightly alleviated only by Romas. They are of Orthodox faith. Some of them are native to the region; others are settled there by the municipal political resolutions that brought them into the emptied houses. They live on extensive work on the mountainous estates they rent. Maybe the present generation could not choose otherwise but it has related its future to this village in the Pilot region. Thanks to their offspring, there is still noise in the schoolyard and in the classrooms of a hundred-years-old school. They have adopted to the local habits and customs; they share their hard-earned bread with other local people and they do not complain.

In the deserted villages, the religious shrines are also abandoned and ruined. The priests make rounds of their parishioners mostly when invited and the duty they mostly perform is a funeral service. Another occasion is related to the greatest Christian holidays but this is not compulsory. Usually it is done only in larger church centers (Kostić 2009, 71). The church estate in Temska, on the other hand, leaves an impression of orderliness and functionality. It looks like a small oasis in a stony landscape (ph. 8 and 9). Prota Rajko Glišović, though retired for quite some time, does not neglect either his pastoral or host roles, heartily supported by a few believers. The estate is perfectly ordered. The house is surrounded with luxuriant verdure and flowers. On the grass fields there are peacocks and she-peacocks parading with their colorful feathers. In the economy buildings, near the parish home, numerous fowls are located as well as large cattle for fattening. The religious shrine looks fresh and composed; the facade is white-washed and the wooden parts are protected by fresh paint (ph. 10, 11 and 12). The only missing ones are – believers.

Of grey hair and beard, well advanced into old age, the servant of the altar of God in Temska leaves an impression of a man of spirit and commitment. A vital old man speaks in a low voice but his sentences are short and well thought of. Behind his piercing look there lies a many-decade experience of work with the local villagers. He does not rush with his estimates and with a reconciliatory tone he avoids every possibility for misunderstanding. Rather wondering at than criticizing, the staunch man from Gruža seems not to be able to get used to two characteristics of his parishioners even after several decades of living together: namely, *people's religiosity* and their *stinginess*.

As for the Orthodox doctrine, people have modified it to suit the wisdom of living under concrete historical circumstances, most of all in the cases when there was no church as a support. The old customs and celebrations have survived even when the dogmatic belief and conventional religious behavior failed, especially during the atheistic period of marginalization of the Orthodox religious culture. *The return of religion* to the post-socialist social and cultural scene of Serbia in the late nineties did not automatically bring with it the long desired *return to religion*. Namely, the attempt to bring back

to the church religiously non-socialized citizens who are on the “Christian pathway” is time-demanding and difficult. It is the assignment that the Serbian Orthodox Church is facing as well as other traditional religions on the Balkans (Blagojević 2013; Đorđević 2013; Cvitković 2013). For the Stara mountaineers from Temska, in their older age, namely, those immersed in the unhappy and perspectiveless present day border area, it seems that there is no time to modify their “Christian paganism.”

As for parsimony, the citizens of Pirot bear it as their identity trait though it has been ascribed to them out of misunderstanding since “it is impossible to be a cavalier and a big spender when you do not have enough” (Dinić 2007-2008, 372). The poverty was the reason for prudent living in the passive areas in Southeast Serbia. Respectful for whatever was cultivated under the rough mountain regime, industrious, intelligent, hospitable and committed to home and family, the hosts were not so willing to give up any hard-won coin. Modest in their needs, they have always preferred the practical over the spiritual which was deeply felt by the local clergy. This has made Father Rajko state that “it will be difficult for a priest on this territory to subsist, after I am gone.” Time will show how right he is.

## REFERENCES

- Blagojević, Mirko. „Orthodox Religiousness at the End of the First Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.“ In *On Religion on the Balkans*, edited by D. B. Đorđević, 73–82. Niš and Sofia: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and “Ivan Hadjyiski” Institute for Social Values & Structures, 2013.
- Cvitkovic, Ivan. *Encountering Others*. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2013.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. „Religiousness of Serbs at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: What is it About?“ In *On Religion on the Balkans*, edited by D. B. Đorđević, 65–72. Niš and Sofia: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and “Ivan Hadjyiski” Institute for Social Values & Structures, 2013.
- Динић, Драгана. “Питање идентитета – шта значи бити Пироћанац?” *Пиротски зборник* 32-33 (2007-2008): 368-375.
- Костић, Сузана. “Годишњи обичаји у Пироту и околини.” *Гласник Етнографског музеја у Београду* 73 (2009): 65-92.
- Роровић, В. The Cycle of Saint George in the Territory of the Pȇ Patriarchate. *Зборник Матице српске за ликовне уметности* 34-35 (2003): 95–110.
- Стојковић, Драгана. Насеља и становништво општине Пирот – осврт на поједине историјске, етничке и демографске карактеристике. *Гласник Етнографског музеја у Београду* 74 (1) (2010): 11-108.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. With his wife Vukana and his elder daughter from his younger days, as a priest of Upper Karlovac Bishopric (wife died in 1996)



Ph. 2. Opening up of the parish home in Temska in 1978



Ph. 3. Father Rajko cuts a patron saint's holiday cake





Ph. 4. With his parishioners in the Processions in Temska



Ph. 5. Baptism in the village church



Ph. 6. With nuns before the church in the monastery of St George  
(some twenty years ago)





Ph. 7. Consecration of the church in Crni Vrh, together with Bishop Irinej, present Serbian Patriarch



Ph. 8. Church of Saint Petka Trnovska in Temska



Ph. 9. Father Rajko before the Parish home



Ph. 10. Father Rajko before the Church entrance





Ph. 11. Father Rajko before the alter of the church St Petka



Ph. 12. Father Rajko before the church altar in the monastery of St George



UDK 316.74:28(497.11 Preševo)-735 : 929 Ibrahim L.

Danijela Zdravković  
Dragoljub B. Đorđević

## THE LIFE AND WORK OF IMAM LUKMAN IBRAHIMI FROM ČUKARKA (PREŠEVO)\*

---

“Nowadays, religiousness is far more common than it used to be. My father was also an imam, so I am well aware of the fact that people can now visit mosques freely and without hindrance, which is not how it used to be. People working for state institutions used to deliberately avoid going to mosques. However, religiousness has been widely present since 2002, when religious education was introduced in schools. Children are becoming more devoted to religion and come to mosques more often, there are more books and TV programs on the subject, especially during Ramadan.”

Imam Lukman Ibrahim L.

### AIMS

The aim of our research was to present, in the form of a monograph, the life and work of a religious worker in the border area of Southeastern Serbia. We focused on an imam from the Presevo municipality. One of the widely accepted definitions of the term “imam” states that *imam is a religious figure who can perform certain religious services and ceremonies in Islamic religion*.<sup>1</sup> Our task was to single out the sociologically interesting aspects of his life and work as an imam from Cukarka, a picturesque village 6 km away from Presevo, to find about his attitudes towards religiousness and the Islamic community, and note down the positive and negative experiences from his life of faith in the border area. Bearing in mind the methodological difficulties of a field research in a multilingual environment, we were also aware of some advantages stemming from the fact that one of the researchers comes from the area which was studied and is thus a part of its specific pattern of ethnic and religious practices. Border areas are challenging and inspiring to study for many reasons, one of them being the interplay between

---

\* Prepared as a part of the project *Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of East and Southeast Serbia* (179013), carried out at the University of Niš – Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> “IMAM (Turkish), a religious leader in Islamic communities; a teacher in a madrasah (Cvitković 1991, 118).”

the urban and the rural, the traditional and the modern in many different aspects of life, as well as the perseverance of “face to face” relations in a multilingual and multinational environment, which is considered a major advantage. All of this should presumably contribute to the preservation of cordial relations and a successful social, economic and cultural cooperation in the border area, which has been a “buffer zone” between the Republic of Serbia and its estranged territory – Kosovo and Metohia for almost two decades now. The fact that one of the researchers comes from the Pcinja district presupposes considerable knowledge about both the current and the “invisible” circumstances in the border area, which can help with gaining a deeper understanding of the visible manifestations of Imam Ibrahim’s mediation and work in this multilingual, multinational and multireligious environment. At the same time, we must not forget that even though this is an advantage, it is not on its own sufficient for conducting an analysis.

The data in this paper was collected in a field research, following the *Protocol for collecting data about religious work in the border areas of Eastern and Southeastern Serbia*, written under the supervision of Dragoljub B. Djordjevic. The field work was done by Danijela Zdravkovic on 4 May 2013.

### PREŠEVO

Presevo is located in the utmost south of Serbia, in the so-called Presevo valley, which is physically divided into two parts of relatively equal size by the Belgrade – Skopje motorway, as well as the South Moravica River. It borders Bujanovac and Gnjilane municipalities, as well as the FYR Macedonia in the south, and open into the Kumanovska ravine. It has 35 settlements with the total population of about 40,000, and a significant number (over 15,000) of people temporarily working abroad. According to the 2002 census, the ethnic composition of the Presevo municipality was dominated by Albanians (89.21%), whereas Serbs accounted for the rest. This has remained the same till the present day, when Presevo is the home of 50.1% of the total Albanian population living in Serbia. The majority of the population is Muslim (87.4%), followed by Orthodox Christians (9.7%) and a statistically insignificant number of Catholics and Protestants. Albanian is spoken as mother tongue by 89.21% of the population.

The first mention of Presevo as a settlement dates back to XIV century, or more precisely to 1381. The *Via Ignacia* road went through it, which points to the importance of its geographic location. Presevo is an oriental town with oriental culture, and it stands in sharp contrast to its predominantly rural surroundings, where rural population of the 35 villages makes up a specific ethnic, religious and confessional background of the Serbian southeastern border area (Vlahović 1999). The community is a rather traditional one, where influential individuals play the role of mediators between the rural communities and the global society, i.e. its manifestations in the local community.



