

THE SERBIAN RIGHT-WING
PARTIES AND INTELLECTUALS IN
THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1934–1941

Edited by
Dragan Bakić



INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES
OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

SPECIAL EDITIONS 155

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Dragan Bakić

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BELGRADE

2022

Publisher
Institute for Balkan Studies
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Belgrade, Knez Mihailova 35/IV
www.balkaninstitut.com
e-mail: balkinst@bi.sanu.ac.rs

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ISBN 978-86-7179-121-2

Prepress and Print ∴ Interklima-grafika, Vrnjci

This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia,
PROMIS, Grant no. 6062708, SerbRightWing.

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Фонд за науку
Републике Србије

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, PROMIS, Grant no. 6062708, SerbRightWing.

As indicated above, this edited volume was made possible by the financial backing of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia and has come into being as a major result of the project entitled *The Serbian Right-Wing Parties and Intellectuals in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1934–1941* (acronym SerbRightWing), the Principal Investigator of which is the editor of the volume, Dragan Bakić. The completed project and, consequently, the book are products of the efforts of five people that comprised the project team. It was my great pleasure to cooperate with four of my dear colleagues. They are the authors of the chapters in this volume, and I will list their names as they appear here: Rastko Lompar, Research Assistant, and Dušan Fundić, Research Associate, both my colleagues from the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Svetlana Šeatović, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Literature and Arts; and Vladimir Cvetković, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory. I can only hope that they have found our joint efforts to complete this volume as satisfying as I have, and I extend my warmest gratitude to them for all their hard work, patience and valued assistance on many occasions.

It is customary to thank the staff of all the institutions in which the researchers had the pleasure to work, and I am pleased to do so and acknowledge the professionalism and good humor of a number of archivists and librarians in a range of archives and libraries (listed in the Bibliography) that facilitated the research of our team members. But

one institution and its staff deserve special praise. It was in the Archives of Yugoslavia that the bulk of the research was done by the three historians that contributed to this volume (Dušan Fundić, Rastko Lompar and Dragan Bakić). As it happened, our archival investigations had to be carried out in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and, with all the restrictions imposed on accessing material in the reading room, it seemed that this would be virtually impossible to do. Indeed, it would have been impossible if it had not been for the understanding and unstinting support of the Director of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Dr. Milan Terzić, who appreciated the project's time constraints and made special arrangements for the team members to complete their research. Without his help, this volume would have never seen the light of day. Along with their director, we are indebted to the archivists Tamara Ivanović and Ivana Božović, in particular, for their kind assistance during the sweltering summer months of 2021 when most of our research was done.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and its director and the person in charge of publications, Prof. Vojislav G. Pavlović, for including this volume in the publication plan. For the unfailing administrative support my thanks, as always, goes to our inimitable office assistant, Ms. Radmila Pejić. I am thankful to my colleagues from the Institute, Junior Research Assistants Andjelija Miladinović and Marija Milinković, for taking the time to compile the index for the entire volume. Last but not least, I am grateful to the reviewers, Academician Ljubodrag Dimić of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zoran Janjetović, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Recent History of Serbia, and Aleksandar Stojanović, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Recent History of Serbia for their careful reading of the manuscript and their valuable comments. The responsibility for any shortcomings of this publication rests with the editor alone.

PART 4

Between Conservatism and Fascism:

Prominent Public Figures

(Svetlana Šeatović, Dragan Bakić, Vladimir Cvetković)

Svetosavlje, Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism: Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Dimitrije Najdanović and Djoko Slijepčević*

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Svetosavlje or Saint-Savanes is a term coined in the early 1930s by the students of the Faculty of Theology, University of Belgrade, named after the Serbian medieval nobleman and the first archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Saint Sava Nemanjić (1175-1236). *Svetosavlje* is usually understood as Serbian-style Orthodox Christianity.¹ So far, a number of modern Serbian authors have emphasized the universal Christian character of *Svetosavlje*. However, in the recent historiography on the Serbian and Yugoslav interwar period, especially in the works of Klaus Buchenau,² Maria Falina³ and Stefan Rodewald,⁴

* In this article I rely on some arguments previously exposed in Vladimir Cvetković, “Svetosavlje između hrišćanske filosofije i ideologije nacionalizma: Sv. Nikolaj Velimirović i Justin Popović,” in *Istorija srpske filosofije*, Vol. 4, ed. Irina Deretić (Belgrade: Euro-Giunti, 2019), 173–219, as well as in Vladimir Cvetković, *Justin Popović: sinteza tradicije i inovacije* (Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2021).

