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STEPPING OUT OF THE “ENCLAVE”: PUBLIC ACTIVITIES OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE QUEST TO REGAIN SOCIAL AUTHORITY IN THE 1980S

Abstract: In this paper we will consider how, from the beginning to the end of the 1980s, the Serbian Orthodox Church gradually abandoned its restricted mode of public action and moved from an enclave form, with occasional elements of counterpublics, to a dominant public sphere. This process was the result of a complex set of phenomena that often overlapped. Pressure from authorities on religious communities and believers started to decline at the time despite restrictive legislation regarding public appearances by religious officials still being in force. This was followed by a pronounced deathification of younger parts of the population and an expansion of various forms of secular religiosity (popular culture, sports), including hybrid types of postmodern spirituality within Yugoslav society. In such circumstances, religious communities were encouraged to expand the scope of their public activities, so they found new forms of communication and networking, both among believers and in various social circles. Our aim is to point to forms of public action cultivated at the time by the Church and the stages it underwent in its participation in the public sphere. Additionally, the factors that influenced a change in the Church’s public and social position in the late 1980s will be discussed, along with the consequences caused in different areas of its functioning.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church, SFR Yugoslavia, 1980s, public sphere, public initiatives, publishing, ceremonies, mass gatherings, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Association of Writers of Serbia.

1. Introduction

How the public sphere functioned in socialist Yugoslavia, and in socialist countries in general, has not attracted attention from researchers, probably due to its significant normative distinction in comparison to the Western European model and, consequently, the relevancy of the results that would be obtained.¹ The high degree of

¹ On the problems concerning research into the public sphere in communist countries, see Fielder, Meyen 2015.

control over the mass media, the press, and public speech, which was typical in such states, impeded the possibility of viewing the public sphere as a mediator between society and politics, and made it one of many instruments the party elite used to concentrate power while also controlling and marginalizing its adversaries. Thus, the potential of such a public sphere to encompass different social groups and their distinctive interests and worldviews, or to stimulate debate and expansion of critical voices, was reduced. However, crises for socialist states that emerged in the late 1970s, which culminated in the following decade, led to fundamental shifts in the public sphere. As a result, the space for ideologically diverse groups, including those who had declared themselves strongly opposed to the powerholders, steadily expanded, either through the creation of counterpublics or by gradual involvement in the dominant, mass media public sphere. In the case of socialist Yugoslavia, journalism as a profession becoming increasingly autonomous had been noticeable since 1979,² as was ideological differentiation within the mass media, and especially in the press. This reflected the internal divisions within the League of Communists of Yugoslavia that resulted in the formation of different factions within it³ and the public engagement of numerous opposition-oriented circles.⁴ These and other circumstances galvanized the leadership in religious communities to become more publicly involved in order to secure a stronger social position and more influence for each respective community.

As for the Serbian Orthodox Church, which, together with other religious communities in Yugoslavia, had been pushed to the margins of the public sphere for several decades due to the prevailing sociopolitical climate,⁵ and a trend of intensifying communication with believers had been noticeable since the late 1960s and culminated in the 1980s. Gaining an influential position in the public sphere and in Yugoslav society was a slow and painstaking process, but the typical *modus operandi* in the form of enclave publicity⁶ began gradually losing importance in favor of other forms. Changes in the Serbian Church's public engagement were the result of various phenomena inside and outside this entity. The actions of a group of younger theologians and clerics, which included enriching existing theological literature, disseminating knowledge of church history and art, reviving religious art, and increasing political involvement were particularly significant.⁷

² Križan 1989: 152.

³ Denitch 1989: 166–167.

⁴ *cf.* Križan 1989: 152

⁵ See Đorđević 1984; Mojzes 1986; Radić 2005.

⁶ This concept was taken from Catherine Squires (2002). In her interpretation, the enclave represents a public that by “hiding counterhegemonic ideas and strategies in order to survive or avoid sanctions, [...] internally produces lively debate and planning.” (2002: 448). As opposed to this, the counterpublic “engages in debate with wider publics to test ideas and perhaps utilize traditional social movement tactics (boycotts, civil disobedience),” while “a public that seeks separation from other publics for reasons other than oppressive relations but is involved in wider public discourses from time to time acts as a *satellite* public sphere.”

⁷ We refer here particularly to the work of Amfilohije Radović (1938), Atanasije Jević (1938), and Irinej Bulović (1947) all of whom completed their doctoral studies in Athens, Greece, and represented the ardent followers of the hieromonk Justin Popović (1894–1979). Radović, Jević and Bulović took part in numerous activities ranging from translations of theological works, a revision of Vuk Karadžić's translation of the New Testament (as members of the Serbian Church's Commission for the Revision of Translation of the New Testament), preparation of monographs, participating in public lectures and debates, etc. Although they shared views on theological issues, these theologians, hieromonks, and church representatives directed their attention to

Furthermore, pressure from Church leadership and believers declined, while processes of desecularization became more prominent.⁸ A massive flourishing of conventional and unconventional religiosity in Yugoslav society in the 1980s, coupled with a weakening of the state's repressive stance toward religious communities, led the Serbian Church authorities to expand their overall public involvement by finding new channels of communication with both believers and in various social circles and by intensifying social networking.

A large number of studies published in the past few decades tackling the issue of the Serbian Orthodox Church's influence and social position in the late socialist period point to its "penetration" into the dominant public sphere in the end of the 1980s.⁹ However, due to the fact that a majority of them focus on exploring the revitalization of Orthodox religiosity after the fall of Berlin Wall, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, they will not be considered here in detail. There is a similar problem regarding the interpretation of the Church's role in the process of national homogenization and retraditionalization in the late 1980s, with a focus on only a portion of its undertakings, primarily after Slobodan Milošević's rise to power.¹⁰ In order to outline the phases of the Church's reaffirmation in the Yugoslav society and the public sphere in the 1980s and to document its growing influence at the time, we focused on its various activities oriented toward believers and clerics, diverse social circles, and the wider public. For this purpose, we examined a large selection of periodicals published by the Church from 1981 to the end of 1989 along with a small sample of literary and political journals and magazines.¹¹

As a result of a thorough examination of how the Church functioned "from the inside," we were able to gain some insight into the characteristic "modes" of public engagement during this period. As will be evidenced in the following sections, the Church acted within the enclave framework from 1981 until the end of 1988 and early 1989. The events it supported and organized took place mainly in temples, monasteries, and within the halls of the Patriarchate, the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, and in secondary theological schools in Belgrade. Close contact with believers and the general public was established through celebrations of Church holidays and anniversaries of temples and monasteries, the cycles of popular theological forums, church music concerts (known as spiritual concerts), etc. An important move beyond this reduced type of functioning was initiated in 1984 after permission was granted to construct the St. Sava Memorial Temple in Vračar, and

divergent types of engagement – Radović to the revival of icon painting and church art, particularly in connection with the St. Sava Memorial Temple construction; Jeftić to political activism; and Bulović mostly to academic work.

⁸ *cf.* Bigović 1985: 257–258; Pantić 1993; Blagojević 2003; Blagojević 2005: 115; Blagojević 2008: 243–248; Radić 2010: 108–109.

⁹ After Dragoljub Đorđević, of one of the most influential Serbian sociologists of religion in the second half of the twentieth century, published his research on religiosity and the expression of faith among the Orthodox populations of SFR Yugoslavia in 1984, dozens of studies on similar topics, particularly the revitalization of (Orthodox) religiosity in the post-Socialist period, were published by other prominent Serbian sociologists of religion including Mirko Blagojević, Dragana Radisavljević Čiparizović, Milan Vukomanović, Zorica Kuburić, Danijela Gavrilović, and historian Radmila Radić. Part of their abundant work is referred to in this paper.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Perica 2002; Naumović 2009; Aleksov 2003; Radić 2000.