## RURALISATION

The process of speedy deagrarianisation and depopulation in the rural areas, and the consequent “domination of urban society” and “the autumn of peasantry” has been empirically confirmed by multiple sociological studies in Serbia (Mitrović 1999), especially when it comes to villages in the border areas, which are the canker of Serbia as a country (Đorđević, Stevanović i Todorović, 2012). Statistical data referring to mechanical and natural population changes in the Pcinja district (Bujanovac and Presevo municipalities), clearly show divergence from the current trend of urbanisation, as they reveal an increase in the population of the rural areas, in which Albanians make up the ethnic majority (Source: Municipalities in Serbia 2010, 111). Farmers from the local villages in Presevo are a social class with the highest fertility rate. This is why the urban population of Presevo keeps increasing at the expense of peasantry, which now represents a strong and vital core of this border area. From the sociological perspective, it is interesting to see some aspects of the interdependence between the rural and the urban described from the standpoint of an imam. Unlike the rest of Serbia, the border area of the Presevo valley does not have a problem with population increase. What is the role of an imam in rural areas (the village of Čukarka)? To which extent can imam’s religious activities contribute to the development of a border area and what is this influential individual’s responsibility when it comes to reinforcing the urban core (Presevo) that we analysed, in the wake of the second wave of modernisation in Serbia? These starting hypotheses in the form of questions shaped our consequent research in an attempt to validate (through an in-depth interview) the effects of imam Lukman Ibrahimimi’s religious work on the social development of the Presevo valley.

## ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES IN SERBIA

The mosque (Ph. 1 and 6) is in the close vicinity of the centre of Čukarka, where we were met by Dugadjin Hasani (1981), our informant and translator in the interview with the imam. Our translator works as a religious teacher in a polytechnic school in Presevo, as well as a court interpreter for Turkish at the Primary court in Vranje. Mr Hasani takes great pride in his education obtained in Istanbul (Turkey), where he finished high school, the Imam Hatim Lisesi madrasah, and enrolled in İlahia, an Islamic college. He spoke about Islamic communities in a quiet voice and a hesitant manner:

“There are two official Muslim organisations: *The Islamic Community of Serbia* and *The Islamic Community in Serbia*. I believe that the former one was founded in 2007, based in Belgrade, and is administered by reis-ul-ulema Adem Zilkic. It comprises an independent riyasat, which is divided into three meshihats: the Meshihat of Serbia (seats in Belgrade and Novi Sad), the Meshihat of Sandzak, and the Meshihat of Presevo. As for the latter, it comprises a separate meshihat which belongs to the Riyasat of the Islamic community

in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Meshihat of Presevo has 39 imams, and the one we will be interviewing is amongst the youngest. I shall introduce you to him and kindly ask him to help us with the research (...) Salam aleikum (D. Hasani greets the imam).”<sup>2</sup>

The research into the new religious tendencies amongst the Muslims in Serbia would be unimaginable without prior reflection on the various factors which played a key role in the organisation, religious activities and social implications of the Islamic community of Serbia, on and beyond its territory. It is widely known how the establishment and the development of the Islamic community unfolded, as the process was started in 1868. Before that there was no need for such a community, as Serbia was still ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Following the liberation from the Turkish rule, the Islamic community of Serbia gained independence and continued to exist as the only Islamic community on the territory of Serbia at the time. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Islamic community had to face a number of changes, and when ex-Yugoslav states proclaimed their independence, the question of establishing new Islamic communities cropped up. Henceforward, there has been a number of crucial changes in the organisation of the Islamic community in ex Yugoslavia.

Some of the most important characteristic of the present-day Islamic community of Serbia (administered by effendi Adem Zilkic) are its independence (in the organisation of its religious activities and the management of its property) and autonomy (which is based on Muslim religious and legal institutions dating back to the times of the Osman rule in Serbia). Having checked the research permit, which the reserchers on the Project obtained when the Project started in 2011, he addressed us in the following manner:

“Welcome to the mosque, a pleasant retreat for all the believers, regardless of their confession (ph. 1). I am a member of the Islamic community of Serbia, I follow the rules of the institutions of my community and my religious activities are in accordance with the rules and principles of Qur’an, the religious teaching of the Prophet Mohammed, as well as with the Islamic tradition of the Muslims and the requirements of modern times.”

The imam was kind enough to wear his robe (ph. 2) and allow us to take exclusive photographs. Furthermore, he showed us the exact spots in the mosque where he usually preached and prayed (ph. 3), as well as a small platform from which imams read Qur’an (ph. 4). The aim of the Islamic community is based on the idea that all its member should live in accordance with the Islamic norms. This goal can be achieved in various ways: by establishing and preserving mosques as centres of religious life and teaching, founding schools, faculties and universities, libraries, publishing companies,

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the Islamic community of Serbia (reis-ul-ulema Adem Zilkic) and the Islamic community in Serbia (mufti Muamer Zukorlic) are in bitter conflict.

museums, charities, as well as through cooperation with different Islamic and other religious communities, and focusing on all other religious and cultural influences which shape Muslims in Serbia. The history of how the Islamic community of Serbia was established and the changes it went through serves as the cornerstone on which new mosques are built and religious teaching in them preserved.

### AROUND THE MOSQUE

Imam's activities are limited to Cukarka, a hamlet with about 120 households in the Presevo valley, also known as "the village right next to the border", which lent its name to the border crossing, as it is only 4-5 km away.

This young religious teacher told us about his reasons for doing the interview: the first one is concerned with the open-mindedness of the Islamic community of Serbia, and the second has to do with his positive attitude to education and science in general. He was notably more than willing and pleased to cooperate, and did not mind our recording the conversation and taking a few photographs in order to add some visual detail to the story.

Imam Lukman Ibrahimimi was born on 10 November 1977, in Alidjerce village, which is also located in the Presevo district. He is married with two sons. (It is interesting to note one curious coincidence: namely, our imam's name corresponds to the surname of Thomas Luckman, a Slovene by birth, who is one of the leading sociologists of religion, and who studied Islam, amongst other things. Dragoljub B. Djordjevic published his famous text about the conversion to Islam, titled: "Religious circumstances in Europe: the background of contemporary conversion" [2005, 135-144] in *Teme*, a magazine published by the University of Nis. The name Lukman does not hold any special significance in Serbian translation. The name was chosen by imam Ibrahimimi's father, who was an imam as well. Qur'an mentions that Luqman, as well as Mohammed, was a prophet and a famous healer.)

His education includes a madrasah in Pristina and a Hafiz (diploma and a title of respect for a person who knows the entire Qur'an by heart). He started working in 2001. There is no explicit appointment of an imam. He has lived in the area, more precisely in Aludjerce, his entire life. It was entirely up to him to decide whether he would live in his family home or in the mosque. The mosque of Cukarka has no separate residential premises, and his religious work is limited to the village:

"Every village has its own mosque and an imam, the one who teaches the locals, heals and advises against bad habits in life, which should be abandoned in youth, when one is still capable of changing. There are two types of local Islamic communities: rural and urban. Unlike orthodox priests, whose activities extend to several churches, we only have one imam in each mosque. Since 1991 only one mosque has been built in the village, and it has already been mentioned that Cukarka has only one mosque as well. It was built in 2010, when the existing one was torn down and a new one built in its place."

The conversation with imam then shifted towards the most common technical and financial issues he faces, and which are mostly related to the *shortage of money*, since the religious activities of an imam, as well as the mosque are financed by the village, i.e. by the locals' donations. The size of the village and the affluence of its religious population therefore largely determine the religious activity of an imam, as well as the functioning of the mosque.

In his service, Lukman Ibrahimimi has maintained friendly relations with other imams from the Presevo district. Frequent meetings, at least twice a week, have brought their relationship to a higher level. He has no contact with the priests from the Serbian Orthodox church, and so far has not met any of them. What is interesting is that Cukarka has a church, but does not have a priest in residence who would perform religious services for the remaining Serbs there. A priest occasionally comes from Presevo for patron saint celebrations or funerals. This fact seems to provide an excellent explanation for Orthodox dignitaries and sociologists of religion who are allegedly baffled by the reasons why our border eparchies are dying out. Well, that is why!<sup>3</sup>

We insisted on finding out something about his relationship to his superiors in the local Islamic community, and this is what Mr Ibrahimimi had to say:

“In contrast to Orthodox Christianity, there are practically no superiors in the Islamic religious community; relationships between imams from different districts are left to their own will and they are based on religion without subordination. However, the Islamic community of Kosovo, which was formed in 1993, after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the separation of the Sarajevo riyaset, exerts the biggest influence on the Muslims in the Presevo valley.”

### **BELIEVERS, MUSLIMS AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS**

Comparing the past – in which religion was suppressed and marginalised, with the present-day circumstances in which religious organisation can act freely and faith is seeing a revival, the imam pointed out the importance of being on friendly terms and cooperating with the authorities and government institutions of the country:

“Nowadays, religiousness is far more common than it used to be. My father was also an imam, so I am well aware of the fact that people can now visit mosques freely and without hindrance, which is not how it used to be. People working for state institutions used to deliberately avoid going to mosques. However, religiousness has been widely present since 2002, when religious education was introduced in schools. Children are becoming more devoted to religion and come to mosques more often, there are more books and TV programs on the subject, especially during Ramadan.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Explained in greater detail in the text titled “Administration in a remote region – Trgovište“ (Đorđević and Zdravković 2013).

A fulfilled and righteous life of faith, claims the imam, certainly contributes to the harmony and cooperation within the local community, as well as to personal and social development. The primary measurable indicator of religiousness in Cukarka is the frequency with which the mosque is attended for prayer. The prayers are performed five times a day, more precisely, at: 4:30, 9:30, 13:00, 16:30, and 19:00 hours. The largest number of people attends the 13:00 o'clock Friday prayer, the so-called Jumma, when the mosque is visited by approximately 60 people. On other days and times, the mosque is visited by 10 to 15 people on average. As we have already mentioned, there are around 120 households in Cukarka, out of which 100 are Albanian.

People who come to the mosque most often are the most religious ones – all males over 60, farmers, two professors and two teachers.

The village is populated by Albanians and Serbs; the imam is happy about their mutual cooperation. Obviously, Serbs do not come to the mosque, but our interlocutor has a few things to say about his view on welcoming other religions and religious people into the mosque, as well as his attitude to the local holidays and customs<sup>4</sup>:

“The non-Albanians from the village, who are all Serbs, are welcome to the mosque, and it would be nice to see them perform ceremonies and celebrate religious festivals together with the Muslims. On holidays, it is an Islamic tradition to take meat as a present to the next-door neighbour, regardless of their nationality and faith. Personally, I celebrate all the holidays and follow the customs of my nation and religion. We used to be a lot closer and interact a lot more with the Serbian population. In the past, we used to invite each other to weddings. However, that is now reduced to courteous congratulations and only an occasional visit.”

It is remarkable that an imam in the border area leans towards ecumenism, and interculturalism, but as these work both ways, it seems odd that he does not mention how nice it would be if Serbs and Albanians “performed ceremonies and celebrated religious festivals together” in an Orthodox church.

