

HELSINKI Bulletin



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Nº 47 • December 2009

Struggle over Patriarch's Legacy

The funeral of Patriarch Pavle was more than a burial of a church dignitary. The entire obsequial scenario – including memorial ceremonies – was above all designed to demonstrate national unity and show that the entire Serb nation was mourning as one.



It is hard to tell who was a mastermind of that all. To all appearances, it was a joint endeavor of political, church and intellectual elites. The state – i.e. the ruling coalition – is eager to win over the Church, particularly at this moment when it (Serb Orthodox Church) faces the challenge of electing a new Patriarch. And it is not all the same to the ruling coalition whether a new Patriarch comes from the ranks of conservative or more or less reformist circles within the Church.

At the same time, the funeral ceremony manifested Serbia's regression and its identification with the 19th century values. It drew a line under Serbia's all modernization efforts in second half of the 20th century thus cementing the interpretation of ex-Yugoslavia's disintegration, wars and war crimes – the interpretation that

has nothing to do with reality, particularly the one emerging from courtrooms of the tribunal in The Hague. With a manifestation as such the said elites have only further isolated Serbia.

The general public has perceived Patriarch Pavle as someone unique, an exception from corrupted elites in the state and the Church. Or, as Djordje Vukadinovic put it, "as an example of authentic existence and spirituality amidst the sea of banality, superficiality or falsity that make up our so-called modern world and life." Against the backdrop of devastation and corruption in politics, Pavle was for people a rare example of a modest person who "by passing away peacefully grew bigger and bigger inasmuch as everything around him grew smaller and smaller, paler and paler, compromised and profane."¹ Hardly anyone touched on his political radicalism of early 1990s vis-à-vis his ascetic existence.

With ample support from Vojislav Kostunica, the Serb Orthodox Church stepped on Serbia's public and media scene after the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic. Though omnipresent, the Church could not have undermined the foundations of civil society on its own – for this it needed a helping hand from the state. Therefore, it was the state and its political leadership that exclusively decided everything related to the funeral ceremony – itself exceeding the constitutional frame.

¹ Djordje Vukadinovic, „The Autumn of Patriarch Pavle,“ *Politika*, November 23, 2009.

The funeral of Patriarch Pavle signaled a final stage of the struggle over patriarchal seat, incited two years ago when the late Patriarch stepped down. Within three months – till February 15, 2010 - the Church has to elect a new Patriarch. Judging by the recent funereal ceremony, the state will surely have its hand in the election.

State-orchestrated funeral

Intent to create or demonstrate the atmosphere of national unity, the state has obviously taken over the organization of the funeral. The Christian right-wing and clerical stands of top officials were promoted. President Boris Tadic and ministers of foreign affairs, the police and religion were on the funeral committee. TV channels of “foreign” stations were illegally blacked-out during national mourning. The Ministry of Education recommended that all schools and faculties should be closed on the day of the funeral. Three-day national mourning (four-day in Belgrade) was proclaimed. As state symbols, gendermerie and the guard of honor were lined up at the funeral. Everything was planned to create the impression of an exceptional event. Criticizing the atmosphere surrounding Patriarch’s death and his funeral, Professor Ljubisa Rajic focused on the government’s actions and attitudes rather than on the Church’s ambitions. For, as he put it, “the problem is in the governance that approved all that and, above all, in Serbia’s political elite that allows the country’s gradual clericalization in the attempt to block up modernization processes.” Namely, the state elite “seizes every opportunity of religious holidays or the Patriarch’s death to hush up some by far more serious, burning problems – unemployment, workers on strike who have blocked a railroad and the authorities only telling them to get lost as there is no money for them,” said Rajic.²

The whole country was almost in a state of emergency – additionally fueled by the panic created over the new flu and the coverage the media

² Kaziprst, B92, November 19, 2009.

were giving it. The state successfully played “a national reconciler” – some 60.000 citizens were in the streets on the day of the funeral. The topics such as workers’ protests against overdue salaries, Ministry of Finance’s announcement that the budget for 2010 would need additional sources of income and the day marking the 18th anniversary of the fall of Vukovar were pushed aside or went unmentioned. Republika Srpska proclaimed a day off, whereas Serbia’s government suggested that employers should allow their employees to take paid leaves on the day of the funeral. Faculties and secondary schools closed their doors (such decisions were optional but by making it every faculty has actually exposed religious and national feelings of its students to ridicule, let alone violated the laical character of the University).