¹¹ See the list of periodicals in the reference list.

fundraisers were held for this edifice and to popularize St. Sava as one of the most striking figures in Serbian history. Meanwhile, Church representatives, in conjunction with members of the Association of Writers of Serbia and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, sought to place themselves as key defenders of political, social, and human rights for Serbs in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija through ongoing public involvement. Advocating for Kosovo Serbs, particularly from 1981 until 1987, revealed the Church authorities' willingness to play a role in a counterpublic type of engagement.

Apart from emphasizing the shift away from enclave and counterpublic and into the dominant public sphere at the end of the decade, this analysis of how the Serbian Church functioned during the 1980s has several other goals. Firstly, it is important to determine the typical forms of communication among the Church, believers, different social circles, and the broader public, and their impact on the Church's social positioning. As will be discussed in the following sections, it appears that, in parallel with the Yugoslav state's change in approach toward the Serbian Orthodox Church (and other religious communities) since the mid-1980s, how the Church built authority depended on its ability to (1) develop strong ties with believers; (2) connect with various intellectual, artistic, and political circles; (3) attract the attention of the broader public; and (4) refute negative representations created after the Second World War. The process of "anchoring" into Serbian and Yugoslav society at the time and the process of destigmatizing, were reinforced due to the growing trend of desecularization. As will be demonstrated, it is possible the growth of religiosity, particularly among the youth, observed around the mid-1980s initially occurred independently of the Serbian Church's undertakings.

2. Functioning inside the enclave's boundaries

The position of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religious communities in socialist Yugoslav society was determined by a specific legal framework created in the decade after the Second World War,¹² which was slightly modified during the following decades,¹³ and by dominant views of religiosity that were reproduced through schools, universities, mass media, cultural production, etc.¹⁴ Although the freedom to belong to religious communities was guaranteed to Yugoslav citizens, as was the right of such communities to perform their rites and communicate with believers, there were various, ongoing forms of pressure placed on these communities and believers, starting in 1945.¹⁵ From the perspective of the Church authorities, its "isolation" from the wider public space and the mass media, which exerted enormous influence over the Yugoslav population, was of great importance.¹⁶ Inaccessibility to this channel of communication, among other things, restricted the Church's contact with the significant corps of those who did not declare themselves religious. Such circumstances continued until the country's dissolution.

¹² See Božić 2019.

¹³ *Ibid*, 48.

¹⁴ See Đorđević 1984; Mojzes 1986; Radić 2005; Blagojević 2015: 110–112; *cf.* Blagojević 2005: 159–162.

¹⁵ Blagojević 2015: 110–112; Blagojević 2015: 159–162; Roter 1989.

¹⁶ Gavrilović 1985a: 3.

Furthermore, the possibilities offered by a presence on television and radio for the process of communicating with believers, from providing information about church events to advancing the catechization and dynamization of church life, were out of reach for them. Apart from the Church's isolation and marginalization from the dominant public sphere, another problem was a prevailing understanding of religiosity and the approach to religious communities in Yugoslav society. Interpreted in openly negative terms, religious teachings and religious practices were generally the subject of harsh criticism, condemnation, and ridicule. In the Yugoslav socialism of the 1980s, which was already burdened by a deep socioeconomic crisis, distrust of conventional religions continued to be expressed, particularly within influential political and cultural circles.¹⁷ The Church press often pointed to various examples of the Serbian Church's inadequate representation in film or television productions, concerns displayed in the mass media about strengthening the role of religious communities in the country, young people's inclination toward conventional religion,¹⁸ and the punishment of schoolchildren for attending St. Sava's Day celebrations. Finally, discrimination of the religious population in the period after the Second World War, which was reflected in their reduced possibilities for social mobility and inequality in the exercise of social rights in comparison with atheists, should not be overlooked.¹⁹

Generally speaking, the atmosphere in Yugoslav society was not conducive to the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religious communities, and, even when circumstances changed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the consequences of decades of marginalization could not be easily eradicated. The Serbian Church's social position dramatically altered after the Second World War in comparison to the previous period. Apart from the separation of church and state and the breaking of its traditionally close ties with the political elite, there was a significant drop in the number of believers, especially during the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ The erosion of the Church's key stronghold in society – its flock – was intensified due to the role of believers in church life becoming more passive. This was manifest in a declining interest in regular participation in church rites, services, and church visits.²¹ The problem of poor religious knowledge among Orthodox believers, of which theologians and clerics occasionally warned, further subverted the Church's social and cultural mission.²²

¹⁷ *cf.* Terzić 1984.

¹⁸ *cf.* Lazić 1984.

¹⁹ See Roter 1989.

²⁰ See Đorđević 1984; Blagojević 2005: 179; Blagojević 2015: 109–115.

²¹ Čarkić 1983: 13.

²² Although socialist religious policies could have been interpreted as the main cause of such a “state-of-affairs,” some theologians and clerics found its genesis in the more distant past. As was pointed out: “there are many examples of omissions in the past, a longstanding historical neglect that impeded the development of a strong catechetical tradition among the people. Religious teaching often depended on the prevailing atmosphere and the initiative of the state. It is hard to awaken a numb awareness of the need for religious knowledge.” (Mijač 1983: 13). Regarding the presence of believers in the church and at services, it seems that certain trends persisted for a long period of time as well. Believers' loss of interest in active participation in church life “should be sought in the times before this last war [the Second World War],” and one of the possible reasons could be the Church's politicized role on the eve of its outbreak. Namely, “sermons with national topics, and even more with political, that were held in our churches” in the 1930s probably “demotivated believers” to a considerable extent (Čarkić 1983: 13). According to some interpretations, the early signs of this process were visible in the second half of the nineteenth century, and resulted from the “nationalization of the Church” that

Regardless of the extent to which the position of the Serbian Church during the late socialist period was determined by the circumstances of the post- or pre-Second World War periods, problems inherited from the past created a significant burden for it. However, a certain “opening” of Yugoslav society taking place at the time provided an opportunity to work on “critical points” in relations among the Church, believers, and political and cultural actors. Public activities played an important role in changing believers’ perspectives and how the Church was received by the general public, and it also strengthened its social influence. When looking at the decade before the collapse of Yugoslavia, several stages in the Serbian Church’s actions stand out and mostly unfolded simultaneously. The majority of types of public engagement employed in the 1980s originated as early as the late 1960s, but they were mostly characterized by their intensity, coupled with a trend in emphasizing both their sacred and secular dimensions (historical, cultural, artistic, and political values).

Some of the Church’s key activities in the 1980s were to regularly keep the clergy and the believers apprised of its doings, organize events both for believers and general public, and educate members of various social groups about its history, teachings, mission, and cultural heritage. For this last activity, printing presses and periodicals established in the decades before and after the Second World War continued to play an essential role. In addition to *Glasnik* (the Bulletin), which was intended primarily for the clergy, and the journals *Teološki pogledi* (Theological Views) and *Bogoslovlje* (Orthodox Theology), which were a valuable source for Serbian Church’s theological circles, there were publications such as *Pravoslavni misionar* (Orthodox Missionary), *Pravoslavlje* (Orthodoxy) and *Svetosavsko zvonice* (The Bell of St. Sava) that took on the role of mediator for the Church, believers of different generations, and a variety of social circles.²³ The magazine *Pravoslavlje*, for instance, not only covered events within the Serbian Church and its eparchies, official bodies, and in Orthodox churches around the world.²⁴ It also served to initiate theological, social, and political debates.

Articles and reports published in Yugoslav newspapers and political and youth journals at the time dealing with issues of conventional religiosity, Second World War history, and circumstances in the region of Kosovo and Metohija were extensively analyzed and commented upon or were reprinted in abbreviated or full-length versions. At the same time, television broadcasts, shows, documentaries, and international media coverage of the political situation in Yugoslavia were also of great interest. Attention was given to the editions published by the Serbian Church, the goings-on of church choirs (particularly their international tours and performances), and contemporary historiographic, literary, and artistic productions. Since the early 1980s, soon after mass demonstrations by Kosovo Albanians (1981), the issues of Kosovo Serbs’ political, legal, and public safety as well as the endangered status of church property in Kosovo and Metohija were brought to light. Due to its extensive range of coverage and variety of published material, this magazine represents one of the most valuable sources for exploring the Serbian Orthodox Church’s changing trajectory during this period.

led to the primacy of celebrating the *slava* among the believers instead of participating in the liturgy (Bigović 1985a: 23).