## OTHERS

Apart from Orthodox Christians, there are no other Christians in either Cukarka or the Presevo district. The reasons for this have little to do with tensions or conflicts between religions, and a lot to do with the fact that Serbs have gradually moved out of the area. The emigration from the rural area of the Presevo district does not leave room for mutual cooperation. The imam has no friends amongst Orthodox or Catholic priests, pastors and preachers, nor does he know any of them in person.

Furthermore, he has no knowledge of the spreading of the so-called small Protestant communities (pejoratively called cults) amongst Albanians and minorities:

---

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed account, see: Đorđević, Gavrilović, and Todorović 2012.

“There are no Protestants amongst Albanians in Presevo. I have heard that there are 37 Albanian Protestant churches in Kosovo and Albania, but as far as I know, these are all former Catholics. I am not familiar with Albanian Muslims’ conversion to Protestantism, so I believe this to be the problem of the Catholic church. I have heard about a seminar devoted to this issue, which was organised in Tirana 4 or 5 years ago.”

This is his view of *protestantisation*, which is, whether we like it or not, slowly overtaking all nationalities of the world, regardless of their religion and faith (Đorđević 2013), including Albanians, Serbs, and the Roma in the Pcinja district, as well as in Kosovo and Metohia and Albania.<sup>5</sup>

Performing religious service in a border area mosque does not come with any specific advantages – the work of an imam is the same in every mosque. As for the disadvantages, the closeness to the border plays the key role here. Namely, emigrants from Asia and Africa often come to the mosque asking for help in the form of food, clothes, or medicines. Even though the mosque is supposed to help everyone in need, these people are often followed by the police, which disturbs the peace inside the mosque and gives it bad reputation, aggravating both the imam and the locals. Apart from this, he has not had any unpleasant situations in his religious work. The imam is an active mediator between the people of Cukarka and the local government of Presevo, and he has a good cooperation with the farmers. Together they make decisions concerning some important village issues, the funding of the mosque, the maintenance of the local road and all other activities related to farming the land, livestock care, local children’s education. etc. As a member of the Muslim Community Board he got in touch with the municipal president, especially around Bayram, one of the greatest festivals. Imam said the following about his relationship with the representatives of political parties:

“I asked the president for financial help and small amounts of money for personal social and health insurance on numerous occasions, and the president in turn asked for my help with some socio-pathological issues. For example, we arranged meetings with young people in the mosque on several occasions, during which I talked about the negative effects of drugs, alcohol and theft, especially if such problems were noted in the village. According to the laws of the Islamic community, cooperation should be established with the representatives of all political parties, for the purpose of spreading the ideas of Mohammedanism in accordance with requirements of modern times and political circumstances, which is what I do, so I wouldn’t want to single out anyone in particular.”

---

<sup>5</sup> In 2004 and 2005, Dragoljub B. Đorđević taught in a summer school, i.e. an international camp in Ulcinj, where the students were both Serbian and Albanian (from Albania and from Kosovo and Metohia) and the members of different Protestant cults and denominations. The camp was organised by EUS (Evangelical University Students).



Despite his religious education, Mr Ibrahim erroneously uses „Mohammedanism”, an obsolete term for Islam and Muslims, nowadays even considered offensive („Mohammedan, an archaic European term for Muslims [v.]. Due to its incongruity with the teaching of Islam and the aversion Muslims feel towards it, it has largely been abandoned [Cvitković 1991, 195].“)

## CONCLUSION

The interview with the imam was concluded in a friendly atmosphere. He kindly saw us off and agreed to a few photographs in front of the mosque (ph. 5).

The things he told us about his work in the border area are personal experiences: life in such an area – a multinational and multiethnic environment – improves one’s personal development, as well as the development of the group one belongs to, but only when friendly relations are cherished. Border life and coexistence with other peoples and ethnic minorities, religions and confessions is a great fortune, and should be preserved in the spirit of diversity and complementation.

Getting used to peaceful coexistence with one’s neighbours and mutual tolerance between those who have been brought together by historical destiny is a widely accepted and attested prerequisite for the survival of any nation, either big or small. The principle sociological postulate concerning the rational organisation of ethnically diverse societies relies on the fact that the influences of basic social institutions have to be decreased and toned down, so as not to increase and intensify the differences between different nations (Mitrović 2007, 153; Cvitković 2013).

Will the Islamic community, imams and their religious activities ever manage to be the factor that decreases the differences and discrepancies which have existed between Serbs and Albanians for the past 20 years?<sup>6</sup> The regional development and the development of the border rely heavily on the improvement of ethnic relations in Presevo and the entire Pcinja district.

One should get to know one’s Muslim neighbours (Osmani 2005; Đorđević and Todorović 2009; Cvitković 2011). This paper is a small push in that direction.

## REFERENCES

- Cvitković, Ivan. *Rečnik religijskih pojmova*. Sarajevo: samostalno izdanje, 1991.  
Cvitković, Ivan. *Moj susjed musliman*. Zapeč: Školska knjiga, 2011.  
Cvitković, Ivan. *Encountering Others: Religious and Confessional identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Niš: YSSSR, 2013.

---

<sup>6</sup> The imam believes that the cooperation between Serbs and Albanians is possible, saying it should be improved “by decreasing the interference of political interests, and encouraging the locals to socialise through various sports activities (with mixed teams) or cultural events which would be financed by the state, the mosque and the church.”

- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. (ed.) *On Religion in the Balkans*. Niš, Sofia: YSSSR and „Ivan Hadjyiski“, 2013.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B., Danijela Gavrilović, and Dragan Todorović, eds. *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on the Border*. Niš: YSSSR and Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 2012.
- Ђорђевић, Драгољуб Б., Ђура Стевановић и Драган Тодоровић. *Село у пограничју*. Београд и Ниш: Службени гласник и Машински факултет, 2012.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. and Dragan Todorović. *Jemka has Risen: Tekkias, Tarikats and Sheiks of Niš Romas*. Niš: Filozofski fakultet u Nišu, 2009.
- Đorđević, Dragoljub B. and Danijela Zdravković. Administration in a remote region – Trgovište. In *A Priest on the Border*, edited by Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Dragan Todorović, and Miloš Jovanović. Niš: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 2013.
- Лукман, Томас. „Религијска ситуација у Европи: позадина савремених преобраћења.“ *Теме* 29 (1-2) (2005): 135-144.
- Митровић, Милован. *Српско село. Прилог социологији традиционалног српског друштва*. Нови Сад: Матица српска, 1999.
- Mitrović, Milovan. *Uvod u sociologiju i sociologija prava*. Beograd: Pravni fakultet i Službeni glasnik, 2007.
- Општине у Србији*. Београд: Републички завод за статистику Србије, 2010.
- Османи, Ибрахим. „Текија.“ *Теме* 29 (1-2) (2005): 161-174.
- Влаховић, Петар. *Србија*. Београд: Етнографски музеј у Београду и Вукова задужбина, 1999.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Ph. 1. The inside of the mosque in Cukarka village, Presevo district



Ph. 2. Imam in his robe



Ph. 3. The place where imam performs ceremonies (preaching and praying)



Ph. 4. The place where imam reads from Qur'an



Ph. 5. Imam in front of the mosque



Ph. 6. The mosque with a minaret in Cukarka village, Presevo district





## ABSTRACTS

---

Victor Bakharev  
Sergey Lebedev

### **MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL SERVICE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE BORDER REGIONS: TO SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

#### **Summary**

This article focuses on setting the problem and a primary review of aspects of research in the development of socially constructive initiatives, going from institutions of traditional religions and faiths, which are of particular significance and relevance in this context, with the of most authoritative, influential and "set the tone" to all other traditional religious communities with Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate among them. And comprehensive cooperative partnership of these institutions with government agencies and emerging institutions of civil society is of great importance too.

**Key Words:** missionary activity, Russia, religion, religious factor, Social mission of the Church.

### **МИСИОНАРСКА АКТИВНОСТ И СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАД РУСКЕ ПРАВОСЛАВНЕ ЦРКВЕ У ПОГРАНИЧНИМ ОБЛАСТИМА: КА СОЦИОЛОШКОЈ АНАЛИЗИ**

#### **Резиме**

Чланак се фокусира на успостављање проблема и први приказ аспеката истраживања развоја социјално конструктивних иницијатива институција традиционалних религија и вера, које су од посебног значаја и важности у овом контексту, од којих је најауторитативнија, најутицајнија и она која „одређује тон” свим осталим религијским заједницама Руска православна црква са московским патријархатом. Такође, од велике је важности свеобухватно кооперативно партнерство ових институција са владиним агенцијама и институцијама грађанског друштва у настајању.

**Кључне речи:** мисионарска активност, Русија, религија, религијски фактор, социјална мисија цркве.

---

Milovan Vuković

### **PRIESTS OF THE BORDERLANDS: VELIKO GRADIŠTE**

#### **Summary**

This paper considers the role of local clergy in a local community, especially those located in the borderlands. The initial assumption is that churches and religious communities, as a kind of non-governmental organizations, are independent from political and economic institutions. Namely, they deal with the welfare of the ordinary people and engage in various philanthropic activities. As such, they may contribute to the development of civil society in local communities. Having this in mind, the opinions and attitudes of local priests in Veliko Gradište are gathered using so-called "in depth interview", as a widely used empirical technique. The analysis of answers on variety of raised social issues have revealed that the priests in Veliko Gradište have a significant role in the social life of this local community, maintaining good relationships with various institutions; especially, with educational ones.

**Key Words:** The Orthodox Serbian Church, Veliko Gradište, local priests.

## СВЕШТЕНИЦИ У ПОГРАНИЧЈУ: ВЕЛИКО ГРАДИШТЕ

### Резиме

Овај рад сагледава улогу локалног свештенства у локалним заједницама, посебно онима које су лоциране у пограничним крајевима. Почетна поставка рада је да су цркве и религијске заједнице, као невладине организације, независне од политичких и економских институција. Наиме, оне се баве унапређење благостања обичних људи и укључене су у различите филантропске активности. Као такве, оне могу допринети развоју цивилног друштва у локалним заједницама. Имајући ово у виду, истражени су ставови и мишљења свештеника у Великом Градишту применом дубинског интервјуа. Анализа одговора о низу постављених социјалних питања открила је да свештеници у Великом Градишту имају значајну улогу у друштвеном животу ове локалне заједнице, одржавајући односе с различитим институцијама, а посебно образовним.

