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## RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLICS

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It has been 16 years since professor Dragoljub B Djordjevic, the leading sociologist of religion in Serbia, and a group of sociologists founded the Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (YSSSR). During this period, this society organized 15 international conferences on this subject. It is not surprising that the main topic of the 15<sup>th</sup> conference was dedicated to the position and impact of sociology of religion in the former Yugoslav republics from 1991, the moment of collapse of the Socialist Yugoslavia, to 2007.

There are a few objective and subjective reasons lying at the foundations of such decision. However, one stands out. This is the need to refute the ideologically-grounded claims that in the former Yugoslavia there had been no sociology of religion at all, particularly not of kind found in the West. The editor of this book made a strong effort in this direction by his recent book *Role Models and Friends: A Sketch for a Portrait of YU Sociologist of Religion* (Djordjević, 2008). Portraying the leading sociologists of religion, Djordjevic gave a history of the sociology of religion in the former Yugoslavia. It seems quite logical that after these portraits of YU sociologist of religion professor Djordjevic could, perhaps, provide a "concluding" overview of "where" sociology of religion in post-Yugoslav countries is going to. Indeed, he fulfilled this expectation by editing and contributing to the book: *The Sociology of Religion in the Former Yugoslav Republics*.

The key issue of the book is – (1) under what circumstances did sociology of religion develop in the Socialist Yugoslavia, and (2) what are the circumstances emerging after its transformation into new sovereign states. Do they differ from those found

in Central and Easter Europe (CEE)? As a starting point for this consideration, a very influential study of Irena Borowik (2007) has been used.

In her latest study, "The Religious Landscape of Central and Eastern Europe after Communism" (prepared for *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*; Beckford and Demerath III, 2007), Borowik singled out five reasons why the CEE countries should be differentiated from the rest of Europe in terms of religion. These reasons for considerable differences are the following: (1) Christianity reached most of these countries later than it did in the West; (2) the rift in Christianity ended up in such a manner that in most eastern European countries, eastern Orthodox Christianity prevailed, while in most central European countries, it was western Catholicism which ruled (with some exceptions); (3) in the East religions became consolidated during the same process in which national identity and tradition were constructed, which was not the case in the West; (4) the unification of CEE lies in the historical and political experience of religions, their fate in which they had to struggle with communism and anti-religious totalitarian regimes, promotion and implementation of atheism; and (5) the collapse of communism (*perestroika*, the dismantling of the Berlin wall, "the Velvet Revolution") where religion took part in the changes.

Dragoljub Djordjevic is right when, on the basis of Borowik's insight, states that the situation in the Socialist Yugoslavia was quite different from other CEE countries. Indeed, it is unclear why I. Borowik failed to notice this difference. While the first three reasons that Borowik mentioned apply to the Former Yugoslavia, the last two do not matter at all. In regard to the fourth reason, Djordjevic acknowledges:

The Yugoslav variant of socialism did not end up in an anti-religious totalitarian regime, and it certainly did not implement the so-called scientific atheism and atheistic upbringings. The Yugoslav socialist school was indeed atheized, but this was not the radical, so-called combat atheism, such as: scientific atheism and atheistic upbringing with scientific exclusiveness in the Soviet Union, or theistic atheism with inquisition-like methods in Albania (p.7).

The collapse of communism – the fifth reason pointed out by I. Borowik – did not occur at all in the Socialist Yugoslavia; namely, religion was not part of change and did not play a positive role. Although some social scientists may have a different stand, Djordjević points develops this argument:

The civil and ethnic clash, concocted with the religious portion, an unscrupulous religious war started, for, whether or not sociologists would agree, it was not the struggle of Croats against Serbs, and Serbs against Bosniaks and the other way round, but that of Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, of Christians and Muslims (p. 7).

This, somehow, reveals an easy acceptance of widely exploited Huntington's idea of the *Clash of Civilizations*.

The book *The Sociology of Religion in the Former Yugoslav Republics* – the subject of this review – focuses on the essence of what happened with or around sociology of religion between 1991 and 2007. The subject is presented through the introduction (5-18) and fifteen articles grouped into three parts. The first one describes the development of sociology of religion in all former Yugoslav republics, except Serbia (19-62). The second part considers the development of sociology of religion only in Serbia, focusing on some of its peculiarities – primarily related to the professional association of the sociologists of religion, publication of journals, and the study of the religious life of Romas (63-122). Finally, the third part (123-156) contains a variety of papers, which generalize the scope of the sociology of religion in the entire region, comparing it with other regions and pointing to exclusive, brand new topics of study. In this review, the focus has been put on study of the relationship between religion and political phenomena.

### **I The Development of Sociology in the Former Yugoslav Republics: 1991-2007**

Not delving into a more detailed analysis of everything said in this part, I shall shortly list the main characteristics of the development of sociology of religion in each of the former Yugoslav republics.