²³ Cisarž 1986: 19–33.

²⁴ See more in Janjić 2017: 189–196.

Among various celebrations taking place during the church year, the elaborate Easter celebrations, which lasted for several weeks, were of particular importance. In addition to church music concerts held in Belgrade churches that included performances by choirs active within the Serbian Church and its Belgrade and Karlovac Archdiocese (Choir of the Belgrade Clergy, Choir of the Students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, etc.), sermons and lectures by priests and theologians were also highlighted. These “Weeks of Orthodoxy” commenced with the Easter fast, and every seven days a different group of choral ensembles, preachers, and theologians gave performances or spoke at the Belgrade churches. This continued throughout the 1980s without any major changes. Much effort was also devoted to the celebration of St. Sava’s Day, particularly in the most important of the Church’s educational institutions – the St. Sava Seminary in Belgrade and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. In both institutions, honoring St. Sava included symposiums (*svečane akademije*) that provided an opportunity to bring together Church leaders, representatives from the Republic and the City of Belgrade Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, and, over time, an increasing number of individuals from the academic sphere, including members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and faculty members from the University of Belgrade.

There were initiatives to move such celebrations outside church premises and hold them at some of Belgrade’s prestigious cultural institutions, but this occurred rather slowly. For instance, in 1985, the idea to hold a symposium in honor of St. Sava at Kolarac Hall was first put forward, but this request from the Serbian Church was rejected by the city authorities.²⁵ The ceremony was instead held at St. Michael’s Cathedral in Belgrade, and this tradition continued for several years. Still, in 1989, the Church and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade were finally given permission to organize a symposium in honor of St. Sava at Kolarac Hall, and in attendance were members of the Presidency and Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, the president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, rector of the University of Belgrade, and many other distinguished guests.²⁶ Moving the celebration of St. Sava’s Day into the public space outside the Church did not occur without obstacles, and the same was true for popularizing this holiday among the wider public. In the provincial areas, believers, and particularly schoolchildren, were even subjected to open criticism and sanctions by the local authorities.²⁷ Such circumstances were reported by the church press even in the late 1980s.²⁸

Because believers and the general public were being introduced to the Serbian Orthodox Church’s rich history, artistic treasures, and theological tradition, numerous publishing ventures that were launched during the 1980s were of particular importance. A number of very active publishing houses within the Church, such as Pravoslavlje (the Belgrade and Karlovac Archdioceses), Kalenić (the Diocese of Šumadija), the Čelije monastery and others, prepared on average two or more publications per year, which included studies by influential Serbian and foreign Orthodox theologians and monographs dedicated to Serbian medieval monasteries, as well as popular didactic literature created for

²⁵ Bigović 1985b.

²⁶ Novaković 1989.

²⁷ Radojević 1983.

²⁸ Anonymous 1987b.

believers and others interested in understanding the key concepts of Orthodox theology. Although there was a variety of printed publications, the selection of titles did not seem to follow any particular pattern, and the distinctive dispositions of readers were not taken into account. In this respect, literature for children and youth was particularly scarce, while in the case of popular didactic publications, there was a noticeable lack of clearly defined goals such as an understanding of what believers and potential believers needed to know in order to grasp the historical and theological dimensions of the Serbian Church.²⁹

An important part of the Church's publishing endeavors included preparing monographs dedicated to certain medieval Serbian monasteries.³⁰ In addition to enriching the academic literature on the cultural heritage of medieval Serbia, these publications were also unique because of their multidisciplinary framework, which was reflected in the need to bring together expert knowledge on the religious, social, and cultural life of this period. The first of several volumes of this type was prepared in 1981 to mark the 600th anniversary of the Ravanica monastery. In addition to theologians and clerics, leading Yugoslav scholars – historians, art and literary historians, and musicologists, from the University of Belgrade and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and its institutes – took part.³¹ It seems that the experience gained during this process, together with developing closer ties with important people in the academic sphere, and especially members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts,³² were of great significance when preparing similar projects in the coming period. Here, what was probably the most ambitious, yet also respected, collection on a single subject published by the church in the 1980s, should be mentioned: a memorial book dedicated to the Studenica monastery (1986). A large number of eminent scholars and theologians (over 35) contributed to this publication, which provided comprehensive and multidisciplinary insights into this monastery's historical and artistic value.³³ Due to the diversity of papers

²⁹ Apart from the journal specifically created for children and youth, the *Svetosavsko zvonce*, that was initiated in 1969, as well as the *Ilustrovana Biblija za decu* [*Illustrated Bible for Children*] whose third edition appeared in 1981, publications meant for this group of believers did not appear often. This was also the case with publications dedicated to catechization of various generations of believers. In 1982, Monastery of Čelije published a book titled *Nema lepše vere od hrišćanske* [*There is no better faith than Christian faith*] whose authors were bishop Danilo Krstić and hieromonk Amfilohije Radović. It was one of the rare examples of popular books for the catechization of believers published in 1980s.

³⁰ This represented a continuation of a 40-year long tradition of publishing capital, memorial editions on the occasion of important anniversaries from the history of Church, as well as the Serbian cultural and literary history. From 1946 to 1981, nine capital volumes appeared. *cf.* Vukić 1986b.

³¹ *cf.* Anonymous 1982.

³² For instance, in October 1981, the Serbian church, and the seniority of the Velika Remeta monastery contributed to the organization of the scientific conference dedicated to composer Kornelije Stanković that was hosted by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. As one of its major events, an exhibition devoted to the old Serbian music took place in the monastery building (see Monah Lukijan 1981). Two years later, in January 1983, the Serbian Patriarch German met with the president of the academy, Dušan Kanazir, and a group of academicians (writer Antonije Isaković, chemist Aleksandar Despić and art historian Dejan Medaković), in order to discuss further collaboration on the preservation and the use of the Archive of the Patriarchate-Metropolitan in Sremski Karlovci (see M. D. J. 1983). Since 1984, the academy officials were regular guests at St. Sava academies organized by the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, and other important events in the church's life.

³³ Anonymous 1986e.

and the breadth of perspectives, a representative work was created that was intended not only for those in academic and clerical circles, but also for the wider public.³⁴

In the 1980s (1983) a long-prepared, completely revised version of Vuk Karadžić's translation of the New Testament (*Sveto pismo Novog zaveta*), formally initiated in 1961, was published. As Church authorities explained, the motive for this project was primarily of a theological nature and aimed to create a 'reliable, official' translation, although it was also important 'to make it accessible to modern people.'³⁵ A historically important intellectual and publishing undertaking of Serbian Church was presented for the first time at the 29th International Book Fair in Belgrade, in October 1984, in front of the representatives of the Republic of Serbia Commission for the Relations with Religious Communities, representatives of the prestigious publishing houses, academician and writer Antonije Isaković, "renown figures of public and cultural life," and "a large audience."³⁶ While the ceremonial promotion of this edition gathered not only members of clerical, intellectual, and political circles, but also believers and part of the wider public, its general reception was not given reports in the church press. Besides, the data concerning circulation of the new translation were left unnoticed.

Among the important publishing undertakings in this period were releases of church music recordings, both as LPs and audio cassettes. The first edition of Orthodox church music on cassette appeared in 1981, and soon after several others followed.³⁷ Although there is no information on how widely they were circulated, it is known that the cassettes were sold in churches across the country along with other commercial products.³⁸ Since Orthodox Church music was rarely recorded in the SFR Yugoslavia after the Second World War and, except for concerts organized by the Serbian Church, was not often included in concert repertoires,³⁹ the popularization of this type of music helped believers to better understand

³⁴ In the process of preparation of monograph on Studenica, very cordial relations between church authorities and other contributors, mainly university professors and researchers, were brought to the fore. The ceremonial reception of all contributors with the Serbian Patriarch that was organized upon monograph's publishing, along with a group tour around central Serbian dioceses, testified to the specific atmosphere that prevailed in the realization of this project. *cf.* Vukić 1986b.