**Кључне речи:** Српска православна црква, Велико Градиште, локални свештеници.

---

Ninoslav Golubović

Vladan Petrović

### A PRIEST ON THE BORDER – GOLUBAC

#### Summary

The paper is based on an interview with Miroslav Milošević, a priest in the temple of St. Father Nicholas in Golubac. The paper refers to his rich and long-lasting church practice in the municipality of Golubac and to his views of religiousness of the inhabitants of this region of Southeastern Serbia.

**Key Words:** Miroslav Milošević, priest, Serbian Orthodox Church, Southeastern Serbia, Golubac.

## СВЕШТЕНИК НА ГРАНИЦИ – ГОЛУБАЦ

### Резиме

Рад је настао на основу интервјуа са свештеником Мирославом Милошевићем, парохом у православном храму Св. Оца Николаја у Голупцу. У раду се чини осврт на богато, вишедеценијско чинодејствовање овог православног свештеника у голуbacher општини и његова схватања о религиозности локалног становништва овог дела југоисточне Србије.

**Кључне речи:** Мирослав Милошевић, свештеник, Српска православна црква, југоисточна Србија, Голубац.

---

Danijela Voza

### UKRAINIAN AMONG CATHOLICS IN MAJDANPEK, BOR, ZAJEČAR...

#### Summary

Like most of the border areas, borderland of eastern Serbia is characterized by diversity in ethnic and religious terms. As regards the religion, Catholicism is, right after Orthodox Christianity and Islam, the most common denomination.

The aim of this paper is to examine the functioning of the Catholic Church in the Eastern Serbia municipalities (Majdanpek, Bor, Zajecar, Negotin), effect of border area, the believers ratio to the church, other religions, preservation of the identity of Serbs and ethnic minorities in this area and so on. These data, the author got through the interview conducted with the only Catholic priest in charge of all the parishes in eastern Serbia. Limiting factor in the interview, and at the same time interesting fact, is that the interviewee is a Ukrainian who lives in this area and for only four years. Therefore, he is not very familiar with the identity of the Serbs and ethnic

minorities. Despite the small number of Mass visitors in towns like Negotin Majdanpek Donji Milanovac, interlocutor is satisfied with the treatment that the Catholic Church and Catholics have

**Key Words:** Eastern Serbia, religion, Catholicism, priest, borderland.

### УКРАЈИНАЦ МЕЂУ КАТОЛИЧКИМ ВЕРНИЦИМА У МАЈДАНПЕКУ, БОРУ, ЗАЈЕЧАРУ...

#### Резиме

Попут већине пограничних области, пограничје источне Србије одликује се разноврсношћу у етничком и религијском погледу. Када је реч о религији, католичанство је, одмах после православља и ислама, најзаступљенија конфесија. Циљ овог рада је испитати функционисање католичке цркве у општинама источне Србије (Мајданпек, Бор, Зајечар, Неготин), утицај пограничја, однос верника према цркви, другим религијама, оуваност идентитета Срба и националних мањина у тој области итд. До ових података, аутор је дошао путем интервјуа обављеним са јединим католичким свештеником задуженом за све жупе у источној Србији. Ограничавајућа околност у интервјуу, истовремено и занимљивост, јесте што је саговорник Украјинац, који на овим просторима живи и ради тек четири године. Стога, није добро упознат са идентитетом Срба и националних мањина. Упркос малој посећености миса у градовима као што су Неготин, Мајданпек, Д.Милановац, задовољан је третманом који католичка црква и католици имају.

**Кључне речи:** источна Србија, религија, католичанство, свештеник, пограничје.

---

Vesna Trifunović

### A PRIEST ON THE BORDER: FATHER DRAGAN FROM KLADOVO

#### Summary

Serbian Orthodox Church is equally present in the areas where there is Orthodox population, both in the center and in the border areas, and its activity is included into everyday life of the population. Its torchbearers are Orthodox priests who are always with believers, even with those who turn to Church occasionally for support and comfort, do not single them out and lead each one of them carefully on their pious way of to their religious self-realization. In Kladovo, a town in eastern Serbia, father Dragan, in prayers and rites with father Dejan and father Milan, does everything in the power of priests and as a part of his duties within the Orthodox Church to preserve faith keep and pass on Christian Orthodox learning and commandments, to the glory of God and the salvation of faithful people.

In Serbian Orthodox Church, dedicated to Holy and Great Martyr George, in the center of Kladovo, this God's servant has been serving God and lay people, so they can live by the commandments of God and to glorify the Lord.

**Key Words:** Serbian Orthodox Church, Orthodoxy, clergy, identity.

### СВЕШТЕНИК У ПОГРАНИЧЈУ: ОТАЦ ДРАГАН ИЗ КЛАДОВА

#### Резиме

Српска православна црква је једнако присутна на просторима где је православни живаљ, у центру као и у пограничним срединама, а њена активност је уткана у свакодневни живот становништва. Њене лучоноше су православни свештеници вазда уз вернике, чак и оне који се повремено обрате Цркви за помоћ и утеху, не правећи разлику међу њима и подједнако их брижно водећи богоугодним путем до њихове религиозне самоспознаје. У Кладову, градићу у источној Србији,

отац Драган, у заједничкој молитви и чинодејствију са оцем Дејаном и оцем Миланом, чини све што је у моћи свештеника и што је део дужности његових у окриљу православне цркве да очува веру, да одржи цркву и преноси хришћанско, православно учење, поуке и заповести његове, у славу Богу и на спасење верном народу. У Српској православној цркви у центру Кладова, посвећеној Св. Великомученику Ђорђу, овај богослужитељ већ двадесет година саслужује Богу и мирјанима, како би по заповестима Божјим живели и Господа Бога прослављали

**Кључне речи:** Српска православна црква, православље, свештенство, идентитет.

---

Miloš Jovanović

Miloš Tasić

## A VLACHIAN PRIEST IN THE BORDER REGION

### Summary

The paper deals with the experiences and attitudes of Bojan Aleksandrović or Boian Al Lisăndroaichi, a priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church, whose "missionary zone" covers the Eastern Serbian town of Negotin and the surrounding rural area with more than one hundred villages, mainly populated by Vlachs or Romanians. His accounts of religious life, inter-ethnic and religious cooperation and tensions, relations with the local and state political authorities, as well as his insights into the life and work in the border region are presented.

**Key Words:** Priest, Border Region, Romanian Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church.

## ВЛАШКИ СВЕШТЕНИК У ПОГРАНИЧЈУ

### Резиме

Рад се бави искуством и ставовима Бојана Александровића (на румунском: Boian Al Lisăndroaichi), свештеника Румунске православне цркве, чија „зона мисионарења” обухвата подручје града Неготина у источној Србији, као и оближње области са више од сто села која углавном насељавају Власи или Румуни. Представљени су његови погледи на религијски живот, међуетничку и религијску сарадњу и напетости, односе са локалним и државним властима, као и увиди у живот и рад у пограничју.

**Кључне речи:** свештеник, пограничје, Румунска православна црква, Српска православна црква.

---

Dejan Krstić

Dragan Koković

## FATHER BORA – A GOOD MAN AND PRIEST (ZAJEČAR)

### Summary

When it comes to religious life, Zajecar area is somewhat specific. This paper presents a notable and popular Serbian Orthodox Church priest from Zajecar. The first part gives his biography which testifies the history and current developments in Serbian Orthodox Church in this area and in the rest of the country as well. The second part gives his experiences and attitudes concerning the prevalence of "folk Orthodoxy" in this area, the impact of former socialist state on religion, the relation between ethnic-cultural differences of this area and religion and the relations with other religious communities in micro-environment.

**Key Words:** Father Bora, pries, faith, religion, Serbian Orthodox Church.

## ПОП БОРА – ДОБАР ЧОВЕК И СВЕШТЕНИК

### Резиме

Зајечарски крај, када је реч о верском животу, има своје специфичности. У овом раду се представља један угледни и у народу омиљени зајечарски свештеник Ср-

пске православне цркве. У првом делу се приказује његова биографија, која сведочи о историји и садашњем стању Српске православне цркве на овим просторима и у читавој Србији. У другом делу рада се приказују његова искуства и ставови везани за раширеност "народног православља" на овом подручју, за утицај некадашњег социјалистичког уређења на религију, за однос етничке и етно-културне разноликости овог подручја са религијом, за однос са другим верским заједницама у микро-средини.

**Кључне речи:** Поп Бора, свештеник, вера, религија, Српска православна црква.

---

Lela Milošević Radulović  
Dragana Stjepanović Zaharijevski  
**THE PRIEST IN THE BORDER AREA:  
SPASA PAVLOVIĆ FROM KNJAŽEVAC**

**Summary**

The paper's subject is the representation of the activities undertaken by the priest in the border municipality of Knjaževac. The paper's first part describes the life and work of the priest Spasa Pavlović from Knjaževac; the second part highlights some of the problems involved in the priest's living and working in the border area.

The focus of interest is the priest's view of his parishioners and religious life in the border area, his opinion about general social issues and trans-border cooperation, as well as about the experience of life in the border area, through the prism of his own contribution as well as that of the church and religion to the social environment he lives in.

The data are collected by means of an in-depth interview with the priest Spasa Pavlović from Knjaževac in June, 2013.

**Key Words:** Priest, Border Area, Parish, Bishopric, Knjaževac.

**СВЕШТЕНИК У ПОГРАНИЧЈУ:  
СПАСА ПАВЛОВИЋ ИЗ КЊАЖЕВЦА**

**Резиме**

Предмет овога рада је представљање деловања свештеника у пограничној општини Књажевац. У првом делу рада описан је живот и рад свештеника Спасе Павловића из Књажевца, а у другом делу су осветљени неки од проблема живота и рада свештеника у пограничју.

У фокусу интересовања је свештениково виђење парохијана и верског живота у пограничју, његово мишљење о општим друштвеним питањима и прекограничној сарадњи, као и доживљај живота у пограничју кроз призму виђења доприноса цркве и вере и сопственог доприноса средини у којој живи.

