

**Hadzi Nenad M. Jovanovich**

Book review

<https://doi.org/10.54561/prj1701189m>

Date received: December 30, 2022

Date accepted: March 17, 2023

## **“RELIGION, BIDEN AND SERBIA: RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN THE POLITICS OF PRESIDENT BIDEN AND HOW COULD IT AFFECT SERBIAN INTERESTS”**

Institute for Political Networking & Centre for Research  
of Orthodox Monarchism, Belgrade, 2021  
ISBN 978-86-81758-13-7, 184 pp.

*Religion, Biden and Serbia: Religious Factor in the Politics of President Biden and How Could it Affect Serbian Interests* by Rev. Deacon Hadzi Nenad M. Jovanovich is a thought-provoking and insightful book that primarily explores the role of religion in American foreign policies and procedures, with a particular focus on the Balkans region and its implications for Serbia. Published in Belgrade by the Institute for Political Networking and the Centre for Research of Orthodox Monarchism in 2021, the book offers a comprehensive analysis of the politology of religion in the contemporary global context.

Namely, the US State Department established the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA) back in 2013 with the idea of better understanding and more precisely interpreting the implications of religion in global affairs and especially its effects on the American policy decisions. During the Trump administration the RGA evolved into the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) with similar goals and slightly different tasks that were later carried over into the Biden administration. Despite the different worldviews that may be represented in the White House from one administration to another, the fact that understanding of the importance of religion in international relations remains a constant might be overlooked by the general public, but not by attentive scholars and focused diplomats.

The fact that these issues are at the centre of attention at Harvard, Yale, Fordham and other universities, with names such as Aristotle Papanikolaou, Shaun Case or former Secretary of the State John Kerry, demonstrates the importance of this area of study. The scholarly interest in Serbia is confirmed by the fact that the book opens with significant insights by several highly respected local scholars and experts in the field, such as the founder of the academic discipline of Politology of religion Professor Miroљjub Jevtic, but also Professor Dejan Mirovic, Professor Dusan Prorokovic, Dr Srdjan Perisic and Dr Aleksandar Rakovic.

The study itself rests on three main chapters, each of which provides a unique perspective on the significance of religion in American politics and its influence on US foreign policies, especially towards the Balkans region. In the chapter named “The Influence of Religion on the formation of American foreign policy in the Balkans”, Jo-

vanovich goes beyond the title suggestion and points to the personal involvement of President Biden in the breakup of Yugoslavia that started in the early 1990s. He describes Biden's religious connections with some of the American religious heavyweights who had and perhaps still have personal interests in the Balkans politics.

These connections transpire from tendencies among many Serbian leaders and scholars to observe the entire Catholic Church through the prism of their negative, to say the least, experience with the Catholic Church in Croatia, all the way to the local intricacies of American presidential elections and anti-Trump movement in certain Catholic clergy circles in the US. A very nuanced analysis that went practically unnoticed both among the Serbian policy makers and academics.

This is where the theological significance of the presidential political system in the US and its historical roots in Protestantism also come under scrutiny. The author argues that the presidency has a religious character deeply rooted in American culture and that this religious character has played a significant role in shaping American values and beliefs. He points out that American exceptionalism, which is a central component of American foreign policies, is rooted in the Protestant tradition of Puritanism and that this tradition continues to shape American politics to this day. This is juxtaposed not only to President Biden's Catholic faith but also to his persistent loyalty to his Catholic tradition and more importantly to his practice of faith.

Jovanovich also highlights the significant role that religion has played in American political discourse and how it has been used to justify US foreign policies, particularly towards the Balkans region. He argues that American foreign policies in the region have been influenced by a range of religious, cultural, and political factors, and that religion has played a significant role in shaping American attitudes towards the region and vice-versa.

In the chapter dedicated to changes of the religious and ethical paradigms in the American society, Jovanovich provides an overview of religion in the US today and its influence on the Balkans policies of different American administrations. He argues that American society is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of religious affiliations, and that this diversity is having a significant impact on American foreign policies towards the Balkans region. He offers a nuanced analysis of the various religious denominations present in the US and their respective stances on international issues, particularly with regards to the Balkans. He highlights the complex interplay between religious, cultural, and political factors in shaping American foreign policies towards the region.

Jovanovich also focuses on the significance of Joseph Biden as the first Catholic president since John F. Kennedy. He argues that Biden's Catholic faith has played a significant role in shaping his political beliefs and that this has implications for American foreign policies towards the Balkans. He suggests that Biden's Catholicism and connections to certain Catholic leaders of Balkan origins, could lead to a complex approach to US foreign policies towards Serbia which might be presented in a less favorite light than it would hope so. His arguments are once again supported by a

plethora of academic literature and policy documents, offering readers an excellent list of literature for further research.

It should be noted that throughout the study his arguments are supported by a vast array of trustworthy sources, ranging from primary historical documents to contemporary political and religious texts. The list of sources used in the study, which can be taken as a 'further reading' list is a substantial chapter on its own. Since the book is published in Serbian and as such has a (very) limited scope, the bibliography by itself represents a massive, and ready to use, asset to researches of politology of religion around the world.

In addition, Jovanovich underlines that religious institutions in the US are undergoing significant changes in their ethical and moral stances, particularly with regards to issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage. He suggests that these changes could have significant implications for US foreign policies, particularly in the Balkans region where religious and cultural tensions are high. He argues that the growing religious diversity in the US could lead to a more complex approach to US foreign policies towards the region.

Overall, "Religion, Biden and Serbia: Religious Factor in the Politics of President Biden and How Could it Affect Serbian Interests" is a meticulously researched and persuasively argued book that sheds light on the complex interplay between religion and politics in the contemporary global society. One should not skip to mention that the weakest point of the study is definitely the title of the book, which implies a certain "use by date" of the study's relevance. To an extent this is true, however the Biden presidency can also be observed as a simple case study, from which one can also learn about the future. This book is highly recommended to scholars both locally and globally interested in the particular case studies or politology of religion in general.

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