³⁵ Karadžić's translation was never approved by the church, and was never used in the church service, but was "tolerated for private use." See Petković 1983.

³⁶ M. D. J. 1984.

³⁷ The first audio cassette edition was recorded by the St. Sava Choir of Clergy of the Šumadija Diocese, and prepared by Kalenić, the diocese's publishing house. It was a unique endeavor for the whole of Yugoslavia at the time. The idea was to show Orthodox church music in its "only adequate liturgical sense" rather than in a concert format (Anonymous 1981a). The Choir of the Belgrade Clergy published an LP the same year with the works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Serbian and Russian composers of church music (Stepan Vasil'evich Smolensky, Stevan St. Mokranjac, Pavel Chesnokov, Aleksandar Gavanski, Vojislav Boberić and Georgije Maksimović). Several years later, in 1986, the St. Sava Choir of Clergy of the Šumadija Diocese released another audio cassette containing twelve works of Serbian, Russian, Romanian and Greek authors (Stevan St. Mokranjac, Pavel Chesnokov, Alexandru Podoleanu, Volislav Ilić and others).

³⁸ Anonymous 1981b.

³⁹ The circumstances have slightly changed since the mid-1980s as Orthodox church music started to be performed more frequently outside the Serbian church. For instance, Dragoslav Pavle Aksentijević, as a part of the promotion of his LP *Serbian Melods* [*Srpski melodi*], published by Radio-Television Belgrade in 1985, held a concert in the National Museum in Belgrade in 1986 dedicated to Serbian church chant from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. A year later, in 1987, Leningrad Glinka Choir performed *Requiem* of

and adopt it, and it created an opportunity to also attract a non-religious audience. The use of an accessible and popular format such as the audio cassette also provided a possibility to reach a larger audience and also testified to the Church's willingness to conform to the demands of believers (and non-believers). Such concessions to believers' consumer habits could be interpreted as a clear sign of trends in secularization that had perpetuated the alienation of believers from the Church. Church authorities defended their approach with claims that commercial products, including cassettes, represented the embodiment of God's plan and intervention and, therefore, served as a path to the world's salvation.⁴⁰ Regarding the problem of "empty churches" that, as we shall point out, was occasionally discussed in theological and clerical circles,⁴¹ turning to media and formats popular among the wider population probably resulted from the reasoning that any contact with believers and potential believers would be a better option than no contact at all.

3. The widening scope of the Serbian Orthodox Church's public involvement: the St. Sava's Memorial Temple project

The initiative to restart the project of building the St. Sava's Memorial Temple emerged in the late 1950s; however, permission for it to continue was not given until June 19, 1984.⁴² This was preceded by numerous pleas and talks between the Serbian Patriarch German and state officials, and, judging by what was written in the church press, the President of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia Dušan Čkrebić's favorable position toward this project played a decisive part. After the decision by the Republic of Serbia and the City of Belgrade was made public, the Serbian Orthodox Church initiated ambitious fundraising efforts that significantly contributed to creating closer collaboration with various social circles and to using the Church's publishing capacities to their maximum. The Church's undertakings to popularize this project took several directions. These included publishing a supplemental series in the magazine *Pravoslavlje* that provided detailed information about the work taking place at the Vračar plateau; organizing large ceremonies at the site of the future temple; holding lectures and charity events for the Serbian diaspora in the US, Canada, and Australia; creating special commercial editions; reviving the craft of icon painting; etc. Such activities were important for multiple reasons – Church networking with various cultural and academic circles intensified, the ties with

Stevan Hristić on their concert on Bemus festival in Belgrade. The Bulgarian Obretenov Choir presented excerpts from sacred pieces written by Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, Dobri Hristov and Nikolai Kedrov also in Bemus festival (1987), and performances by the Symphonic Orchestra of the Radio-Television Belgrade of Stevan Mokranjac's *Opelo [Requiem]* and the Choir of Radio-Television Zagreb was broadcasted on February 1988 on radio stations in twenty European countries. Finally, two events that took place in 1989 should be mentioned – a series of performances of Mokranjac's *Liturgy* and *Requiem* at the Bitef theater in Belgrade, and a cycle of concerts of Orthodox church music by the Belgrade Cultural Center as a preparation for the Summit of the Non-Aligned countries. According to Medić, forthcoming.

⁴⁰ Anonymous 1981b.

⁴¹ cf. Simić 1981.

⁴² On the history of this project and its political aspects, with particular focus on the period after 1945 see Aleksov 2003; cf. Janjić 2017: 177–179.

dioceses outside the country were strengthened, and the public image of the Serbian Church gained new dimensions. It is clear that realizing the St. Sava's Memorial Temple project symbolically represented the Church's return to Serbian and Yugoslav society, its empowerment, and its attempt to regain the social influence and authority it lost after the Second World War.⁴³ The ambitions of the Church authorities grew along with the progress of temple construction, the increasing mobilization of expanding numbers of believers, and as divisions between the Church and part of the diaspora in the North America and Australia were overcome. This all culminated in 1988 and early 1989 when, on the eve of the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, a translation of the relics of Holy Prince Lazar throughout the Orthodox dioceses of Yugoslavia was initiated to strengthen the bond between the Church and believers and to revitalize the faith among the Serbs, among other goals.

3.1. Mass gatherings and celebrations

Since the early 1980s, organizing mass gatherings on different occasions, once or twice a year, has been one of the Church's favorite forms of public engagement. Regardless of whether these were celebrations of anniversaries of monasteries or churches or the consecration of newly constructed or reconstructed church buildings, such events were based on mobilizing believers mainly from particular dioceses, or, with some exceptions, from various parts of Yugoslavia. The revitalization of the idea of congregation that became actualized in this manner seems to have had a particular importance when considering the declining numbers of believers that were active during the decades following Second World War and their overall alienation from the Church. The problem of "emptying" churches together with a prevailing lack of interest in church services among believers was recognized by the clergy and the Church authorities. However, a detailed exploration of its possible causes did not take place. With the exception of a few strictly theological conferences about the place of liturgy and other types of services in believers' everyday life,⁴⁴ this problem was rarely discussed in detail in the church press or within church bodies. Based on available information, the assumption is that, instead of promoting regular church services and rites and their value, importance, and relevance for the people's expression of faith, the Church authorities focused on activities that enjoyed widespread popularity. For this reason, mass celebrations and gatherings that believers responded to with great enthusiasm⁴⁵ became a crucial "channel of communication" between them and the Church, and with the other social groups, such as intellectuals, artists, politicians, that usually participated in these.⁴⁶

⁴³ On the symbolism of temple construction see Aleksov 2003: 67–69; Srdanović Barac 1988.

⁴⁴ See Simić 1981: 11.