Подаци су сакупљени продубљеним интервјуом са свештеником Спасом Павловићем у Књажевцу јуна 2013. године

**Кључне речи:** свештеник, пограничје, парохија, епархија, Књажевац.

---

Dragan Todorović  
Jovan Živković  
**BRANISLAV PAVLOV:  
HEAD OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN BUJANOVAC**

**Summary**

The paper is based on an interview with Branislav Pavlov, Head of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac. It critically questions the position and activities of smaller religious communities on the territory whose population has traditionally and for centuries been regarded as members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islam Community. A special curiosity is the present believing population of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bujanovac, namely those who are almost exclusively recruited from the Roma ethnic corpus. The paper also discusses the principles of the Protestant missionary

activities and the reactions of the surrounding population to them as well as the cooperation of Jehovah's Witnesses with the local municipal and religious structures, including their views of the peculiarities of the way of life in the border region.

**Key Words:** Branislav Pavlov, Head, Jehovah's Witnesses, Southeast Serbia, Bujanovac.

**БРАНИСЛАВ ПАВЛОВ:  
СТАРЕШИНА ЈЕХОВИНИХ СВЕДОКА У БУЈАНОВЦУ**

**Резиме**

Рад је настао на основу интервјуа са Браниславом Павловим, старешином Јеховиних сведока у Бујановцу. У раду се проблематизује положај и деловање малих верских заједница на територији чије становништво вековима уназад традиционално спада у вернике Српске православне цркве и Исламске заједнице. Посебан куриозитет је тренутно верништво Јеховиних сведока у Бујановцу које се регрутује готово искључиво из редова ромског етничког корпуса. Разматрају се принципи протестантског мисионарског деловања и реакције окружујућег становништва на то деловање, као и сарадња Јеховиних сведока са локалним оштинским и верским структурама, те њихови погледи на специфичности живота у пограничју.

**Кључне речи:** Бранислав Павлов, старешина, Јеховини сведоци, југоисточна Србија, Бујановац.

---

Jasmina Petrović  
Zoran M. Jovanović

**A PRIEST IN THE BORDER AREA (DIMITROVGRAD): THE PREACHER  
OF GOD'S WORD AND A PARTICIPANT IN RELITY**

**Summary**

The paper presents a conversation with a priest, Mr. Aleksandar Djordjević, who has spent almost his entire life in Dimitrovgrad and its immediate surroundings, from the forties of the twentieth century. His storytelling provided an opportunity to learn not only about the characteristics of a priest's calling, but also about the phases through which the Orthodox Church has passed with its followers in recent decades in the same area, on the border with Bulgaria. Individual experiences of Mr. Slobodan Ilić, a recently ordained priest, and people of Dimitrovgrad are also presented. The data obtained from both respondents have been gathered in a deepened interview, based on a prepared interview basis. The narratives complement each other and provide an insight from the micro-sociological perspective into the characteristics of religious life in the southeast of Serbia, as well as into inter-ethnic relations and the everyday life of its inhabitants (mostly of Bulgarian and Serbian nationality), which resulted in a useful addition to the existing knowledge about the social life in the area. The methodological validity of the micro-sociological analysis is also evident in the fact that, to date, religious life in southeastern Serbia took place in accordance with the general trends existing in the area of the wider community, but was also strongly influenced by historical, political and cultural characteristics specific to the mentioned area, whose profile was shaped by individuals with their existence and activity.

**Key Words:** priest, Church, believers, Niš Diocese, border area, Dimitrovgrad.

**СВЕШТЕНИК У ПОГРАНИЧЈУ (ДИМИТРОВГРАД):  
ПРОПОВЕДНИК БОЖЈЕ РЕЧИ И САУЧЕСНИК У СТВАРНОСТИ**

**Резиме**

У раду је представљен разговор са свештеником г. Александром Ђорђевићем, чији живот готово у целини траје у Димитровграду и непосредној околини, по-



чев од четрдесетих година XX века. Његово приповедање пружило је прилику за упознавање не само с особеностима свештеничког позива, него и с менама кроз које је Православна црква са својим верницима проживљавала у последњим деценијама на истом подручју, што значи на граници с Бугарском. Представљена су и поједина искуства г. Слободана Илића, онедавно рукоположеног свештеника и становника Димитровграда. Подаци добијени од оба саговорника су прикупљени у продубљеном интервјуу, и то на основу припремљене основе за разговор. Приповести су међусобно комплементарне и пружају увид из микросоциолошке перспективе у особености верског живота на крајњем југоистоку Србије, као и међунационалних односа и свакодневице његових житеља (већином бугарске и српске националности), чиме је остварена корисна допуна постојећим сазнањима о друштвеном животу поменуто области. Методолошка оправданост примене микро-социолошке анализе видљива је и у чињеници да се доданашњи верски живот и у југоисточној Србији одвијао у складу с општим тенденцијама важећим на плану шире заједнице, али и под снажним утицајем историјских, политичких и културних особености специфичних за поменуто подручје, чији су профил својим постојањем и активношћу обликовали појединци. **Кључне речи:** свештеник, Црква, верници, Нишка епархија, пограничје, Димитровград.

---

Danijela Gavrilović

Marija Cvetković

#### **A PRIEST ON THE BORDER – TWO SIDES OF A COIN (BABUŠNICA)**

##### **Summary**

The article deals with a priest in the border municipality, following his life and professional career. It attempts to present the lives of the people in the border municipalities of Southeastern Serbia through their religiosity, intensity and quality from the perspective of the priest, as well as to describe the role of the priest in its creation and revival. Still, this article also deals with the life on the border in general, observed through the eyes of the priest and documented in its various aspects.

**Key Words:** priest, border regions, Southeastern Serbia, religiosity, believers.

#### **СВЕШТЕНИК У ПОГРАНИЧЈУ – ДВЕ СТРАНЕ ЈЕДНЕ МЕДАЉЕ (БАБУШНИЦА)**

##### **Резиме**

Текст говори о свештенику у пограничној општини, прати његов живот и професионалну каријеру. Представља покушај да се живот становника пограничних општина у југоисточној Србији прикаже кроз њихову религиозност, интензитет и квалитет виђену очима свештеника, као и улогу свештеника у њеном креирању и оживљавању. Ипак, кроз овај текст говоримо о животу у пограничју уопште, гледамо очима свештеника и документујемо живот овог краја у његовим многобројним видовима.

**Кључне речи:** свештеник, пограничје, југоисточна Србија, религиозност, верници.

---

Suzana Marković Krstić

Aleksandra Kostić

#### **THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CLERGY IN THE BORDER AREA OF CRNA TRAVA**

##### **Summary**

The paper offers a sociological and psychological view of the role and activities of the clergy in the border area of south-east Serbia. The importance of their ac-

tivities in the border municipality of Crna Trava is singled out due to excessive depopulation and the increasingly older population living there. During the second half of the 20th century, the inhabitants who were able to work left their home towns and many villages were left void of any biological potential, the younger population which was able to reproduce. The clergy encountered many difficulties in performing their spiritual activities and spreading any form of enlightenment, so that many churches were closed and many priests left the area. The new social context and the changes that occurred after the 1990s contributed to a reverse process – the restoration of churches, the celebration of patron saints' days and renewed interest in religious ceremonies, the revival of the spiritual and traditional (a pronounced socio-psychological dimension – the gathering and integration of families, of relatives and friends during local and family patron saint days).

The paper presents the results of the research into the way of life of priests Zoran Stojanović and Milorad Maksimović who confirmed the initial hypothesis that the clergy in the border areas through their activities contribute to the cultural and spiritual development of the people living there, the acceptance of the reproductive model which includes the birth of a greater number of children and the context of the preservation of the family, tradition and faith as the axes of social life. Priest Zoran Stojanović possesses a remarkable ability to notice and understand the key life problems of people living in the area of Crna Trava. The corner stones of the survival of the people and the preservation of the Serbian national identity as well as the identities of the minorities living in this border area, in his opinion, are being true to your faith and keeping your tradition, the stimulation of birth and the provision of the material means for people's everyday lives. That is why priest Zoran Stojanović is not involved in merely perceiving the problem, in the role of an observer, but attempts to through his activities (in accordance with his faith in God and faith in the positive outcome of what he is doing) guide people in finding a solution, putting special emphasis on the importance of having children, the reproduction of the population which is the basis for the biological survival and social-economic development of the border area.

**Key Words:** the activities of the clergy, the border region of Crna Trava, the birth rate, tradition, religion, the church, national identity, biological survival, development.

---

## ДЕЛОВАЊЕ СВЕШТЕНИКА У ЦРНОТРАВСКОМ ПОГРАНИЧЈУ

### Резиме

У раду је из социолошког и психолошког угла сагледана улога и деловање свештеника у пограничју југоисточне Србије. Значај деловања свештеника у пограничној општини Црна Трава посебно је наглашен због изражене депопулације и старења становништва. Током друге половине XX века одлазило је радно способно становништво из родног краја, а многа села остала су без биолошког потенцијала, младог и репродуктивно способног становништва. Свештенство је отежано обављало духовне и просветитељске активности, тако да је дошло до престанка рада цркава и одласка свештеника из црнотравског пограничја. Нови друштвени контекст и промене након деведесетих година XX века доприносиле су обрнутом процесу – обнављању цркви, светковању слава и религијских обичаја, оживљавању духовног и традиционалног (наглашена социопсихолошка димензија – окупљање и интеграција породица, рођака и пријатеља током месних и крсних слава).

Рад представља резултате истраживања начина живота свештеника Зорана Стојановића и Милорада Максимовића који потврђују полазну претпоставку да свештеници у пограничју својим деловањем доприносе културном и духовном

развоју народа који тамо живи, прихватању репродуктивног модела који подразумева рађање већег броја деце, у контексту очувања породице, традиције и вере као окоснице друштвеног живота. Свештеник Зоран Стојановић поседује изузетну способност опажања и разумевања кључних животних проблема људи из црнотравског краја. Камени темељци за опстанак народа и очување идентитета Срба и националних мањина у пограничју, према његовом мишљењу, су поштовање вере и традиције, стимулисање рађања и обезбеђење материјалних добара за живот људи. Стога свештеник Зоран Стојановић не остаје на нивоу перцепције проблема, у улози посматрача, већ настоји да својим деловањем (у складу са вером у Бога и позитиван исход онога што ради) усмерава људе ка њиховом решавању, при чему посебно наглашава значај рађања, репродукције становништва која је основа за биолошки опстанак и друштвено-економски развој пограничја.

**Кључне речи:** деловање свештеника, црнотравско пограничје, рађање, традиција, вера, црква, национални идентитет, биолошки опстанак, развој.