After 1991, in Slovenia, sociology of religion achieved exceptionally high status and showed itself to be more successful than some other branches of sociology. The following tendencies have been prominent: (1) the partial appearance or prevalence of new research topics; (2) the appearance of papers by Slovenian sociologists in the international scholarly arena, and (3) continuation of education works by Slovenian sociologists of religion.

One new topic was the critical evaluation of "the relationship between religion and the political system" (Sergej Flere and Miran Lavrič, p. 21). Although this issue was studied by a number of scholars, Smrke's (1996) work (*Politika in religija*, Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče), as Flere and Lavrič claim, was of major importance, and, it may be considered as a good starting point for further work on this issue of the place of religion within the institutional, constitutional and political system. In regard to this issue, Slovenian sociologists have been very critical of the trend, as they asserted it, of departure from the separation of church and state as stipulated by the Slovenian Constitution.

In his review Siniša Zrinščak rightly emphasized some of the methodological difficulties related to the mapping of the development of sociology of religion in Croatia following its independence. He focuses especially on the understanding of the so-

cial context. As he asserts: "It is perfectly clear that the specifics of the social development of a certain country or a region impose a specific theoretical (however not methodological!) approach to explaining phenomena" (pp. 27-28).

In line with this, Zrinščak asserts that the process of the fall of communism and the final fragmentation of the former state led to the general politicization of the social life, including religion. According to Zrinščak, this politicization in Croatia has a slightly higher level than in other countries:

The politization is present in all countries in which the fall of the former system occurred and it is, on one hand, a completely expected phenomenon in the circumstances of a maximal social engagement of the epochal shifts of the political regime while, on the other hand, resulted in a set of negative social consequences.

Although it is hard to claim, without a more precise empirical inquiry, the circumstances surrounding the building of the notion state obstructed by the war could only contributed to an *even higher degree of politization in comparison to other countries* (my italics), or at least if not a higher degree than a longer duration (p. 29).

A special attention has been paid to the work of Srdjan Vrcan and Željko Mardešić. While Vrcan's influence is unquestionable felt the sociological (and political science) circles, Mardešić's influence is evident in sociology, but even more so in the theological/religious circles. What is the essence of their studies?

In the case of Vrcan it is as a matter of domination of the secularization thesis and the interpretation of revitalization through the secularization prism (Vrcan, 1986), which was already mentioned in his study (*Od krize religije k religiji krize*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga) of the crises of religion and the religion of crises.

Therefore, the revitalization is significantly characterized by the social situation of crises in which religion appears as a response or even the arbitrary of crises. Related to that is the exploitation of the Robertson's thesis on the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics (Robertson, 1989), which is the interpretation framework for the role of religion in wartime and generally in social circumstances of crises. The (mis)use of religion, or rather the religious manipulation of the political, is the main line of thought in numerous Vrcan's studies dedicated to religion not only in Croatia but also in the whole of the former Yugoslavia (p. 32).

Unlike Vrcan, Mardešić's approach was essentially phenomenological. Yet, during the last period of his research, Mardešić wrote a number of papers dealing with the Croatian religious/political heritage. What really needs to be emphasized, regarding the events in the 1990s, is the masterpiece on religion and war (Jukić, 1994, 1996.)

Zrinščak rightly argues that the relationship between religion and war remains potentially the most challenging topic of the post-socialist period was not fully-covered. However, it is little bit awkward his claim that sociologists leave this topic to those "less competent", be they even political scientists. For instance, Iveković published the paper "Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: The Politicization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States" (*Social Compass*, 49(4): 523-536, 2002). In the same year, Perica wrote the book *Balkan Idols, Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Ivan Cvitković and Dino Abazović, describing the development of sociology of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focused on the relationship between religion/confession and nation. All analyses done by sociologists and political scientists since 1991 support the idea about "return" to religion through a "return" to national.

Zoran Matevski and Srdjan Vukadinović, reviewing the development of sociology in Macedonia and Montenegro, respectively, demonstrated the absence of empirical studies. The main characteristics of the last fifteen years in Macedonia are the processes of revitalization of religion, the crisis of secularization, the extreme close relations between the religious and political elite, religious tolerance, the role of religion in peace and conflict etc.

## **II. The Development of Sociology in the Republic of Serbia: 1991-2007**

This part of the book contains five chapters written by: (1) Mirko Blagojević ("Serbian Empirical Sociology of Religion"); (2) Dragan Novaković ("Studies of Islam and the Islam Community in the Serbian Sociology of Religion, 1991-2007"); (3) Dragan Todorović ("The Study of Religion and Religious of Roma in Serbian Sociology of Religion"); (4) Dragoljub B. Djordjević ("Contribution of the Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion to the Development of Serbian Sociology of Religion"); and (5) Zorica Kuburić ("Contribution of the Magazine *Religion and Tolerance* to the Development of Serbian Sociology of Religion"). Although it is not possible to describe every work in a such short space, what really need to be mentioned are the first two papers.