¹ Nikolaj Velimirović, “Predgovor delu *Svetosavlje kao filosofija života*,” in Justin Popović, *Sabrana dela o. Justina u 30 knjiga*, Vol. 4 (Beograd: Manastir Čelije, 2001), 176.

² Klaus Buchenau, “Svetosavlje und Pravoslavlje. Nationales und Universales in der serbischen Orthodoxie,” in *Nationalisierung der Religion und Säkularisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 203–232.

³ Maria Falina, “Svetosavlje. A Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion,” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007), 505–527.

⁴ Stefan Rodewald, *Götter der Nationen. Religiöse Erinnerungsfiguren in Serbien, Bulgarien und Makedonien bis 1944* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

Svetosavlje was portrayed as an ideology of Serbian nationalism closely connected to the Yugoslav right-wing movements, such as the movement ZBOR led by Dimitrije Ljotić.

This article aims to analyze the interwar views of Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Dimitrije Najdanović and Djoko Slijepčević on nationalism, Europe and *Svetosavlje* in the context of the allegations against them for espousing right-wing extremism and fascism. I intend first to describe the historical setting in which the new state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later called Yugoslavia) and the Belgrade Patriarchate emerged. Then, I will turn my focus to the role that nationalism played in the Serbian church and to Nikolaj Velimirović's and Justin Popović's views on nationalism in the context of the allegations against them for being nationalistic in their theological reflections. Next, I will explore the way in which Nikolaj and Justin employed Russian religious, especially Slavophile, ideas in their critique of Europe and secular European identity. This will be also analyzed in the context of the alleged anti-Westernism and anti-Europeanism of these two authors. Finally, I will explore the views of all four theologians on Saint Sava and his spiritual heritage in the Serbian Church, as well as political, inter-ecclesial and ecumenical implications that the notion of *Svetosavlje* had in their interwar writings. I will challenge the position put forward in some contemporary German historiography that *Svetosavlje* was a right-wing political platform common to the aforementioned theologians and the collaborationist Government of Milan Nedić, the Chetnik movement of Draža Mihailović, and the fascist movement ZBOR led by Dimitrije Ljotić.

Historical circumstances and the national identity of the Church

Before the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 and the establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920, the Serbian people and the Serbian Church lived in different empires and belonged to different ecclesial jurisdictions. Before the founding of the Principality of Serbia in 1815, Serbia was under Ottoman rule, and the Church in Serbia was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The political emancipation of the Principality from the

Sublime Porte led only to partial ecclesial independence of the Serbian Church in 1832, because the elected Metropolitan of Belgrade still had to be confirmed by the Patriarch of Constantinople.⁵ The Serbian people in Hungary were under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Sremski Karlovci, which was established in 1690 but did not gain wider autonomy until 1868. After the abolition of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1766, the Serbian Church in Montenegro, with the help of Russia, avoided falling under the jurisdiction of Constantinople and remained free until its unification with the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920. The Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an Ottoman-controlled territory, were under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and only after the Austrian occupation in 1878, the election of the Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosnia began to be confirmed by the Austrian emperor instead of the Patriarch of Constantinople. From 1828 on, the Serbian people in Dalmatia were institutionally subsumed under the Diocese in Zadar but there were attempts by the Austrian authorities to suppress and limit this autonomy.

Scattered in several different states and even more ecclesiastical jurisdictions, the Serbian people, led by their intellectual elite, began to build their own identity and unity on their common linguistic affiliation rather than on a sense of belonging to one religion and the shared history and tradition.⁶ The ideas of the Enlightenment and the achievements of the French Revolution and American republicanism, which led to the transfer of political power from the monarch to the peoples or nations, began to penetrate the Balkans, as the Serbian uprisings showed. The Serbian church organizations began to adapt to the new circumstances, no longer associating themselves with existing political institutions but with a new actor on the political scene, the people or nation.⁷ This was especially evident in the territories in which

⁵ Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1992), 15–16.

⁶ Miloš Ković, “Znamenja pobjede, uzroci poraza: kontinuiteti i diskontinuiteti u srpskoj istoriji” in *Ka srpskom stanovištu*, ed. Svetlana Kurčubić Ružić (Beograd: Evro-Giunti, 2014), 153–170: 160.