---

Ivana Ilić Krstić  
Vesna Miltojević

## **ABOUT PRIESTHOOD IN THE BORDER MUNICIPALITY SURDULICA**

### **Summary**

In Serbia, the process of secularization began after the Second World War. The process of secularization was conditioned by the industrialization and urbanization, also by the socio-economic and political change, which were reflected in the social atheism. With the fall of the Iron Curtain 80s of twentieth century, the process of secularization was replaced from the revitalization. Since then we can talk about the revival and revitalization of religion and religiosity in our country.

Bearing in mind that the process of religious revitalization led to the political exploitation of the religion, and the return to religion has not always been the domain of "spiritual revelation" and contributed to tolerance. The necessary is research of the population religiosity but is need to examine experiences, attitudes and role of priests, especially in multi-ethnic communities such as border areas.

**Key Words:** secularization, revitalization, priest, border, Surdulica.

## **О СВЕШТЕНИЧКОМ ПОЗИВУ У ПОГРАНИЧНОЈ ОПШТИНИ СУРДУЛИЦА**

### **Резиме**

У Србији је процес секуларизације отпочео по окончању Другог светског рата. Осим индустријализације и урбанизације, овај процес био је условљен и друштвено-економским и политичким променама које су уследиле, а огледао се кроз атеизацију друштва. Са падом гвоздене завесе 80-тих година 20. века, процес секуларизације смењује ревитализација. Од тог периода можемо говорити о оживљавању или ревитализације религије и религиозности на нашим просторима.

Имајући у виду да је процес ревитализације религије доводио и до њене политичке инструментализације, те да повратак религији није био увек у домену „духовног откровења“ и доприносио толеранцији, потребно је осим истраживања религиозности становништва испитивати и искуства, ставове и улогу свештеника, посебно у мултиетничким срединама каква су пограничја.

**Кључне речи:** секуларизација, ревитализација, свештеник, пограничје, Сурдулица.

---

Dragan Todorović  
Dragoljub B. Đorđević  
Neven Obradović

## ZORAN STOJANOV: A PRIEST FROM BOSILEGRAD

### Summary

The paper was made on the basis of an interview with Priest Zoran Stojanov, the elder of the Cathedral of Bosilegrad. The paper represents a review of the rich, multi-decade ordination of this Orthodox priest from the municipality of Bosilegrad and his views on the religiosity of the local population of this part of Southeastern Serbia.

**Key Words:** Zoran Stojanov, priest, Serbian Orthodox Church, Southeastern Serbia, Bosilegrad.

## ЗОРАН СТОЈАНОВ: СВЕШТЕНИК ИЗ БОСИЛЕГРАДА

### Резиме

Рад је настао на основу интервјуа са свештеником Зораном Стојановим, старешином Саборног храма у Босилеграду. У раду се чини осврт на богато, вишедеценијско чинодејствовање овог православног свештеника у босилеградској општини и његова схватања о религиозности локалног становништва овог дела југоисточне Србије.

**Кључне речи:** Зоран Стојанов, свештеник, Српска православна црква, југоисточна Србија, Босилеград.

---

Dragoljub B. Đorđević  
Danijela Zdravković

## ADMINISTRATION IN A REMOTE REGION – TRGOVIŠTE

### Summary

The article presents the activity of an Orthodox priest in Trgovište, a specific border municipality in the southeast of Serbia, through short chapters on his biography, parish, congregation, quality and quantity of their religiosity, the bishop in charge, relationships with the authority and political parties, life on the border, life with “others”, and main problems of that poor region. The Orthodox clergyman has a somewhat narrow perspective on his vocation and stands firmly on the position that a priest can best help the survival and development of his congregation and parish only by working on the spiritual strengthening of the people from Pčinja, in order for them to go on and overcome the hard times that have befallen the tenacious Serbian people.

**Key Words:** Orthodox priest, Radovan Milošević, Serbian Orthodox Church, Trgovište, life on the border.

## ЧИНОДЕЈСТВОВАЊЕ У ЗАБАЧЕНОМ КРАЈУ – ТРГОВИШТЕ

### Резиме

У реферату се представља деловање једног православног попа у Трговишту, специфичној пограничној општини на југоистоку Србије, кроз кратка поглавља о његовој биографији, парохији, парохијанима, квалитету и квантитету њихове религиозности, надлежном епископу, односу с властима и политичким странкама, животу на граници, животу с „другима“ и о главним тешкоћама тог сиромашног краја. Православни духовник донекле уско види своје послање и чврсто стоји иза става да као свештеник најбоље може помоћи опстанку и развоју парохијана и парохије само радом на духовном јачању Пчињана да би опстали и превазишли недаћу која је задесила жилави српски живаљ.

**Кључне речи:** Православни поп, Радован Милошевић, Српска православна црква, Трговиште, живот на граници.

---

Dragan Todorović

## **RAJKO GLIŠOVIĆ: A PRIEST FROM TEMSKA (PIROT)**

### **Summary**

The paper is based on an interview with Protopresbyter Rajko Glišović, Head of the Church of St Parascheva (Petka) and Spiritual Advisor and Administrator of women's monastery of St Greatmartyr George in Temska near the city of Pirot. It gives a survey of many decades of rich religious practice of this Orthodox priest in the rural background of Pirot as well as of his views of religiosity of local population in this part of Southeast Serbia.

**Key Words:** Rajko Glišović, Priest, Southeast Serbia, Pirot, Temska.

## **РАЈКО ГЛИШОВИЋ: СВЕШТЕНИК ИЗ ТЕМСКЕ (ПИРОТ)**

### **Резиме**

Рад је настао на основу интервјуа са протојерејом Рајком Глишовићем, старешином цркве „Св. Петке“ и духовником и администратором женског манастира „Св. Великомученик Георгије“ у Темској, покрај Пирота. У раду се чини осврт на богато, вишедеценијско чинодејствовање овог православног свештеника у пиротском руралном залеђу и његова схватања о религиозности локалног становништва овог дела југоисточне Србије.

**Кључне речи:** Рајко Глишовић, свештеник, југоисточна Србија, Пиrot, Темска.

---

Danijela Zdravković

Dragoljub B. Đorđević

## **THE LIFE AND WORK OF IMAM LUKMAN IBRAHIMI FROM CUKARKA (PRESEVO)**

### **Summary**

The paper follows the life and work of imam Lukman Ibrahimimi from the village of Cukarka, Presevo district, through the following sections: aims, Presevo, ruralisation, Islamic communities in Serbia, Muslim and Christian believers, others, and the conclusion. Cukarka is right next to the border with FRY Macedonia and AP Kosovo and Metohia. In this multiethnic and multireligious environment dominated by Albanian population and Islam, which has been shaken by conflicts between the Serbs and Albanians for decades, religious communities and religious leaders could have a potentially beneficial effect on rebuilding trust and side-by-side existence. Imam Ibrahimimi seems to be well aware of his responsibility and trying to act towards achieving this.

**Key Words:** imam, Lukman Ibrahimimi, Cukarka, Presevo, life in the border area.

## **ЖИВОТ И ДЕЛОВАЊЕ ХОЋЕ ЛУКМАНА ИБРАХИМИЈА ИЗ ЧУКАРКЕ (ПРЕШЕВО)**

### **Резиме**

У тексту се, кроз поглавља: задатак, Прешево, рурализација, Исламске заједнице у Србији, око џамије, верници муслимани и православци, други и закључак, представља живот и деловање хоџе Лукмана Ибрахимија из села Чукарка у општини Прешево, која се граничи с Републиком Македонијом и АП Косово и Метохија. У тој мултиетничкој и вишерелигијској средини, у којој ипак преовладавају Албанци и ислам, и у којој су деценијама присутне тензије између Срба и Албанаца, религијске заједнице и верске вође могле би да благотворно делује на изградњи поверења и суживота. Имам Ибрахими изгледа да је свестан своје одговорности и да делује у том смеру.

**Кључне речи:** хоџа, Лукман Ибрахими, Чукарка, Прешево, живот на граници.

---

### **PROGRAM BOARD**

- *Prof. dr Dragoljub B. Đorđević* (University of Niš, Serbia), President
- *Prof. dr Danijela Gavrilović* (University of Niš, Serbia), Vice-president
- *Prof. dr Sergey Lebedev* (The Social-Psychological Faculty of the Belgorod State University, Belgorod, Russia)

### **ORGANIZING BOARD**

- *Dr Dragan Todorović* (University of Niš, Serbia), President
- *Mr Miloš Jovanović* (University of Niš, Serbia), Vice-president
- *Neven Obradović* (University of Niš, Serbia)



**THE PROCEDURE FOR COLLECTING DATA  
ON THE LIFE AND ACTIVITY OF A PRIEST ON THE BORDER**  
(Đorđević/Todorović/Jovanović – 2012)

**• Socio-demographic features**

1. Place of birth: .....;  
located in the municipality of ....., in the district of .....
2. Year of birth: .....
3. Offspring: female ....., male children .....; grandchildren .....
4. Qualifications (the exact name of the educational institution):  
.....
5. Year of ordination: .....
6. Since when has he lived in the researched area: .....
7. Today his parish house is located in: .....

**• On the parish**

1. Number of parishes that he serves: .....
2. Parishes are all: a) rural b) urban v) rural and urban
3. Number of churches that he serves: .....
4. How many churches have been built since 1991 in his parish/es: .....
5. Most frequently encountered technical and material problems are:  
.....
6. Intensity and quality of relationships and cooperation with colleagues,  
other priests from neighbouring parishes and the entire eparchy:  
.....
7. On the relationship with the bishop (name, and secular first and last  
name):  
.....  
.....

**• On the congregation and religious life**

1. On the regularity and attendance of service: .....
2. Who are the most common believers  
(approximate sex, age, educational, professional, ethnic, etc. structure)?  
.....
3. Who are the dominant believers in the parish? Apart from Serbs, are there  
members of other minorities, for example, Roma, Vlachs, Bulgarians, Mace-  
donians? .....
4. How are non-Serbs, as believers, accepted by the rest of the Orthodox be-  
lievers? Are they wanted in the church? Are religious rites performed and  
holidays celebrated with them willingly?  
.....

5. On his relation toward local holidays and customs:

.....  
.....

6. A comparison of the former period of marginalized faith and the current one where religious communities act freely and the religious life is renewed:

.....  
.....

7. His positive experience in serving in the border region:

.....  
.....

8. His negative experience in serving in the border region:

.....  
.....

**• On the relationships with the local authorities**

1. Is there any contact with civil councils in local communities:

.....  
.....