As a symbol of national unity of all Serbs, the Serb Orthodox Church is still a mobilizing institution, the same as it has been on the eve of ex-Yugoslav wars.³ Findings of a recent survey conducted by *Balkan Monitor* indicate that citizens still trust the Serb Orthodox Church the most – 67 percent of interviewees responded so.⁴ Situation is about the same in other Balkan countries – people’s trust in state institutions is on the downgrade.



³ “Slobodan Milosevic and his closest associates tried to use the Church for national mobilization that would make it possible for them to keep and expand their power. The Church, unfortunately, misunderstood it as an opportunity to use the state for expanding its influence on the society. So, they tried to profit one from another, and benefits seemed first to be mutual. As this first national-Church mobilization was seen as successful, all democratic parties have been trying the same trump card from late 1980s to this very day.” (sociologist Mladen Lazic).

⁴ *Blic*, December 2, 2009.

Statements by officials

This is exactly why political elites play on the authority of the Serb Orthodox Church and even on the death of the Patriarch. Public figures, analysts and the media were extensively glorifying Patriarch Pavle and invoking his quotes, which would “entwine consciousness of the Serb nation,” they said. Though in his will – opened on the day he died – the Patriarch asked to be buried in private, the state acted contrary to his wish.

President Boris Tadic called the Patriarch’s death an irreparable loss for Serb people. “By their very existence some people keep together an entire nation. Our patriarch was such person. His passing away is my personal loss as well,” he said.⁵ In all difficult situations I went to the Patriarch for advise, he added. Premier Cvetkovic said, “The Serb Orthodox Church and the Serb nation have lost a wise leader who was showing the path of peace, justice and humanity to believers and clergy at hardest times.”⁶

Chairwoman of the Serbian Parliament Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic said, “Memory of this noble spiritual leader of the Serb nation and of all true values his lifestyle and deeds rooted into the Eastern Orthodox world will remain forever in the collective consciousness of our people.”⁷ “This is a difficult time for our people, particularly the part of it living in Kosmet. Patriarch Pavle was encouraging the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija to take the path of peace, justice and humanity. His decades-long work in the Raska-Prizren eparchy has left a lasting mark, and his deeds and words of comfort and hope were the best balm for our anguished people in Kosovo and Metohija,” said Minister for Kosovo and Metohija Goran Bogdanovic.⁸

According to Vojislav Kostunica (Democratic Party of Serbia), “Patriarch Pavle managed to safeguard the Serb church, religion and people at historical crossroads.” Kostunica’s cabinet has used the Church for “na-

tional awakening” by appropriating its most reactionary dignitaries, including Nikolaj Velimirovic. Over his election campaign of December 2003 Kostunica even used many quotes from Velimirovic’s writings.⁹

Republika Srpska – where clericalism is manifest the most – proclaimed a day of mourning. Its premier, Milorad Dodik, speaking of the Patriarch’s role in Republika Srpska, said, “It is most important to remember everything the Patriarch did /for us/ during his frequent visits. Among other things, he sanctified the foundations of the temple in downtown Banjaluka, which had been destroyed in the World War II.”¹⁰



Quotes from and about Patriarch Pavle:

“Obviously, that was the only choice. Now the war is imposed on us too. This war of ours, therefore, is a just one because it is defensive. It is not aggressive or conquering.” (Patriarch Pavle, Duga, April 10-23, 1999)

“Our supreme commander is Patriarch Pavle.” (Zeljko Raznatovic-Arkan, October 1991).