⁷ Cyril Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology. Chronicles on Church Awareness* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 21.

the Serbian people lived under foreign rule, in the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. A series of people's church councils, established at that time, especially in southern Hungary, clearly shows the change in church identity and its self-reflection. The previous identity of the Church, which was reflected in the established hierarchy, was replaced by a new identity based on the nation. The power within the Church, which, according to the medieval model, lay in the hands of the episcopate, was now transferred to the people, i.e., the people's representatives in the newly established councils. However, the change in the organization of Church authority, and thus the change in its self-reflection, led to a profound shift in the identity of the Church. By claiming that the protector of faith was not patriarchs and councils, but all the people (*laos*) of the Church as the Body of Christ, *The Response of the Orthodox patriarchs to Pope Pius IX* from 1848 points to a new ecclesial reality.⁸ This new reality had two components. The first component was embodied in the positive changes in decision-making processes on ecclesial and national issues. These processes were no longer controlled by a narrow elite, which, especially during Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, protected the Church interests by making concessions to foreign authorities; instead, they became part of a broader consensus of the representative bodies. The other component, however, relates to the emergence of a common "ecclesial" and "national" identity, i.e., equating the goals of the Church with the goals of nations.

On the example of the Serbian Church in Austria-Hungary, Thomas Bremer demonstrates very well how this church functioned not only as an "ecclesial" but also as a "national" institution, and how it employed its ecclesial autonomy to advance Serbian political projects in the Empire.⁹ The fact that the laity played a greater role in the Serbian church administration in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not a reflection of the theological inventiveness or dogmatic liberalism of the

⁸ "Response of the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs," in *Creeeds and Confessions*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (Yale University Press, 2003, Vol. 3), 282; Kallistos Ware, "Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his Successors," *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 11/2–3 (2011): 221.

⁹ Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie*, 55.

Serbian church there, but a way of realizing the political rights of the Serbian people. The interests of the episcopate, on the one hand, and the lower clergy and people, on the other hand, not only did not coincide but were often opposed. The Austro-Hungarian government actively worked on that division by trying to control the election of the metropolitan, who in order to be elected and preserve the continuity of the Synod came into conflict with the representatives of the people at the councils.¹⁰ Gale Stokes, therefore, blames the episcopate of the Serbian church in Austria-Hungary for preventing a more serious consolidation of the Serbian national corpus in order to preserve the acquired state privileges.¹¹ However, it is difficult to discern a theological platform behind the conflict of individual, group and national interests of Serbs in Austria-Hungary, but also in other areas populated by Serbs, which does not reflect this conditionality by historical circumstances, and does not make the Church an ephemeral and transient reality. This mixing of the “ecclesial” and the “national”, created by a combination of historical circumstances, represents a constant danger of misunderstanding the essence of the Orthodox Church, especially since the totality of the Church is often identified with the totality of nation.

The need for a new rethinking of the Church

The processes of secularization initiated by the Enlightenment, which took place during the nineteenth and twentieth century in Europe, resulted in an understanding of the source of political power not as a divine but as a popular principle. Removing the divine principle from the public sphere opened the door to many secular philosophies and ideologies but at the same time freed theology of the role of justifying socio-political organization as a kind of divine necessity and enabled it to search for the true identity of the Church. At the same time, another offshoot of the Enlightenment, rationalism, enabled the Church to use the intellectual methods applied in other scientific disciplines to

¹⁰ Ibid., 55–56.

¹¹ Gale Stokes, “Church and Class in Early Balkan Nationalism,” *East European Quarterly* 13/3 (1979): 264–265.

contemplate its “self.”¹² Thus, the image of the Church as a social phenomenon, changeable and dynamic, not only in its historical forms and institutions but also in its own reflection, was added to the dominant metaphysical image of the Church as something permanent and unchangeable.¹³