2. Is there any contact with the president of the municipality:

.....  
.....

3. He has the best relationship with the representative of which political party and why?

.....  
.....

**• On the relationships with other religions, confessions, and religious communities**

1. What other religions act in his parish, that is, eparchy?

.....  
.....

2. Apart from Orthodoxy, what other Christian confessions exist in his parish, that is, eparchy? .....

3. Has there ever been any disagreement, and even conflict, with other religions (Islam), and confessions (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism)?

.....  
.....

4. Or cooperation?

.....  
.....

5. Do you have friends among imams, pastors or Catholic priests?

.....  
.....

6. Is there any knowledge on the spreading of the so-called small Protestant religious communities (derogatory: sects) among Serbs and national minorities:

.....  
.....

.....  
.....

**• On the life and activity on the border**

1. Does life on the border – in a multinational and multireligious environment – in his opinion, improve personal, group, and general development or does it hinder them?

.....  
.....  
.....

2. How can he, as a priest, best help in the survival and development of his parish and congregation:

.....  
.....  
.....

3. Is the life on the border/in the border regions with other peoples and national minorities, religions and confessions, a wealth in itself, which should be nurtured, or is it the gravest danger to the survival and identity of both the majority and minorities?

.....  
.....  
.....

4. What are the segments in which, in his opinion, the identity of Serbs, as the majority living on the border and in the border regions, is most endangered:

.....  
.....  
.....

5. What are the segments in which, in his opinion, the identity of national minorities (that are the majority in some places) – Vlachs, Bulgarians, Roma, Albanians – who live on the border and in the border regions, is most endangered:

.....  
.....  
.....

6. To preserve the national identity of Serbs and minorities on the border/in the border regions, it is most important to keep one's religion or something else (language, tradition, cultural heritage...)?

.....  
.....  
.....

7. Generally, the underdevelopment of border municipalities – particularly the devastation of villages and emptying of entire regions – has multiple reasons. Name a few of them:

.....  
.....  
.....



## INDEX OF NAMES

---

- Aleksandrović, Bojan** 57-58, 63-65  
**Alijević, Samir** 77  
**Archbishop Jozef Michalik** 9  
**Archimandrite Tryphon** 8
- Bakalović, Georgije** 88  
**Bishop Danilo Krstic** 73  
**Bishop Emilijan Piperkovic** 72-73, 81  
**Bishop Irinej** 209, 233  
**Bishop Justin Stefanović** 91  
**Bishop Metodije** 73, 82  
**Bishop Midić Ignjatije (Dobrivoje)** 15, 33  
**Bishop Nikolaj** 70  
**Bishop Pahomije of Vranje** 186, 196, 209  
**Bishop Pavle of Raska and Prizren** 73  
**Bishop of Dacia Ripensis Danil** 59, 67  
**Bishop Jovan of Niš** 127-128, 149  
**Bishop of Sumadija Valerijan** 73  
**Bishop of Timok Justin** 46, 63, 73, 84  
**Blagojević, Milan** 47-50, 53  
**Blagojević, Mirko** 19  
**Bulović, Irinej** 64
- Cvitković, Ivan** 87
- Denić, Sunčica** 208  
**Dermaku, Ali** 111
- Đorđević, Aleksandar** 125, 127-134, 137-139, 143-146  
**Đorđević, Dragoljub B.** 36, 85, 132, 238, 241, 244
- Dzhambulat Hatyov, Kuban** 8-9
- Father Leonid** 36-44  
**Fiorentino, Nutricato** 172
- Gavrilović, Stefan** 88  
**Glišović, Rajko** 221-227, 230, 234-235  
**Golubović, Ninoslav** 26
- Hasani, Dukađin** 239  
**Hočevar, Stanislav** 37, 64
- Ibrahimi, Lukman** 237, 241-242, 245  
**Ilić, Slobodan** 137-139  
**Imam Hatim Lisesi** 239  
**Ivanović, Dragan** 47, 54-55
- Jordanović, Radoslav** 212  
**Jovanović, Miloš** 36, 85
- Karadžić, Vuk** 137  
**Krstić, Nenad** 212  
**Kuburić, Zorica** 17
- Luckman, Thomas** 241
- Maksimović, Milorad** 166-169, 177-180  
**Malešević, Milena** 71  
**Mamutović, Nazif** 111  
**Marinković, Dušan** 127  
**Marinković, Nikola** 89  
**Marković Krstić, Suzana** 166  
**Metropolitan Danilo of Montenegro** 81  
**Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk** 9-10  
**Miletić, Dragiša** 72  
**Milisavljević, Predrag** 14-16, 18-19, 21-23  
**Milošević, Miroslav** 26, 31-33  
**Milošević, Radovan** 208, 210-215, 217, 219-220  
**Momčilović, Stanislav** 188  
**Mrkalj, Milan** 14-17, 19, 21  
**Mufti Muamer Zukorlić** 240  
**Mufti Muhamed Jusufspahić** 187, 189

**Obradović, Neven** 196  
**Obrenović, Miloš** 88

**Pajić, Dejan** 47  
**Patriarch German** 81  
**Pavlović, Miodrag** 99  
**Pavlov, Branislav** 103-105, 107, 109,  
111-112, 114, 117-121  
**Pavlov, Irena** 105, 121  
**Pavlović, Spasa** 85, 89-95, 97-98,  
100-102  
**Petrović, Vladan** 26

**Radojičić, Borivoje** 69-74, 77-84  
**Reis-ul-ulema Adem Zilkic** 240

**Simmel, Georg** 86  
**Stanojević, Aca** 88  
**Stoenescu Nacu** 59  
**Stojadinov, Nebojša** 185-187, 189  
**Stojadinović, Milutin** 73  
**Stojanov, Zoran** 195-196, 198-199,  
201-202, 204-206  
**Stojanović, Zoran** 166-167, 169-172,  
175-180

**Schmemann, Alexander** 125  
**Špakovski, Nikolaj** 171  
**Špele, Mihalj** 104

**Todorović, Dragan** 36, 85  
**Tomić, Darko** 212  
**Torbica, Ilija** 172

**Vučković, Žaklina** 99

**Zaharijev, Vladimir** 201  
**Zdravković, Danijela** 208, 215, 238  
**Zlatković, Saša** 212



## NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS AND EDITORS

---

- *Victor Bakharev, Ph.D.*

From 2004 he was a professor in the department of social technologies, and then Professor and Head Department of Social Work, is currently a professor of the Department of Social Work of the Belgorod State University. A Member of the Research Committee for Social Ecology of the Russian Sociological Association. Research interests: the philosophical and sociological, psychological and pedagogical aspects of social ecology as an interdisciplinary scientific field, the formation and reproduction of environmental awareness, the organization of a regional system of socio-ecological monitoring, continuous problems of regional socio-environmental education, social and environmental concerns of different groups, found themselves in a difficult situation, the problems of prevention, correction and rehabilitation of deviant behavior among young people, the technology of social work. Author of more than three hundred and fifty published scientific and educational works.

E-mail Address: [socioecolog@mail.ru](mailto:socioecolog@mail.ru)

- *Sergej Lebedev, Ph.D.*

Assistant professor at the Department of Social Technologies, the Social-Psychological Faculty of the Belgorod State University since 2001. A Member of the Research Committee for Sociology of Religion of the Russian Sociological Association. President of the Belgorod Regional Department of the Russian Association of Researchers of Religion. Since 2003 a member of the Bureau of the Research Committee for Sociology of Religion of the Russian Sociological Association and a deputy president of the Belgorod Department of the Russian Sociological Society. Professor at the Department of Sociology and organization working with young people of the Belgorod State University since 2012. The Fields of interest: sociology of religion, sociology of culture, sociology of education. The author of more than one hundred and fifty published scientific and educational works.

E-mail Address: [serg\\_ka2001-dar@mail.ru](mailto:serg_ka2001-dar@mail.ru)

- *Milovan Vuković, Ph. D.*

He holds a PhD in political sciences and works as an associate professor of sociology and work ethics at the Technical Faculty in Bor – University of Belgrade.

E-mail Address: [mvlakovic@tf.bor.ac.rs](mailto:mvlakovic@tf.bor.ac.rs)

- *Ninoslav Golubović, Ph.D.*

He is an Assistant Professor at Department of Geography, Faculty of Science and Mathematics, University of Nis. Born in 1973. PhD in Demography 2012. He has been teaching Geography of settlements and Demography at bachelor studies; Geography of resorts and tourism places and World population Geography at master studies.

E-mail Address: [ninoslav@pmf.ni.ac.rs](mailto:ninoslav@pmf.ni.ac.rs)

- *Vladan Petrović, MA.*

He holds and MA in physical culture and works as a skills instructor at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: [wladanp@gmail.com](mailto:wladanp@gmail.com)

- *Danijela Voza, MA.*

She holds an MA in engineering management and works as a teaching assistant in social sciences at the Technical Faculty in Bor – University of Belgrade.

E-mail Address: [dakicd83@gmail.com](mailto:dakicd83@gmail.com)

- *Vesna Trifunović*, Ph.D.

She holds a PhD in sociology and works as an associate professor of sociology and education sociology at the Teacher Training Faculty in Jagodina – University of Kragujevac.

E-mail Address: dimitrije95@ptt.rs

- *Miloš Tasić*, BA.

He holds an MA in English language and literature, he is currently a PhD student at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade and works as a foreign (English) language instructor at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: baulkarea@gmail.com

- *Dejan Krstić*, MA.

He was born in Zaječar, in 1971. He graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Belgrade, at Department of Ethnology and Anthropology in 1996. He has had a M. A. degree in ethnology and anthropology from University of Belgrade since 2007. He has been working in the National museum in Zaječar since 2001. He has a title of Senior curator. Except museology, he is interested in researching religion, ethnic identity and social culture.

E-mail Address: dejkrst@verat.net

- *Dragan Koković*, Ph.D

He is a Full Professor at the International ECPD postgraduate studies. He is a Full Professor of Sociology and Sociology of Culture at the Department of Sociology, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. He has worked on scientific and research projects in the fields of sociological studies, urbanism, organization of life and work, violence in sport, multiculturalism, etc.

E-mail Address: kokovic@ff.uns.ac.rs

- *Lela Milošević Radulović*, MA.

She holds an MA in sociology and works as a teaching assistant in sociology basics and upbringing and education sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: lela.m@eunet.rs

- *Dragana Stjepanović Zaharijević*, Ph.D.