⁴⁵ See Čarkić 1983: 13

⁴⁶ The assumption that the Church's focusing on mass gatherings in the 1980s (and in the previous decade) was the result of the need to compensate for the lack of interest of believers in regular church service and, at the same time, the popularity that this kind of interaction enjoyed among them, opposes the findings of Klaus Buchenau (2005: 559) who claims that such events represented a "chain reaction" to what was happening inside the Catholic church sphere of influence in Yugoslavia at the time. According to Buchenau, "wherever the Catholic church showed

Before the construction of the St. Sava Memorial Temple began in the late 1984, several large events organized by the Serbian Orthodox Church were particularly prominent in terms of the number of participants, their regional differentiation, and the presence of influential individuals from various circles outside the Church. Among them was the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the Ravanica monastery (July 26, 1981), as well as the consecrations of a new church in Tutnjevac (Bosnia and Herzegovina, August 30, 1981), a rebuilt residence in the Patriarchate of Peć (October 16, 1983), and a new church in Jasenovac (September 2, 1984). According to the model that was already employed when organizing large events, a few months after Memorial Temple project was officially approved, a process was initiated to prepare a large ceremony on the grounds of the future temple on the day of St. Basil [Vasilije] of Ostrog (May 12, 1985). Believers and the general public were given detailed information in the church press, and, as a distinctive feature in comparison to similar events, a monumental choral ensemble performance by singers from all of the Belgrade church choirs was planned. The majestic ceremony was meant to symbolically point to the historical significance behind the revival of this decades-old project while also making a strong impression on the believers and the citizens of Belgrade. As reported in the church and foreign press, the first holy liturgy given on the Vračar plateau became the largest mass religious gathering in the Yugoslav capital since the end of the Second World War. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 people were present.⁴⁷ In addition to those from Belgrade, the ceremony and liturgy were attended by believers from Dalmatia, Šumadija, Kosovo and Metohija, Srem, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lika, and others, as well as representatives of the Assembly of Socialist Republic of Serbia, the Republic and City of Belgrade Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, the Republic Committee for Science, Education and Culture, the Belgrade City Assembly, and the Belgrade Socialist League of the Working People. According to theologian Dušan Kašić,

it was not an 'event'; it was a congregation, a mass congregation of those in whom the noble desire to express gratitude to Saint Sava and to build the temple had been simmering for decades...It was a mass prayer imbued with a particular sacred atmosphere. In this gathering, we all complemented each other: the excited voice of the Serbian Patriarch, the triumphant singing of the monumental choral ensemble, the high representatives of the republic and city authorities and religious communities, nuns and monks, old and young, all merged into one unique beauty, joy and good. [...] All that was 'holy and honorable' was dispersed to thousands of homes that day and the good news poured in that the covenant of the Orthodox Serbs was in the process of being realized.⁴⁸

The next mass gathering at the Vračar plateau was held with a festive atmosphere when the holy cross was placed on the temple's dome, once again on the day of St. Basil of Ostrog, May 12, 1989, in front of tens of thousands of Belgraders. As church chroniclers noted:

The windows of nearby houses and institutions are open, people are pressed together. Bystanders and those who hadn't heard about the event see that something unusual is happening and are stopping

presence by mass events, the other communities tried to develop similar activities," but, considering the reports and analysis published in the church press and journals, the internal factors seems to have held more weight.

⁴⁷ Anonymous 1985.

⁴⁸ Kašić 1985.

to watch. The movement [...] of the hands [of the Patriarch] follows the first centimeters of [the cross] being lifted, applause echoes from many hands and the singing of Hymn of St. Sava has started. People are crying out in song, in the truest sense of the word."⁴⁹

In the period between the two events, Church authorities regularly visited the construction site along with writers, diplomats, journalists, groups of schoolchildren and university students, university professors, members of various associations, etc.⁵⁰ In January 1987, on St. Sava's Day a *slava* rite was performed,⁵¹ and on the same day in 1988, this was repeated in the presence of several thousand Belgraders, the British and American ambassadors, and was accompanied by the Belgrade Priests Choir.⁵²

Continuity in organizing mass celebrations and gatherings was maintained within the Serbian Church independently from the Memorial Temple project. In this regard, the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the Studenica monastery was of particular importance, as was the translation of Holy Prince Lazar's relics, which was part of a large number of events between Saint Vitus' Day [*Vidovdan*] on June 28, 1988 and the fall of 1989.

The celebration at the Studenica monastery in 1986 displayed, among other things, the Church's extensive networking within various artistic and intellectual circles. Close relations with the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts were established in the early 1980s, and were further strengthened by including the writer Dobrica Ćosić and the art historian Vojislav Đurić as delegates in the Anniversary Celebration Committee.⁵³ In addition to members of the academy, certain artists also took part in the ceremony at Studenica. For instance, the painter and chanter, Dragoslav Pavle Aksentijević, sang at the celebration,⁵⁴ and the painter Kosta Bradić prepared an exhibition of his graphic art.⁵⁵ In addition, numerous writers, the majority of whom were members of the Association of Writers of Serbia at the time, were present in the audience.⁵⁶

While the Studenica anniversary clearly demonstrated the Church's growing influence in cultural and academic spheres, one of the objectives behind the translation of Holy Prince Lazar's relics was to encourage believers to actively participate in church life. This intention was brought to light during the celebrations that followed the display of relics

⁴⁹ M. D. J. 1989.

⁵⁰ Among them were the writers Vuk Drašković, Slobodan Selenić, Raša Popov, Miodrag Bulatović, poet Desanka Maksimović, British and American ambassadors, the delegation of spouses of various ambassadors, the bishop of Zvornik and Tuzla diocese Vasilije with 7,000 believers (April 23, 1988), the part of the Department for Technical Sciences of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the group of professors and students of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade, etc. (cf. M. D. J. 1988c).

⁵¹ Anonymous 1987a.

⁵² M. D. J. 1988a.

⁵³ Ćosić 1986.

⁵⁴ Anonymous 1986a. It should be noted that Aksentijević regularly performed at various church events including the St. Sava gatherings at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology (1984), the cycle of lectures held in Voždovac (1988), the ceremony of presenting the Voždovac church wall paintings (1988), the *slava* of the First Belgrade Choral Society (1989), etc.

⁵⁵ Anonymous 1986b.

⁵⁶ According to press reports, present were writers Dobrica Ćosić, Vuk Drašković, Matija Bečković, Antonije Isaković, Rajko Petrov Nogo, Gojko Đogo, Milan Komnenić, Antonije Đurić, Danko Popović, painters Kosta Bradić, Milić of Mačva and others. cf. Anonymous 1986c.

across the various dioceses, and it was meant to encourage believers to gather in their parishes and the centers of dioceses, and, finally, to attend the ceremony of the 600th anniversary of Battle of Kosovo at Gazimestan in 1989. Unlike before, mass gatherings were organized and repeated every few weeks. The extent to which such activities increased was indicated by reports from different dioceses. For instance, around 15,000 people were present at the ceremony, which took place in Lazarevac on October 16, 1989, during which the relics were brought from the Šabac and Valjevo Diocese to the Šumadija Diocese. When they arrived in Kragujevac on October 23, around 25,000 people had gathered. In the meantime, the relics were exhibited in Arandelovac and Topola, and attracted a great deal of interest among believers.⁵⁷

As the translation of relics progressed and the main celebration approached, the initial idea of strengthening religious sentiment among believers and bringing them closer to the Church began to be superseded by more ambitious and complex plans in which (broad) cultural and (narrow) religious motives intertwined. The Memorial Temple project also went through something similar. By the eve of the celebration of the Battle of Kosovo, the original aim of honoring the greatest Serbian saint and completing a decades-long initiative became secondary to becoming the cornerstone of the Serbian Orthodox Church's broadly defined cultural and national program.⁵⁸ This shift was reflected in the interpretations of the theologian and bishop of the Banat diocese, Amfilohije Radović, which were presented in the study *The spiritual meaning of the temple of St. Sava in Vračar* [*Duhovni smisao hrama Sv. Save na Vračaru*] (1989). This study was based to a large extent, on a merging of the interwar theological concept of *svetosavlje* and the dominant political views of the Serbian Church at the time.

In the late 1980s the Church authorities were openly preoccupied with the process of social, sociocultural, and political transformation instead of focusing on internal reforms. This was evidenced by an understanding of the value and relevance of these projects and activities, which was mediated through the church press. From this perspective, 1989 was a crucial year, not only for the Serbian Orthodox Church, but for the Serbian people as well:

In year of our Lord 1989, miraculously magnificent and important events took place in the history of the Serbs. [...] The entirety of the Serbian people experienced enlightenment, national and spiritual integration, and religious and moral transformation. The magnificent temple rises from the ashes in Vračar, dedicated to the greatest son and most beloved saint a Serbian mother has given birth to – St. Sava. On the Sunday before the St. Vitus' Day [June 28], the Divine Liturgy was given there. This year, Holy Prince Lazar [...] marches among his people, through Serbian lands and temples. Masses of people, boys and girls, women and children, welcome him everywhere. With arms full of flowers, tears in their eyes, and fire in their souls, everyone approaches and kisses the holy right hand of the virtuous Prince.⁵⁹

While the strengthening role of political motives was evident in the realization of these projects by the end of the decade, as was the relevance of nationalist discourse,⁶⁰ political engagement

⁵⁷ Anonymous 1989a.