One of the founders of modern Orthodox ecclesiology, Alexei Khomiakov, based his teachings about the Church on his personal experience of understanding the Church as a concrete and dynamic Christian community.¹⁴ Thus, the dynamic and changing identity of the Church is not only recognized but also taken as the basis for scrutinizing the Church as such. By reflecting on a specific church community, embodied in the Russian countryside, Khomiakov finds two basic principles on which the identity of the Church is based – unity and freedom.¹⁵ Khomiakov also saw an aspiration to realize these two principles in the Western churches, but one principle was always affirmed at the expense of the other. Thus, with legalism, the Roman Church established the unity of its members but endangered their freedom, while rationalism in the interpretation of church authorities allowed the members of Protestant churches freedom of thought and action but challenged their unity. In the Orthodox Church, Khomiakov argued, these two identity principles were perfectly reconciled and united in the notion of catholicity (*sobornost*). Only through *sobornost* can the members of the Church be both free and organically united. Based on these premises, Khomiakov describes the Church as an organic unity, which has God’s grace of mutual love as the fundamental principle of its existence.¹⁶

This short excursus aims to point out a novelty in contemplating the nature of the Church, which consists in determining the concepts of the Church’s identity based on the experience of a particular church

¹² Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology*, 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

¹⁴ Joost van Rossum, “A. S. Khomiakov and Orthodox Ecclesiology,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 78.

¹⁵ Alexei S. Khomiakov, *L’Église latine et le Protestantisme au point de vue de l’Église d’Orient*, Sion: Éditions Xénia, 2006, 301.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

community, on the one hand, and using biblical metaphors and images, which maintain the constancy of ecclesial identity, on the other hand. Khomiakov uses the notion of *sobornost* to describe the identity of the Church and at the same time employs the image of the Church as an organism, i.e., the Body of Christ, as a constant and uninterrupted reference to the Church. Before describing how Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović determine the identity of the Church, it would be pertinent to examine this connection between identity and image. Since recent scholarly approaches to the Church are defined as approaches to a specific corporate reality, in the following lines, I will deal with the connection between identity and the image established in modern organizational studies.

Contemporary research in organizational studies has shown that there is a close interrelationship between organizational identity and the different images that describe this identity.¹⁷ Therefore, the apparent permanence or constancy of identity is actually contained in the stability of the image used by its members to express their faith in what the organization should be, but the meaning associated with these images changes so that identity is actually something changeable.¹⁸

If this model is applied to the Church, one may conclude that the constancy of its identity depends on the stability of the image associated with the Church and that the Church's identity is changeable insofar as our understanding of this image is changeable.

The image of the Church as an organism, i.e., the Body of Christ, established by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 12: 4-8; 1 Cor. 12: 4-7), is one of the oldest and most widely used images describing the Church. However, it did not always have the same meaning, so different meanings determined different understandings of the Church's identity. Thus, when it was necessary to distinguish and separate the Church from worldly institutions, the divine nature of its founder was emphasized. It was also insisted that it was not a self-sufficient reality and needed Christ as its head.¹⁹ Similarly, when it was necessary to point out the internal

¹⁷ Dennis Gioia, Majken Schultz, Kevin G. Corley, "Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability," *Academy of Management Review* 25/1 (2000): 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64

¹⁹ Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology*, 5-6.

unity of the Church, embodied in the multitude of gifts that exist at the same time without conflicting with each other, the image of different limbs of one body was recalled. When, at the time of confessional divisions, a clear distinction had to be made between rival church organizations, the image of the Church as one body was used, because in comparison with other images, it quite sharply establishes the boundaries of the Church.²⁰ In regard to these examples, it can be seen that the same image had different meanings on the basis of which the identity of the Church was established. When it was necessary to express its divine nature, it referred to the Church as the Body of Christ; when it was necessary to emphasize that the Church was guided by divine providence, the reference to Christ as the head of the Church was employed; when it was needed to point out the unity of Church members, the metaphor of limbs of one body is employed; when the limits of the Church were determined in relation to other ecclesial bodies, or sects, the clear boundaries that separate the human body from the external world were recalled. Therefore, the identity of the Church changed according to the imperative of survival, and yet it was always firmly attached to the image of the Body of Christ, which was interpreted differently at different times. This demonstrates that the Church, like any organization, must change in order to preserve its identity, that is, its nature.²¹

A critique of nationalism and the new Serbian ecclesiology

During the 19th century, the Serbian people, scattered in different empires, began the process of their political emancipation under the slogan of national liberation and unification. Liberation meant liberation from the imperial policy of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires in the Balkans and the creation of an independent and sovereign state framework within which all the rights of the people could be realized. Following the example of other nations that defined themselves based on linguistic affiliation, the struggle for unification en-

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

²¹ Pasquale Gagliardi, "The creation and change of organizational cultures: A conceptual framework," *Organization Studies* 7 (1986): 124–125.

tailed the unification of all the people in the Balkans who spoke the same South Slavic language and its different dialects. Although the new national idea was at odds with the idea of the people as a community based on the same religion and common historical experience, the Serbian Church and its members became the bearers of this national emancipation.²² In that process, the “ecclesial” and “national” identities of the Serbian people were identified with each other, and the totality of the local Church, whose historical framework coincided with the former Patriarchate of Peć, was identified with the entire nation. Although church representatives praised the national idea as emancipatory, some of them also saw the danger lurking for the Church if nationalism became the mainstay of ecclesial identity.