She holds a PhD in sociology and works as a full professor of family sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: draganazaharijević@gmail.com

- *Jovan Živković*, Ph. D.

He holds a PhD in political sciences and he works as a full professor of sociology and sociology of religion at the Teacher Training College in Aleksinac.

E-mail Address: dda@eunet.rs

- *Jasmina Petrović*, Ph. D.

She holds a PhD in sociology and works as an assistant professor of sociology research methodology at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: jasmina@medianis.net

- *Zoran M. Jovanović*, Ph. D.

He holds a PhD in history of arts and works as an assistant professor of the recent national history of arts at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Priština, temporarily relocated to Kosovska Mitrovica.

E-mail Address: zmjovan@sezampro.rs

- *Danijela Gavrilović*, Ph.D.

Currently occupying the post of assistant professor in Sociology of Religion, Sociology of Law and Sociology of Morality at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš. In the post-graduate study program of the same faculty she is the Head of the Sociology of Religion Section. The fields of interest: Religions in the modern world, religion and globalisation, social values and norms, religious and ethnic identification.

E-mail Address: danijela.gavrilovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

- *Marija Cvetković*, BA.

She is a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade and works as a teaching assistant in preschool and school pedagogy at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: marija.cvetkovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

- *Suzana Marković Krstić*, Ph. D.

She holds a PhD in sociology and works as an assistant professor of social demography, rural sociology and urban sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: suzana.markovic.krstic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

- *Aleksandra Kostić*, Ph. D.

She holds a PhD in psychology and works as an associate professor of social perception and nonverbal communication at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: aleksandrakost@gmail.com

- *Ivana Ilić Krstić*, MA.

She holds an MA in environment protection and works as a teaching assistant in social sciences at the Faculty of Occupational Safety – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: ivana\_soc@yahoo.com

- *Vesna Miltojević*, Ph. D.

She holds a PhD in sociology and works as an associate professor of sociology at the Faculty of Occupational Safety – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: vmiltojevic@yahoo.com

- *Neven Obradović*, MA

He is a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš and works as a teaching assistant in research journalism at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: neven.obradovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

- *Danijela Zdravković*, Ph.D.

She holds a PhD in sociology and works as an assistant professor of sociology at the Teacher Training Faculty in Vranje – University of Niš.

E-mail Address: danijelavranje@gmail.com

\*\*\*

- *Dragoljub B. Đorđević*, Ph.D.

He was born 1954. He is sociologist of religion and romologist, gained a PhD in Sociology of Religion in 1983, at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. He is a full professor of Sociology of Culture and Morals and the Head of Department for Social Sciences at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, University of Niš. He specialized in Sociology of Religion at the Faculty of Philosophy, at Moskow's State University "Lomonosov" (Russia) and at the Institute for social research at the University of Zagreb (Croatia). He is founder and honorary president of the Yugoslav Society of Scientific Study of Religion (YSSSR) and the editor in chief of "Teme" /Themes/, a journal of the University of Niš (2001-2011). He is the editor in chief of edition "Religion and Society". He also was the president of the Yugoslav Sociological Society (1998-2000). He researches Christian Orthodoxy, New Religious Movements, ethnic, religious and confessional relationships in Serbia and Balkans, possibilities of inter-culturalism in multiethnic and multi-confessional societies, with special attention paid to Roma. He have published in national and international journals more than 300 articles; he wrote and edited, alone or in co-authorship, 50 books. Recent books: *Roma Religious Culture* (2003); *Секте и култову (Sects and Cults)*, 2003; *О мисионарењу, преобраћењу и прозелитизму (On Evangelization, Conversion, Proselytism)*, 2004; *Romas & Others – Others & Romas*, 2004; *Romani Cult Places and Culture of Death*, 2005; *Islam at the Balkans*, 2007; *Муке са светим – изазови социологије религије (Torments with Sacred: Challenges to the Sociology of Religion)*, 2007; *Узорници и пријани – скице за портрет ЈУ социолога религије (Role Models and Friends: A Sketch for a Potrait of YU Sociologists of Religion)*, 2008; *The Sociology of Religion in the Former Yugoslav Republics*, 2008; *Устала Јемка (Текије, тарикати и шејхови нишких Рома (Jemka has Risen /Tekkias, Tarikats and Sheiks of Niš Romas/)*, 2009); *Од путање до аутостраде (Споменица Јована Ђурића) (From Trail to Highway /The Testimonial to Jovan Ćirić/)*, 2010; *Могућности и домети социјалног учења православља и православне цркве (Capabilities and Ranges of Social Teaching of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church)*, 2010; *На коњу с лаптопом у бусагама (Увод у ромолошке студије) (On a Horse with a Laptop in Saddlebags /An Introduction to Romological Studies/)*, 2010. and *Казуј, крчмо Церимо: Периферијска кафана и окол ње (Speak Tavern Džerima: Kafana on the Outskirts and its Surroundings)*, 2011.

E-mail Address: brkab@junis.ni.ac.rs

- *Dragan Todorović*, Ph.D.

He was born 1971. He holds a PhD in sociology and works as an assistant professor of Sociology Basics and Historical Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš. He is a secretary general of the Yugoslav society for religion studies from Niš (since 2002) and a President of the Serbian Sociological Society (since 2013). He was awarded *The Zoran Djindjic Prize* for the best diploma or masters' thesis in the field of philosophical and sociological sciences in 2006 in the Republic of Serbia. Dealing with historical sociology, sociology of religion and Romology. Books: *Sociologija i istorija (Sociology and History)*, with Lj. Mitrović, 2003; *Romas and Others – Others and Romas (Social Distance)*, with D. B. Đorđević and L. Milošević, 2004; *Romani Narratives about Pre-death, Death and*

*After-death Customs/Romano Vakeriba kotar Anglunomeribasere, Meribasere thay Palomeribasere Adetya*, 2005; *Romological School of Niš: Bibliography 1996-2005*, 2006; *Друштвена удаљеност од Рома (Етничко-религијски оккуп) (Societal Detachment from the Roma People/Ethnic-religious Relations/)*, 2007; *Jemka has Risen (Tekkias, Tarikats and Sheiks of Niš Romas)*, with D. B. Đorđević, 2009. (Co)edited books: *Evangelization, Conversion, Proselytism*, 2004; *Islam at the Balkans in the Past, Today and in the Future*, with D. B. Đorđević and Lj. Mitrović, 2007; *Kvalitet međuetničkih odnosa i kultura mira na Balkanu (The Quality of Interethnic Relations and the Culture of Peace in the Balkans)*, with D. B. Đorđević, 2008; *Hodočašća – između svetog i svetovnog (Pilgrimages – between Holy and Secular)*, with D. Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2011; *Orthodoxy from an Empirical Perspective*, with M. Blagojević, 2011; *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on the Border*, with D. B. Đorđević and D. Gavrilović, 2012.

E-mail Address: dragan.todorovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

- *Miloš Jovanović*, BA.

Sociologist. From October 2008 working as a teaching assistant at the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, where in December 2008 started PhD studies in sociology of religion. Edited an issue of *Teme* journal [XXXIII (1) Jan-Mar 2009] dedicated to *sociology of queer identity*. Currently preparing an issue on *sociology and/of Eastern Orthodoxy*. Edited books: *Можности и дoмети социјалног учења православља и православне цркве (Capabilities and Ranges of Social Teaching of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church)*, with D. B. Đorđević, 2010. Scientific interests: sociology of sexuality and religion, qualitative research methods.

E-mail Address: milos.jovanovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

**YSSSR Annuals**

1. *Religija – rat – mir (Religion – War – Peace)*, 1994.
2. *Religija i razvoj (Religion and Development)*, 1995.
3. *Religija – crkva – nacija (Religion – Church – Nation)*, 1996.
4. *Etnoreligijski odnosi na Balkanu (Ethno-religious Relationships on the Balkans)*, 1997.
5. *Verovanja, organizacija i delovanje religijskih zajednica i pokreta (Beliefs, Organization and Activities of Religious Communities and Movements)*, 1998.
6. *Hrišćanstvo – društvo – politika (Christianity – Society – Politics)*, 1999.
7. *Dve hiljade godina hrišćanstva na Balkanu (The Two Millennia of Christianity at the Balkans)*, 2000.
8. *Vere manjina i manjinske vere (Religions of Minorities and Minority Religions)*, 2001.
9. *Kulturni i etnički identiteti u procesu globalizacije i regionalizacije Balkana (Cultural and Ethnic Identities in the Process of Globalization and Regionalization of the Balkans)*, 2002.
10. *Roma Religious Culture*, 2003.
11. *Evangelization, Conversion, Proselytism*, 2004.
12. *Religion and Globalization*, 2005.
13. *Protestantism on the Balkans*, 2006.
14. *Islam on the Balkans*, 2007.
15. *The Sociology of Religion in the Former Yugoslav Republics*, 2008.
16. *Revitalization of Religion*, 2009.
17. *Pilgrimages, Cult Places and Religious Tourism*, 2010.
18. *Orthodoxy from an Empirical Perspective*, 2011.
19. *Religion, Religious and Folk Customs on the Border*, 2012.
20. *A Priest on the Border*, 2013.



CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији  
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

27/28-725-46(497.11)(082)  
316.74:2(497.11)(082)

YSSSR. Annual International Conference (20 ;  
2013 ; Niš)

#A #Priest on the Border / [XX Annual  
International YSSSR Conference, Niš 2013] ;  
edited by Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Dragan  
Todorović, Miloš Jovanović. - Niš : Faculty  
of Mechanical Engineering : Yugoslav Society  
for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2013  
(Niš : Unigraf-X-Copy). - 260 str. : ilustr.  
; 21 cm. - (YSSSR Annuals ; 20, 2013)

"Prepared as a part of the project  
'Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and  
National Minorities in the Border  
Municipalities of Eastern and Southeastern'  
Serbia (179013), conducted at the University  
of Niš - Faculty of Mechanical Engineering,  
and supported by the Ministry of Education  
and Science of the Republic of Serbia" -->  
kolofon. - Tiraž 300. - Notes on the  
Contributors and Editor: str. 255-259. -  
Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst.  
- Bibliografija uz svaki rad. - Abstracts. -  
Registar.

ISBN 978-86-6055-038-7 (FME)

а) Пастирска служба - Србија - Зборници б)  
Социологија религије - Србија - Зборници  
COBISS.SR-ID 199218444