Blagojević gives an excellent review of empirical research studies in Serbia, thus, supporting his basic claim: "there are just enough empirical, sociological research studies of religion and church to prove that Serbian empirical sociology of religion is still alive, but those studies represent the enthusiastic endeavour of their authors rather than systematic, regular and institutionalized practice" (p. 65)

Among the authors who dared to cope with the study of religion until the 1990s in Serbia, the names of Dragan Pantić, from the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, and Dragoljub B. Djordjević, sociologist of religion and professor at the University of

Niš stand out. Although Blagojević's review is focused on the research studies conducted in Serbia from the nineties up to now, it is important to mention a research study dating back to 1982 and conducted by Dragoljub B. Djordjević. The subject of this study was the Orthodox community in the region of Niš, and the results were published two years later in a monography with a provocative title *Escape from the Church* (Djordjević, 1984). This study, conducted upon the methodologically developed research studies in Slovenia and Croatia, revealed that the unexamined Orthodox regions might be interesting for sociological investigation. The interest in researching Orthodox religion would reach its peak fifteen years later through works of Dragan Pantić, Mirko Blagojević, Zoric Kuburić and Dragana Radisavljević-Ćiparizović.

Novaković in his review of studies of Islam pointed out two influential scholars: Dr Darko Tanasković, professor of Oriental Studies at the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade, and Dr Miroljub Jevtić, Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade. Studying numerous papers about Islam written by Jevtić and other cited authors, the sociologists of religion can search for answers to the question about the relationship between society and religion as well global consequences springing from the challenges of the politicized Islam to the West civilization. Yet, Novaković's analysis rightly reveals the commitment of our social science to the study of Islam at the global level. What remains to be done, is the conducting studies on Islam and Islamic communities at national and regional levels.

### **III *Several Specific Topics in the Sociology of Religion in the Former Yugoslav Republics: 1991-2007***

Finally, the third, shortest part of the book contains four articles (not classifiable into a structured whole) written by these authors: (1) Danijela Gavrilović ("Comparative Analysis of Topics in Sociology of Religion in the Period 1991-2007 in Former Yugoslavia"); (2) Milan Vukomanović ("How to Understand and Study Religious Diversity Today?"); (3) Ružica Cacanaska ("The Religion in Macedonian Society"); and (4) Dragana Radosavljević-Ćiparizović ("Pilgrim Tourism: Case Study of Three Sanctuaries in Serbia").

In the paper "Comparative Analysis of Topics in Sociology of Religion in the Period 1991-2007 in Former Yugoslavia" Danijela Gavrilović marks the principal characteristics, looks at achievements and inadequacies of the development of sociology religion in the Former Yugoslav republics, from a comparative prospective. On the basis a thoroughly conducted analysis, she rightly concludes:

The general impression is that, although sociology of religion is not inclined to avoid any issue, the most difficult ones, e.g. the relation between church and state, remain insufficiently dealt with and diagnosed. There is an overlapping of the topics, although it is clear that Slovenia and, following close-

ly, Croatia have been the most successful in the analysis of the status of religion in the conditions of increased religiosity of the post-communist period. What sociology in Serbia needs is more empirical research, as well as innovation in the field of theoretical and methodological apparatuses used in the approach to the subject matter. Similar destiny dictates the choice of topics to a great degree, and by rule these topics overlap: increase in and types of religiosity, ethnic and religious identification (p. 128).

In the conclusion of this review, one can say that the sociology of religion in the former Yugoslav republics has things to boast and offer to the "global market" of sociology of religion. From the material presented in this book, it follows that sociology of religion is a bit more developed in Slovenia and Croatia, and to an extent in Serbia. Sociology of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina is getting closer, while in Montenegro contributions are still anticipated.

Despite this promising trend, should we be pleased with a current state of sociology of religion in Serbia? Not, at all. We should keep in mind a critical observation given by Djordjević.

Serbia is one of the few countries without a separate institute for the sociological study of religion, or at least a section dedicated to it in one of existing institutes. So far at least, this has not been compensated for by individual research groups, originally established as non-governmental organizations. There is still no journal specializing in sociology of religion, even though *Themes*, a Journal of the University of Niš, and *Religion and Tolerance*, a journal of the Center for Empirical Researches of Religion from Novi Sad, are getting as close as possible to this. Even more devastatingly, in contrast to the Slovenian and Croatian authors, Serbian sociology of religion, for instance, cannot boast even a single research paper published in a leading international journal. The Serbian academic community of sociology of religion seems all too relaxed, mindful of its own business, where most scholars do not understand that competition for publishing a text is necessary, that journals and their rating are important (p. 13).

Does this critical observation of Professor Djordjević, the editor of this monography, serve enough as a warning? Certainly, it does. There is still a lot of tasks that stand in front of our institutions, universities in particular, in order to make new advancements in sociology of religion.

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