

Lecture: Miroslav Djordjevic: Influence of Orthodox Church in Serbia

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It's nice to meet you all here. Lately I've been refusing to participate in lectures of this kind, but I really don't want to bother you with this. The last lecture I have participated had similar subject to this one and it was in Paris. But this time I couldn't refuse Mr. Zilnik since I admire him a lot. So I'm very glad to be here. The first problem I want to tell you there is here is that this subject is a very broad subject but I would like and I would try to make it shorter for you. The easiest part for me is to tell you about my ideas, but what I really believe in is the dialog, and I would like you to ask me questions, your questions and I would be glad to answer.

The phenomenon of the religious and of the religion is that it is very specific and hard to explain. Until recently the science thought that religion was something that was going away from the social scene and there is one theses that I would like to emphasize there have always been matters of the religion and there are also today and there always will be matters for the religion, but there will not be any matters for free market.

The second thesis I would like to say here is that everything has changed in the last some 15 years ago with the fall of Berlin wall and the break of the model of communism, but I would like to emphasize there is an important difference between communism as an inspiring idea and the Russian model of communism, which is different than the way that it tried to suffocate, to break down the religion, and the religious objects and ideas.

Instead of the new development based on Christian values all over the orthodox east some other phenomena some unexpected phenomena had happened and after the break of Russian communism, and I insist again between communism as an idea and Russian communism, what happened was a kind movement backwards, not a movement forward. That Russian model of communism was a kind of miscarriage of civilization.

One of these phenomena is unusual and medieval phenomenon which concerns the union between the throne and altar, the government and the altar being the church. There was no spiritual renaissance but this new union and the throne of the government was the throne of the neo-communist government, which brought all the catastrophes these days that we can see every day. All the political happenings and situations in what we call the transition is going over the church, but not in a good way.

The second phenomenon is even more unusual and it's also medieval and it is something called symphony. But this symphony has nothing to do with music, in fact in term the symphony in music has come from the church. It's about an idea from the fourth century that meaning that government and the church should become one and should act as one and this is what is happening in Serbia presently.

The third phenomenon which is recent and which is also very strange and real is something that started at the end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's, which is period of wars and destruction in the Balkans. What happened was the exchange of ideological pattern. Before that period the Russian communism was key to everything, but after the clash the church got the dominant place in society and some simple thing happened, church has become ideology

and the means of government. This phenomenon is the best seen in Russia, but unfortunately it is even better seen in Serbia which had no peaceful transition, but we could call it bloody destruction of the country.

I don't want to bother you with quotations which are that we lecturers usually do but I will have to give you one, actually two. The first one, at the beginning of the 90's communist called Svetozar Marovic who was the boss of one of our countries, at the time it was Serbia and Montenegro, sad that he actually was an orthodox communist (orthodox in the terms of church). And the second quotation which is even more bizarre was sad by Dusan Mihajlovic, who sad that there is no more communism, but the only ideology now should be the teachings and the believe in the church and ideology of St. Sava.

The government of the church entering of the church in the all spheres of our society where it has its place and where it has not its place is something that we see every day on TV, newspapers, and this phenomenon is characteristic for all the orthodox post-communistic east.

There are two types of this influence of church and coming of the church in the society. Two types in history. The first one is vertical. It is when the member of the church has become the members of the parliament and the members of government. A typical case is the case of Macarios in Cyprus, but this is something that is not happening, that is not going on in Serbia, but it is to happen in other countries, for example in Albania in 1924. At the time it was the only country, and in 1924 it had its first free elections which were supervised by Europe and by 67% they have chosen an Orthodox Church leader, to be a president of the country, but it is something we should not fear that will happen in Serbia.

What's happening today from Russia to Balkans is the second type of the influence of the church, horizontal type, which means that the church is present in every part of our society, it's present in politics, in the police, in the trade, in the army, in schools, but there are two things that we don't know and we can't explain, by constitution the church should be separated from the state, but the church leaders express their power and they try to influence government business and they are present in our everyday lives. For example the episcopo, which is church titular, the church leader Irinej from Backa, had gave himself the right to send away some actors from the square in Novi Sad, and what is a very big problem here is that the church has almost become one with regime and it has become very privileged. When we look at the longer period it can present a great danger.

There is something that looks unusual, actually something that looked very strange ten years ago, but has become a normal thing today. Which is proven by many examples in Serbia and Russia today and partly in Bulgaria and it means that the church has taken the role of the communism; it has taken the role of the dominant political power.

I would like to state few theses about the role of our Serbian Orthodox Church in the last 10 or 15 years until today. I would like also to remind you that there have been made at least five documentaries about this subject by people here and people abroad. I would like to say that crucial change when it comes to the relationship between the church and the society happened in 1985.