“Serbs cannot live side by side with Croats in any state whatsoever. They cannot live together in any Croatia.” (Patriarch Pavle in his letter to Lord Carington, August 1991).

⁵ Beta, November 15, 2009.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ www.B92.net November 15, 2009.

⁸ Vecernje Novosti, November 16, 2009.

⁹ „Suppression and Denial of Anti-semitism“ by John Byford, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgade, 2005.

¹⁰ Tanjug, November 16, 2009.

“For us, Kosovo is just another name for the noblest principles, truth and justice, for law and order, whereas the Kosovo pledge is our New Testament. Therefore, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is inseparable from the issue of Serbia and destiny of Serb nation.” (Patriarch Pavle, *Pravoslavlje*, March 15, 2007.)

“Throughout its history – including the 20th century – the Church had to neglect its primary duties in favor of active engagement in the struggle for unification of Serb nation, the struggle in which a priest has simultaneously been a teacher, a judge and an armed man defending himself and his family.”

(Interview with Patriarch Pavle, *Danas*, January 5-7, 2001).

“In our view, the best relation between state and church and the one that used to be - a symphony of the state, the society and the church.”

(Interview with Patriarch Pavle, *Danas*, January 5-7, 2002).

“In January 1992 Pavle announced that the church and Serb people have never “recognized AVNOJ /post-WWII/ borders and that no agreement whatsoever is binding for the nation as a whole without its consent and the blessing from its mother Serb Orthodox Church. In December of the same year he stated though no one asked for his statement that ‘there have been no mass rapes of Muslim women by Serbs in Bosnia’ and that ‘such accusations were fabricated in the shameful warring propaganda against Serb nation’.” (Monitor, May 2006).

Nonpresence of leaders of Eastern Orthodox churches

Out of fourteen leaders of Eastern Orthodox churches, only two patriarchs attended the funeral. The Moscow Patriarch did not show up – allegedly, he was ill. Except for Albania, no one came from neighboring countries. The Serb Orthodox Church officially refused to host a delegation of the Macedonian, canonically not recognized church.

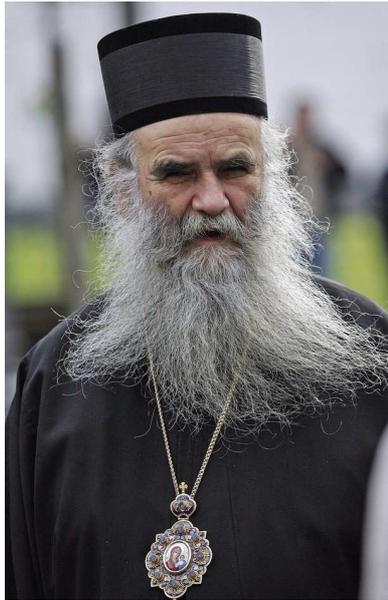
The first among the equals, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I – with whom Serb and Russian churches are not in friendly relations – did come to pay his homage. The two churches object to his search for “a new image” of Eastern Orthodoxy for the 21st century, and oppose his advocacy for reconciliation and harmonious actions by all Eastern Orthodox churches. In his funereal address, Bartholomew I warned the Serb Orthodox Church that it should work towards reconciliation worldwide, primarily referring to its attitude towards the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

Struggle over the patriarchal seat

The struggle over the patriarchal seat has been on for two years now – ever since Patriarch Pavle was hospitalized. On several occasions some bishops have suggested election of a new patriarch but failed to secure consensus. There have also been suggestions that the Holy Archbishopric Assembly should meet this fall to raise the question of the election of a new leader. A fierce struggle for Pavle’s successor is still on behind the scenes. Metropolitan Amfilohije – who has been an acting patriarch for two years – is the only certain candidate for the time being.