⁵⁸ cf. Naumović 2009: 67

⁵⁹ Anonymous 1989c.

⁶⁰ cf. Naumović 2009: 67.

by Church representatives in this period was, to a great degree, built on experience gained during extensive campaigning for Kosovo Serbs from 1981 to 1987,⁶¹ although the “milieu” had been significantly transformed. Earlier, the Church directly confronted the political leadership of the Socialist Republic of Serbia and criticized its actions, alleged inertia, and lack of will to deal with the issue of Kosovo Serbs thoroughly and adequately. However, these changing circumstances, and especially the shifts in the Serbian League of Communists and Serbian leadership from late 1987 to late 1989,⁶² led to the Church softening its critical tone and approach to the new nomenclature. As a result of the convergence between the Church’s nationalist program and the policy of “national unity” promoted by the political elite, the dominant public boundaries for the representatives of this religious community gradually began to loosen.⁶³ Given that a solution to the Kosovo issue together with the Serbian national question was a priority for the new Serbian leadership, the Church’s stances became absorbed into dominant political discourse, and complemented it on different levels. In this respect, the “sacralization” of the Battle of Kosovo and how it was related to the political circumstances at the time was of particular importance. It came to striking fruition in the celebration of its anniversary at Gazimestan where, for the first time in post-war history, the trajectories of the Church and the Serbian political elite became closely intertwined.⁶⁴

⁶¹ One of the crucial preoccupations of the Church representatives in the 1980s was the continued struggle to protect the rights of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and the church property in this area. Increased interest in the political situation in this autonomous province was evident in the 1960s, and particularly after Kosovo Albanian demonstrations in March of 1981. Since then, Church authorities, bodies, and the press started series of activities in order to inform the Yugoslav, European, and global public about the problems Kosovo Serbs were experiencing and that, they believed, followed from the Kosovo Albanians controversial political aspirations. The theologian and hieromonk Atanasije Jevtić took on the role of Church spokesperson on this issue, and took part in public forums and lectures, initiated a series of writings in the church press, prepared various publications, etc. His views crystalized in a series of travelogues entitled “From Kosovo to Jadovno” [*Od Kosova do Jadovna*] published first in the journal *Pravoslavlje* (1983) and soon after reprinted in a book of the same title, along with various poems and archival documents (1984). They were further elaborated on in the collective monographs *The Monuments of Kosovo [Zadužbine Kosova]*, prepared by the Raška and Prizren Diocese, the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, and the editorial committee in 1987 and *Kosovo 1389–1989, the Land of the Living [Kosovo 1389–1989, zemlja živih]*, edited by the hieromonk Irinej Bulović, and supported by the Montenegro St. Stefan monastery in honor of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo (1989). In 1985 Atanasije Jevtić participated in a series of events dedicated to Kosovo issue along with bishop Amfilohije Radović and hieromok Irinej Bulović joined the Association of Writers of Serbia. Noteworthy among them was a three-day discussion organized by the Association and its Belgrade Writers Section in March 1986. It included a presentation of the latest publications related to Kosovo and an exchange of views on the situation in Kosovo province. Along with Jevtić’s book *From Kosovo to Jadovno*, the Belgrade audience was given insight into many historical and literary works, including Dimitrije Bogdanović’s study, *Knjiga o Kosovu* [A Book About Kosovo], which was very highly regarded by the Church authorities. The contours of counterpublics were shaped through these and similar occasions and separate campaigns run by the Association and the Serbian Church in their own journals and publications. Elements of these counterpublics became manifest in the rejection of the the Serbian leadership’s policies and the critique of the results of their work, restricted access to the mass media, and the use of various “alternative” channels of communication – the journals of the Church and the Association (*Pravoslavlje* and *Književne novine*), various publications, public forums and discussions etc.

⁶² On Slobodan Milošević and his associates’ rise to power see Pavlović, Jović, Petrović 2008; Jović 2008.

⁶³ cf. Naumović 2009: 65–70.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

3.2. Activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church among Serbian diaspora

One of the problems that plagued the post-war Serbian Orthodox Church was an internal schism resulting from conflicts with certain dioceses in the diaspora. The accumulated problems culminated in the early 1960s, and eventually led to a split between the Diocese of the United States and Canada and the Holy Assembly of Bishops and Holy Assembly of Synods (1963–1964) and the formation of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church. The former bishop of the US and Canadian diocese, Dionisije (Dionisije Milivojević), was the person behind this split and a number of parishes and believers in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand separating from the Belgrade Patriarchate. This happened with the support of various influential and also strongly anti-communist oriented intellectual and political circles within the diaspora.⁶⁵

The need to strengthen the Serbian Church's position in Yugoslav society, which became visible through public involvement during the 1980s, encompassed an attempt to establish closer relations and more intense cooperation with dioceses and believers outside the country. There were activities organized and supported by the Church among the Serbs in the diaspora at the time, and the desire for creating stronger bonds was mutual. Apart from ecclesiastical circles outside the country, various Serbian cultural associations also made significant contributions to this. These became more frequent after 1984 when the Memorial Temple project was revived. Although the project itself was not the primary motive for organizing events in the diaspora, it was certainly an important point of reference. The first significant step toward bringing the Serbian Church closer to Serbs in the US and Canada was made in the summer of 1985, three years after it was initiated. It was a two-month tour of North American and Canadian church municipalities by the Student Choir of the Belgrade Faculty of Orthodox Theology. Plans for it were extensive, and the tour included visits to a large number of Serbian churches and communities in North America. As witnessed by the conductor Predrag Miodrag, "for two months we were the living bond [...] between our people abroad, our mother church, and the entire nation in the homeland; so much so that they themselves felt and expressed in their own words and sealed with their applause and contributions to the new [faculty] building and the St. Sava Memorial Temple."⁶⁶

This ensemble visited again in 1987 and, prior to their arrival, the dioceses in the United States and Canada along with individual Serbian organizations, initiated a series of events to celebrate Saint Sava and promote the Memorial Temple project. The Serbian National Academy of Canada organized festive evenings in honor of it in late 1985 in Montreal, Windsor, Toronto, and Chicago. They were hosted by writer and academician Matija Bećković and TV director Arsenije Jovanović, and included a message from Patriarch German, the hieromonk Atanasije Jevtić, academicians Dobrica Ćosić and Antonije Isaković and writer Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz. Members of the Serbian National Academy returned the visit in the spring of 1986 and prepared a memorial book dedicated to Saint Sava.⁶⁷ These writers and academicians gathered

⁶⁵ See Slijepčević 2002: 225–245.

⁶⁶ Miodrag 1985.

⁶⁷ See Vukić 1986. In April and May 1988, Matija Bećković was once again invited to give lectures on Saint Sava and the temple project throughout US and Canada. After his visit to the Serbian diaspora, supported both

at the reception organized for them in Belgrade by the Serbian Patriarch, along with academician and writer Ljubomir Simović and journalist and writer Vuk Drašković.

Various fundraising activities for the St. Sava Memorial Temple took place among the Serbian diaspora in Australia. For instance, Bishop Longin of the Australian and New Zealand diocese organized a series of lectures to promote the project, its historical value, artistic qualities, and significance for the Serbian Church. To this end, a group of artists and intellectuals from Serbia close to the Serbian Church were invited. In 1987, Branko Pešić, architect and proto-master of the Temple; Vuk Drašković; and Danko Popović held lectures throughout Australia where they had an opportunity to meet Orthodox Serbs from various church municipalities.⁶⁸ Two years later, in 1989, the same task was given to Matija Bečković.⁶⁹

The more extensive exchange between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian diaspora from the US, Canada, and Australia probably contributed to a certain extent to the gradual improvement of relations with the unrecognized and uncanonical Free Serbian Orthodox Church. As a sign of positive development in this regard, an initiative was begun in 1989 to form a Commission for Dialogue between the Canadian-American Diocese and the Serbian Orthodox Church.⁷⁰ It was preceded by an appeal signed by forty Serbian intellectuals calling for reconciliation within the Church.