The second crucial thing happened in 1989. When Milosevic held the meeting on Gazimestan, Kosovo. This was the huge change which brought the destruction of society. There was shown the union between Milosevic and the church and that's where two kinds of nationalism met,

the political nationalism of Milosevic, which was destructive, which was proven destructive for the country and church nationalism which is called philatim.

The term philatim comes from Greek and it really means my tribe, and the person who puts his tribe in the first place before the fate and the good undivided god is called the philatist. This is the situation when the church lets down itself and becomes a kind of national institution and a kind of a political party. This is what is happening today. You know that according to the church teachings church must not become the institution of one nation and one ideology it must become the institution of salvation and tolerance.

Our church, Orthodox Church in Serbia hasn't yet been cured from this disease, the philatim, this kind of church nationalism. This is something that explains all the clashes of church with the society and connections between power structures in church and political parties. People who can't understand this situation, mostly foreigners who came and stayed in our country are confused and start asking questions: What is this here? Is this Happening? Is this a church or the political party? What is your country is it a republic or is it a monarchy? This is something what you can see in everyday life here. During the war in the Balkans the church was not only witness of the time and that goes also for the Catholic Church and the Muslim church. They were all accomplices in these wars, both directly and indirectly. One example of this when an army force made by Milosevic, called the Scorpions, were called the death squad that time. They caught some Muslim boys, civilians, and shot them with the blessing of an orthodox priest, called Gavriilo from monastery called Grivina glava and this was something that terrified the whole world.

We would like to give you some concrete examples which are many. The church was used by Milosevic as an ideological force. When there was a plan for a destruction of Vukovar, there is an example of a church newspaper called Pravoslavlje, at that time wrote about the liberation of Vukovar. The same thing happened in Srebrenica and these huge crimes will stay above us like a mushroom of bomb explosion. The fact that the church has become a kind of a military leader here is disastrous. We, who still don't lose hope in church and believe that it will come to it self one day can here when we go to the liturgies which is the synonym for the mosques and the catholic churches we can hear sentences that the church prays for the government leaders, earlier they used to pray not to kings and emperors but for them, but in some of our churches they even mention the prayer for Vojislav, meaning leader Vojislav Kostunica which is rather bizarre.

I have written thousands of pages on this subject, but I

.....presenting the project of great Serbia, the idea which brought catastrophe, the idea which was supported by the government and by the church, and this idea of the great Serbia, has brought only the bad things to the people around us, but mostly to our selves because through out the history the Serbia has never been smaller and it has never been more helpless and the situation with Kosovo is already closed theme.

What is happening today and is present to preschool to university as mister Zilnik explained it is a word that comes form "Sveti Sava", that is Saint Sava who was the founder of Serbian orthodox church, and this ideology is accepted by almost all political parties is Serbia. The question is actually what is that? The church leaders use to say that this is theology is the theology of war which means that we have the theology of war, but the Jesus said and it is written in the Bible that he who take the sward by the same sward shall die. And here in Serbia the church and the state are not separated but the fact is that the Jesus when he walked

on this earth separated them. He emphasizes that the emperor should take what is his and the god should take what is his and that is not the same. And there is also quotation from the Bible which the church is trying to hide and won't talk about it. It was when Jesus was taken to the court and when Pilate asked him whether he wanted to be a king Jesus answered that his kingdom is not of this world.

There is one more interesting thing about a month ago the public asked a minister of education minister Vuksanovic, what is happening in the schools here, why all the bad things happen such as drugs and other things. And what he said is, the quote "I don't care what people think I have given my rapport to Saint Sava". That is something that is really stupid. To get back to Sveti Sava, he is the one who refused to rule and become the priest. And this ideology called Svetosavlje was not his ideology he did not create it. During the middle aged nationalism was not the problem Sveti Sava lived in the middle ages. This ideology was created in the 30s not by Serbs but by Russian emigrants and this has also become a fascist ideology during the world war two. There is also the thing called here, near Novi Sad there is a mountain called Fruska Gora and there is a monastery of Zilots who are orthodox priest and on the monastery there is a flag on which is written: Orthodox religion or death. And this is what brings disaster to Serbia.

As I already said on the beginning I believe more in the dialog so I want you to ask me any question on this subject and subject of religion in brother sense. I would also want to mention that here strange things happen when we call Russia to solve our problems with Kosovo and we are creating a kind of mythology because it is becoming grotesque and that is it. If you have any questions you can ask them.

What mister Zilnik says is that thanks to this lecture we have been presented a real situation here and especially the things that have been confusing us here, cause people here were confused by the situation that ideology is connected to church and he wants to emphasize that Mr. Djordjevic is really a believer that goes to church and that he does not criticize the church as an atheist but as a believer and who wanted to say that the church had given up of Biblical idealism.