Other candidates are claimants to the seat: Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla Vasilije, Bishop of Backa Irinej, Bishop of Zahumlje-Herzegovina Grigorije and Bishop of Nis Irinej. According to some sources, these are just rumors spread by some clans. This time political circles in Belgrade seem to agree that a new patriarch should come from Serbia.

Whether or not bishops will insist on new rules on the election of the Patriarch of the Serb Orthodox Church is a major question. Any possible change in the existing, so-called apostolic procedure is usually interpreted as an attempt to interfere from the outside in the election of a new church leader. However, some bishops have already demanded that a new patriarch should be elected by majority vote.



Quotes from Amfilohije in 1990s:

Amfilohije's begun rising through church ranks in 1980s. As a staunch anti-communist, he was exchanging his views about the nation's renewal and its modes with Dobrica Cosic and Slobodan Milosevic.

In the philosophical-religious collection of papers "God's Lamb and Beast of Underworld" published in 1996, he wrote that war was unavoidable because of imperfection of human being and justified the war "against a universal enemy of faith, law and freedom, and our homeland." According to him, "the history of Christian nations is more or less a return to the Old Testament, whereas the New Testament is just emerging among human race."

All his hopes rested on Republika ("the most beautiful Serb land, a beacon and a Piemont of the entire Serbhood") and its leadership who turned down Vance-Owen plan in 1993 and thus "looked after us and our souls, opting, like Tsar Lazar, for a heavenly empire."

He (Amfilohije) was advocating unification of all Serb lands.

"By international dictate, dwarfish states are emerging just to tear apart again crucial parts of the body of the Serb nation...Despite all hard-

ship, the bone marrow of those unified lands is formed anew – Serbia and Montenegro. Eastern Herzegovina, a considerable part of Bosnia and Bosanska Krajina, as well as Srpska Krajina are side by side with them...Contours of these Serb lands have visibly emerged in all past developments. And the only misfortune is that the cry for help coming from Srpska Krajina has not met a proper answer at the proper time."

"The Serb nation, threatened by its own utopia – deliberate or imposed – has not been strong enough to put forth a clear-cut program at the right moment...The issue of Macedonia cannot be settled offhandedly. Macedonia owes its freedom to the bones of Serb warriors." (*Duga*, April 12, 1992).

When bestowed an award for his book "Soul Restored to Chastity" in Pec he said:

"At this moment my words cannot save the soul of our people, nor can the words of anyone writing or uttering them. At this moment and on this day the soul of our people is in the safe hands of Biljana, Republika Srpska and Srpska Krajina. The same as Vuk Karadzic saved our mother tongue, at this moment his namesake, together with Plavsic /Biljana/, a new maiden of Kosovo, are looking after our soul because this very night they set themselves on the path of the holy Tsar Lazar. Like Tzar Lazar in this Kosovo, they have chosen the hearth and home of our soul in the heavenly empire." (*Borba*, May 1, 1993).

Pavle and the people

Yet another phenomenon marked the Patriarch's death: masses of people. Hundreds of thousands of citizens were waiting patiently for hours to pay homage to the dead dignitary. Serbia has no that many believers, people sociologist Mirko Djordjevic calls "a small flock" and who are regular church goers. President Boris Tadic and all the officials bowing and kissing icons have certainly not inspired the masses to pay such respect to the dead Patriarch who seemed to be lying rather lonely in his own natural environment.