In addition to changing the atmosphere within the Serbian diaspora and their sentiments toward the Serbian Church, activities that took place in the US, Canada and Australia during this period resulted in strengthening the collaboration between the Church and certain artistic and intellectual circles. The aforementioned writers, academicians, artists, and others (writers Milan Komnenić, Slobodan Rakitić, Antonije Đurić, Rajko Petrov Nogo, Gojko Đogo, Jovan Radulović, Brana Crnčević, Dragoslav Mihajlović, academician Dejan Medaković, painters Kosta Bradić and Milić of Mačva, etc.) began openly supporting the Church's work and participating in its activities. At the same time, their academic and artistic achievements were promoted in the church press. This was also the case with the Association of Writers of Serbia, whose various activities, public appeals, protest letters, and forums were given attention in the church press, especially in the late 1980s. The intersection between Church authorities and groups of artists and intellectuals was evident not only in their political involvement at the time, but also in the cultural events organized by the Church. In terms of this, the initiation of the Voždovac Summer Spiritual Evenings (1988) was of particular importance. In addition to lectures by Serbian Orthodox theologians, it included a lecture by academician Matija Bečković and performances by chanter Dragoslav Pavle Aksentijević,⁷¹ as well as series of lectures on Kosovo by Antonije Isaković, (writer and academician) Dragoslav Mihajlović, (theologian) Žarko Gavrilović, (writers) Aleksandar Petrov, Milo Gligorijević, Brana Crnčević, Gojko Đogo, Petar Pajić, Jovan Radulović, (journalist) Rajko Đurđević, (theologian) Žarko Vidović and (writer) Slaven Radovanović that took place in the churchyard in Valjevo (1989).⁷²

by the Serbian National Academy of Canada and the Canadian bishop Georgije, ended, a popular book entitled *The Service of Saint Sava [Služba Svetom Savi]* was prepared for the purpose of fundraising.

⁶⁸ Anonymous 1988b.

⁶⁹ Anonymous 1989b.

⁷⁰ Anonymous 1989d.

⁷¹ cf. N. K. 1988.

⁷² Radovanović 1989.

4. The process of desecularization and deatheization in the 1980s and the consolidation of the Serbian Orthodox Church's position in Yugoslav society

Changes in religiosity among the population of Yugoslavia became noticeable in the mid-1980s and were discussed in press reports and surveys by sociologists of religion and culture. Given the decades-long dominance of the process of secularization and atheization in Yugoslav (and Serbian) society, the increasing numbers of believers and the phenomenon of “fuller churches” caught the attention of those who followed trends in Yugoslav daily life. Increasing interest in this topic in widely read publications at the time was observed by Church circles and, as a result, articles published in magazines and newspapers such as *NIN*, *Politika*, *Večernje novosti*, and others were regularly explored in the church press starting in 1984. At first, the emphasis was on criticism of these writings and the stereotypes they reproduced concerning the expansion of conventional religiosity among the youth, but later on the focus became understanding the causes of this process.

It was clear from the critiques of newspaper and magazine articles, and particularly from those that pointed to certain clerics and the effect of their “seductive” sermons as the main reason for the youth turning to the Serbian Church (and other religious communities), that a turning point occurred in the mid-1980s.⁷³ The rapid strengthening of the desecularization process surprised even the Church authorities, since it had not been preceded by more extensive mobilization and catechization within this part of the population. During the 1980s (and before), the Church's public involvement was not designed to respond to the specific needs of believers according to their dispositions and their generational, social, and cultural differences. Because of this, there were no separate activities for children and youth, and only a modest segment of publications was devoted to this group. Apart from the magazine *Svetosavsko zvonce* and *The Illustrated Bible for Children*, which were aligned with the intellectual capacities and forms of communication favored by children and young adults, no other editions that appeared by the end of 1980s were either directly aimed at this group or provided religious education. The absence of a clearly defined youth policy in the Serbian Church and, in general, of activities specifically oriented toward the youth during this period was also evidenced by certain theologians and clerics. According to their claims, the Church “has less contact with young people than all other religious communities,” which was the product of “the objective circumstances in which it functions and certainly not from some kind of disorganization.”⁷⁴

Although perceived as a widespread phenomenon in all religious communities, the increasing involvement of youth in religious life since the mid-1980s has rarely been considered in detail from the perspective of Orthodox theologians and clergy. At the same time, testimonies of schoolchildren and university students who had devoted themselves to the Orthodox faith were scarce in the church press. The observations made by theologian, literary historian, and academician Dimitrije Bogdanović (1985) were of particular importance in this regard. He discussed the potential motives among young people for joining

⁷³ On the empirical research on the expansion of religiosity in Serbia and Yugoslavia among different parts of population including the youth conducted in the 1980s see Kuburović, Gavrilović 2013: 10.

⁷⁴ Gavrilović 1985b.

the Church and described what most of them were like. When comparing religious sentiments in the USSR and SFR Yugoslavia at the time, Bogdanović noticed a number of similarities such as “the increasing openness of youth to religion, and the fact that an increasing number of unbaptized young people were baptized by their own free will and literally by their faith.” The conversion, he believed, was “inspired by a deep spirituality: it makes no difference between them and Russian neophytes [...]. The level of religious knowledge they demonstrate is high, spiritual literature is their regular reading, prayer permeates their home life, their mornings and evenings, their commute to work, lunch or fasting.”⁷⁵

The occasional references to young people in the church press to a certain extent shed some light on the context of their commitment to conventional religion and point to the importance of peer socialization, a generally strong belief in the transcendental authority, deep disappointment in Yugoslav society, the impact of the economic crisis, etc.⁷⁶ When looking at reports published in the press and discussions at theological conferences, it is clear that young people’s interest in the Serbian Church did not correlate with the Church’s public and social involvement in the initial period, and that it was primarily a grassroots initiative. The Church’s more active political engagement since 1984 may have exerted a certain influence. In this regard, the negative reception in the mass media of the Church’s political activities could have played a role. By openly labeling the Church as an anti-systemic institution, the media unintentionally provoked solidarity with the Church from the part of its audience that was dissatisfied with prevailing social circumstances and, consequently, could identify with any “anti-systemic” position. Still, only a closer examination of witnesses of the time can clarify the importance of certain factors pushing young people closer to the Serbian Church.

Although the Church’s contribution to the process of desecularization in Yugoslav Orthodox communities is hard to estimate, its overall position and social authority were undoubtedly strengthened by this process. Due to a trifold increase in the number of young believers, and a significant growth in the total number of believers, the Church and its voice became more firmly embedded within society. As a result, the opinions of Church authorities could not be completely ignored, and the Church’s support was no longer irrelevant in sociopolitical terms. Accordingly, it was not surprising that Church leaders began to appear in influential youth and political journals and media in the late 1980s. For example, extensive interviews with the Serbian Patriarch German appeared in *Večernje novosti* and *Politika* in 1988 and 1989. In addition, on January 6, 1988, *Politika* published the Patriarch’s Christmas Epistle, which was then reproduced “in other media.”⁷⁷ This was one of many indicators pointing to a change in the Church’s position in society and within the public sphere in Socialist Republic of Serbia and Yugoslavia.

5. Conclusion

This analysis of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the late socialist period has revealed

⁷⁵ Bogdanović 1985: 5.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, ‘Bog se nalazi srcem’, *Svetosavsko zvonce*, 1, 1988, 24–25; ‘Mladi pitaju – mi odgovaramo’, *Svetosavsko zvonce*, 3, 1985, 85–87.