Q: Does in Orthodox Church here there are some people some church members who criticize the situation, if there are some factions who do not support this situation?

A: There are some members of the clergy young people, but when we look the situation at the whole we can not see them because they are not influential and have not got the place to express their attitude and they are trying to do something but they are under the great pressure because everything is in the hands of church leaders called Vladika here. What Mr. Djordjevic mentioned was that one time there was public speaking some armed priests wearing their priest clothes came and beat professor Perovic and he received survived injuries and but there are some organizations that try to prevent that such as OBRAZ which means chick and DVERI which means doors.

Q: are there some newspapers where priests could express their attitudes

A; there are papers called REPUBLIKA, it has nothing to do with politics they are just called that way, where priests express their positive opinions but there are not many copies of this. In Serbia there are some healthy theorists, but it also has its bad ones.

Q:

A: More precise data say that there is more than 30 nations in Serbia, but when it comes to religion here there is Judaism, Muslim religion, Christianity, orthodox and catholic but there are over one hundred small religious communities which are not connected to any of the big churches, the problem is that by constitution no church has privileging and that no church shall be discriminated which means that all churches have equal rights but there is a law about churches and about religion communities which accepts only the three traditional religions such as Judaism, Muslim and Christianity. And other smaller religions literary have no rights here they are often attached by the members of the other churches and they are object of repression what often happens here is that the members of the Christian church beat the members of the Adventist church which is the small community which believe in the second coming of the Jesus Christ.

Beside the privileged religions here other more especially here in Novi Sad are called "sects" which originally means a small religious community but here it has a negative meaning, religious community which is not recognized but the church and here in Novi Sad are every day confrontations between the smaller and greater communities but the truth is that no religion is the one-way religion the reaction is bouth in orthodox and the catholic church and in Muslim society is the same situation.

Q: after the fall of the Berlin wall not only Germany but also other countries were influenced to the political situation the real question here was when the religion has become the part of the state and can a religion a formed religion become successful or this job is a matter of personal belief?

A: Most important thing to say there are zilots in orthodox church there are some Muslim people who believe in Jihad, and what happened recently in Novi Pazar some Vehabijas were arrested and they were carrying arms and they are Muslim extremists and they believe that the truth of their religion can be forced by the arms, they believe that they fore other people to except their religion by using arms and the answer is the question how religion can be successful is that only if religion goes back to its roots to preach not violence but brotherhood among people and the situation in which we could have only one religion in which religions would be united only with regards to their difference, because if god wanted us to be all the same he would create us in that manner let say as worms, but we are all different and it is also different to emphasize the difference between the term religion and faith. Religion comes from Latin language and it means the ring as a part of a chain something that connects the person to the creator to the higher sense and faith is believing to something which give us the sense that we are right and that we believe in that but we come to try to force our religion on other people that is when we become lost. Religion is something that has deep sense but it is being forced buy the church and buys the people and throu out the history Christians have seven crusades wars and it is the example of misused religion.

And what is in school books is that and you could probably read it that Rosa Luxemburg said that my freedom starts with the freedom of the others but the truth is that this words before her Christ said it. Christ said that his faith and freedom starts with the faith and freedom of others who is close to him but is different to him.

There is a roll of media buy the media here favor the orthodox church second is Muslim church there is no Jews in the media some times there are examples of anti-Semitism in media and it is a negative roll. There is some laymen TV stations some private TV stations and media, but also there are some church radio stations, newspaper and also TV stations and they all have a negative roll which means that they all favorite the orthodox church.

In Kosovo there are thousands of orthodox churches and monasteries and it is also truth that Kosovo was the cradle of the Serbian state and of our church but what is not truth is that Kosovo is the land that belongs only to Serbia because there live only seventeen nations of most of which are Muslim but there are also some other smaller nations and Albanians, not

all Albanians are Muslims but there are some Albanians in Kosovo who belong to orthodox religion there are some 8% who are catholic and there is also fourth religion practiced by Albanians in Kosovo called Kripto-catholics who have two religions they are generally Catholics. Muslim type of religion in Kosovo is not the aggressive type of religion.

When we look at the media here what they can give us is a wrong picture of reality because media in Belgrade as well as Albanian media in Kosovo. When it comes to the solution of problem in Kosovo nobody knows how are the world powers will call it supervised Kosovo or independent Kosovo or whatever but the crucial this here is that Serbian and Albanian side must start the dialogue and they must compromise which has not happened so far. He also gave an example that when the Turks started invading the there areas the last ruler of Serbia was a woman who is now celebrated as a saint called mother Angelina she was married to the last ruler of the Serbia at that time, and by the nation she was Albanian. So the last queen in all Serbia was actually Albanian and we celebrate her as a saint.