“Christian unpretentiousness” of Patriarch Pavle and his modesty – despite sins he himself might have admitted had anyone asked him to – says Mirko Djordjevic, were behind such massive expression of respect for his person. As if the masses wanted to pass the message that no person as Pavle lived any longer in this state or in this church, persons who were not greedy though sharing the responsibility for the unemployed, for children who could not afford schooling and, finally, for 600,000 citizens of Serbia, hungry and desperate, who could do nothing with their lives but pray.¹¹

Sociologist Ratko Bozovic explains the phenomenon as an ordinary citizen’s attempt at catharsis. The Patriarch’s death engaged people in introspection and reconsideration of the tenets that had guided him throughout his life, says he, adding, “The people in Serbia long for the authority capable of imposing himself by his own lifestyle rather than for the authority institutions of the media are imposing on them. “People are aware of that, that’s what they feel deep inside. We’ve had not only crises of this and that over here, we’ve had a crisis of humanity. And this man – perceived beyond any institution – was for them a model of honesty and humility, but also an undisputable authority,” say Bozovic.¹²

¹¹ Mirko Djordjevic, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/serbian/> November 16, 2009.

¹² www.b92.net November 19, 2009.

Political role of the Serb Orthodox Church

In all crucial moments for Serbia’s political arrangement the Church has obviously played a political role. Adoption of Vojvodina’s statute testified of it recently, and before that declaration of the 2006 Constitution. The Serb Orthodox Church has strongly opposed the draft statute of Vojvodina and any decentralization of Serbia. The Church has never recognized the so-called inner /republican/ borders of Yugoslavia and was among the signatories of the paper authorizing Milosevic to speak for all Serbs in negotiations in Dayton. Once the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, the Church withdrew its signature dissatisfied with the outcome. When the circumstances changed – notably after October 5, 2000 – the Serb Orthodox Church remained the only institution providing open support to aspirations for unification of all Serb lands. In this, its “Bosnian lobby” is the loudest of all.

The Holy Synod of the Serb Orthodox Church sent a letter to the parliamentary speaker, Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, and the Serbian Premier on the eve of parliament-tary debate on Vojvodina’s statute. “As a guardian of Serbs’ spiritual being and national identity for centuries and centuries, even at the time a Serb state was non-existent, the Serb Orthodox Church expresses its anxiety over sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of Serbia jeopardized firstly by the seizure and occupation of Kosovo and Metohija, and then by the attempt to turn the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina into a new state within the state of Serbia,” quotes the letter. Namely, the Church takes that Vojvodina is not entitled to sign international agreements in the domains of its competence, cannot enjoy “the usurped right” to establish its representational offices abroad, particularly in Brussels, and that its assembly is not authorized to pass laws. The Church also condemns the establishment of Vojvodina’s Academy of Arts and Science the purpose of which, as it puts it, is to endow Vojvodina’s Serbs with a special national identity.¹³

¹³ February 6, 2009.



The author of the letter was Bishop Amfilohije. The fact that Bishop of Backa Irinej distanced himself from it indicates disagreement on the issue among claimants to the patriarchal throne. That was evident shortly after the Patriarch's death – at the time he passed away the draft statute was under parliamentary debate.

The state and the Church have been closely connected by tradition – and particularly so when it comes to the election of a patriarch. Today the state wants to see a patriarch who will show respect for the ruling coalition's attempt to direct Serbia towards EU. In this context, there is a general agreement that a dignitary with his roots in Serbia would be the most suitable for the patriarchal seat.

The Bosnian lobby – the strongest of all by the number of dignitaries originating from Bosnia – imposes its role of a guardian of Republika Srpska and seriously aspires to have its candidate elected a patriarch. Since Kosovo has been lost to Serbia it is necessary to safeguard Republika Srpska now, it argues.

With his problematic career in ex-Yugoslav wars, the most serious candidate Amfilohije lacks the support from Belgrade circles. Another serious candidate, Irinej, has always been close to the regime and, therefore, stands good chances. He overtly defied Amfilohije when the latter called Vojvodina's statute separatist.

Election of a new patriarch is crucial for the Church's credibility among citizens – not because of their piety but because of the fact that the Church is being identified with the Serb state. Such perception rests on the fact that in early 19th century the Serb Orthodox Church actively participated in the establishment of a modern Serb state and was among key actors in the process.