⁷⁷ Anonymous 1988a.

several important phenomena. First of all, there was a high degree of reliance on experience and forms of communication with believers and other groups created in earlier decades. This does not imply that changes were not introduced in this area, but because this process happened gradually, there was an impression of uninterrupted continuity. Most types of public engagement employed in the 1980s played a role in earlier decades; however, the dynamics and intensity, as well as the prevailing sociopolitical circumstances, changed with the appearance of the public sphere's slowly paced liberalization and an increase in the freedom of religious expression. Even before these trends became more evident, Church authorities had made efforts to strengthen the position of this religious community in Serbian and Yugoslav society. Much energy was directed toward creating closer bonds with believers, certain social circles, and the Serbian diaspora, as well as toward overcoming deeply embedded post-Second World War stigma. To that end, Church representatives focused on a diverse set of activities – for believers, mass celebrations were emphasized, and cooperation with academic, artistic, and political circles was established through the Church press, political campaigning, and numerous art and church construction projects.

The St. Sava Memorial Temple project encompassed most forms and channels of communication developed from the 1960s onward and served the Church's multiple tasks. It was through this project that the complex character of the Church's social being – both sacred and secular – was particularly emphasized and exploited. It was of particular importance that this monumental temple could be also seen as a place for the rebirth of the Orthodox faith, a reinforcement of the cult of St. Sava, a way to surpass believers' alienation, and as a majestic architectural endeavor that stimulated the revitalization of various crafts and the development of innovative solutions in numerous technical domains. Through its spiritual and more mundane dimensions, this project spoke easily not only to believers and clerics, but also to engineers, artists, and the wider public. Its multiple potentials were reflected in the diversity of activities organized for its affirmation, which ranged from performing holy rites at the construction site and organizing group visits for schoolchildren, university students, engineers, important public figures, etc. to publishing popular literature and a documentary,⁷⁸ preparing the exhibition *St. Sava Memorial Temple – the Design and Construction Process* (1988),⁷⁹ and cycles of lectures among the Serbian diaspora.

In a similar vein, the Church's rich cultural and artistic treasures often served to attract not only the interest of believers, but also of art and history scholars, artists, members of the educated classes, and others. This was particularly evident through the celebrations of the anniversaries of medieval monasteries, which included publishing monographs

⁷⁸ For the purpose of fundraising, Church authorities prepared a special 65-minute documentary "St. Sava Memorial Temple in Vračar" in the VHS and GSC format that was released in 1986. It included a ceremony sanctifying the temple's foundation, Patriarch German and all the Serbian church bishops on May 12, 1985 giving the Holy Liturgy, issuing a charter on restarting the construction, and a sermon given by the Patriarch. It was meant to be the first segment of a feature film that would end with the ceremony sanctifying the completed temple. See Anonymous 1986d.

⁷⁹ The exhibition was opened on February 6, 1988 at the Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade in front of numerous members of the diplomatic corps (American, British, and Greek ambassadors, etc.) along with important figures in cultural, social and public life at the time. As a part of it, a monograph entitled *The St. Sava Memorial Temple in Vračar in Belgrade 1895–1988*, written by architect, and temple's proto-master Branko Pešić, was presented; cf. M. D. J. 1988b.

together with organizing mass gatherings and public celebrations. Through such engagement, it was possible to emphasize the variety of contributions made by the Church to Serbian and Yugoslav society, of which most were of exceptional cultural and historical value. Consequently, this could contribute to mediating more affirmative representations of this religious community among the broader public.

By focusing on different communication channels and social dimensions, the Church slowly improved its interaction with believers, strengthened relations with the diaspora dioceses and their flocks, and created a network of like-minded academic, artistic, literary, and political circles and actors. The expansion of religiosity to various segments of the population, and particularly the youth starting the mid-1980s, made its position more stable and socially influential, thus galvanizing the Church's political ambitions. To that end, the at first indirect and, after the eve of 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, open support of the Serbian political elite was of particular significance.

The Church's public involvement in the 1980s, beside reflecting its different positioning in Serbian and Yugoslav society, revealed changes appearing in the public sphere at that time. The gradual opening of this sphere from 1983 to the end of 1988 was noticeable, although the majority of dissident and "anti-systemic" groups had limited access to the wider public. Starting at the end of 1988, various counterpublic entities were absorbed inside its boundaries, but the extent to which this process contributed to the public sphere's "democratization" is difficult to assess. The idea of national unity and homogenization, which became central in the Serbian political realm at this time, seems to have led to the suppression of critical voices and the establishment of a "new unanimity" instead of the pre-existing pluralism of positions. However, without thoroughly examining other spheres – the media and popular cultural production – an understanding of the processes and trends within the Yugoslav public sphere will remain incomplete.

Mutual support and collaboration between the Church and various intellectual and artistic circles in the 1980s are of particular significance both for remodeling the public sphere and strengthening its social authority. Creating stronger ties with the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Association of Writers of Serbia was achieved through numerous events, initiatives, and projects. In addition to creating a network of writers, academicians, university professors, music performers, and painters willing to contribute to Church activities, the close interaction with both artists and intellectuals led to shaping a specific "anti-systemic" perspective that was anchored in the following: 1. reaffirming the legacy of the First World War and the First Yugoslavia; 2. opening up a debate about the crimes committed in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War; 3. revitalizing the cult of Saint Sava and the Kosovo Covenant; 4. promoting the cultural heritage of medieval Serbia and of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century Serbs from the Habsburg Empire (the Fruška Gora monasteries); 5. struggling for Kosovo Serbs' political and social rights while documenting Albanians' "genocidal" aspirations dating from the medieval period; and 6. propagating the significance and value of the Cyrillic alphabet. Based on interpretations of these issues, a complex discourse evolved, which has been explored in the existing research through an extreme nationalist framework.⁸⁰ Still, the

⁸⁰ *cf.* Perica 2002.

importance of the theoretical, organizational, and political work of interwar theologian Justin Popović and Nikolaj Velimirović, whose devoted disciples were Amfilohije Radović, Atanasije Jević and Irinej Bulović, the *spiritus movens* of Church projects, initiatives, and discourse in the 1980s (and later), needs further clarification.

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**ИЗЛАЗАК ИЗ „ЕНКЛАВЕ“: ЈАВНЕ АКТИВНОСТИ
СРПСКЕ ПРАВОСЛАВНЕ ЦРКВЕ И ПРОЦЕС ДРУШТВЕНЕ
РЕАФИРМАЦИЈЕ ТОКОМ 80-ИХ ГОДИНА ПРОТЕКЛОГ СТОЛЕЋА**

Резиме

У овом раду се разматра како је Српска православна црква током 80-их година прошлог века постепено напуштала сужен вид јавног делања, и из оквира „енклаве“ искорачила у доминантну јавну сферу. Овај процес био је резултат међудејства различитих појава. Притисак власти на верске заједнице и вернике почео је да слаби у том периоду упркос томе што је јавно иступање верских званичника и даље било регулисано рестриктивним законским решењима. То је било праћено наглашеном деатеизацијом млађих делова популације и експанзијом различитих видова световне религиозности (популарна култура, спорт) укључујући и хибридне варијанте постмодерне духовности. У таквим околностима, верске заједнице биле су подстакнуте да проширују опсег свог јавног иступања и проналазе нове канале комуникације и умрежавања како с верницима, тако и с различитим друштвеним круговима. Циљ рада је да се укаже на врсте јавних активности које је Српска православна црква неговала у овом периоду, као и на фазе кроз које је прошла суделујући у јавној сфери. Поред тога, сагледани су и фактори који су утицали на промене у јавном и друштвеном позиционирању Цркве током касних 80-их година, као и последице тих промена на различите области њеног функционисања.

Кључне речи: Српска православна црква, СФР Југославија, 80-те, јавна сфера, јавне иницијативе, издаваштво, прославе, масовна окупљања, Српска академија наука и уметности, Удружење књижевника Србије.

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