Buchenau and Rodewald claim that Velimirović’s and Popović’s theological projects were closely related to the goals of Serbian nationalism and associated with the ideas of *Svetosavlje* and the Kosovo Covenant. In his book *Orthodoxy and Catholicism in Yugoslavia 1945-1991: A Serbian-Croatian Comparison* from 2004, Klaus Buchenau claims that the national mobilization and false evangelization of the Serbian Church, especially associated with the media campaign around Kosovo during the 1980s, led to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.²³ Although there is only a handful of direct references to Velimirović and Popović in this book, Buchenau claims that Velimirović shares sympathy for the Serbian village and anti-modern attitudes with Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of the ZBOR movement,²⁴ while he shares Serbian Orthodox anti-Westernism and church nationalism with Popović.²⁵

The problem with Buchenau’s interpretation is simply the identification of Serbian nationalism from the 1930s with that of the 1990s. Thus, the Serbian nationalism of the 1990s appears as a mere continuation of the nationalism of the 1930s. According to Buchenau, the link between the two nationalisms, and at the same time the two anti-Westernisms, were the students of Justin Popović, and indirectly Nikolaj

²² Milorad Ekmečić, *Ratni ciljevi Srbije 1914* (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1973), 424.

²³ Klaus Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien 1945-1991: ein serbisch-kroatischer Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 379–391.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 82, 436.

Velimirović, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović and Bishop Atanasije Jevtić, who played the most prominent roles in the Serbian Orthodox Church during the 1990s, but also Serbian Orthodox youth organizations such as *Dveri* and *Obraz*, which considered Velimirović's teaching to be their program.²⁶

Buchenau notes that the generation of Serbian church intellectuals raised and educated at the end of the 19th century, to which Velimirović belonged, adopted nationalism, liberalism and anti-clericalism as the basic values of the Church and society.²⁷ However, despite the positive definition of nationalism as love for one's own nation, nationalism for Nikolaj Velimirović also has negative consequences.

In a series of lectures held at St. Margaret's Church in Westminster, London, collected and printed in 1917 with the title *The Agony of the Church*, the hieromonk Nikolaj Velimirović pointed to the danger that European nationalism presented to Christian integrity. He claimed that the early Church had triumphed over its most horrible enemies, Jewish patriotism and Roman imperialism, whereas Christianity in Europe had come to obediently serve the cause of European nationalism and imperialism.²⁸ Rendering themselves subservient to national or imperial aims, the churches in Europe were divided and particularised. This contradicted the universal nature of the Church.²⁹ According to Velimirović, just as salvation for individual human beings depends on God and one's neighbor, so the salvation of any individual

²⁶ Klaus Buchenau, "Orthodox values and modern necessities," in *Civic and uncivic values, Serbia in the post-Milošević Era*, ed. Ola Listhaug, Sabrina Ramet, Dragana Dulić (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011), 111–142. See also the recent study by Pantelis Kalaitzidis, „Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethno-theologies,” In *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, ed. Hans-Peter Grosshans and Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Leiden: Brill, 2022). Kalaitzidis claims that Metropolitan of Montenegro Amfilohije Radović and Bishop of Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtić inherited from their teachers, Nikolaj and Justin, an ethno-theology that promoted “antimodernist ideas, religious intolerance, and ethnoreligious nationalism and even affinities with totalitarian ideologies such as National Socialism” (140–141).

²⁷ Buchenau, “Orthodox values and modern necessities,” 111–112

²⁸ Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1917), 77.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

Christian community depends on their love of God and their love for other churches.³⁰ The true identity of the Church, unlike the identity of a nation, is seen by Velimirović as residing in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which defines the Church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”. Thus the attribute “one” refers not only to the numerical oneness of the Church, but also to its unity.³¹ The other characteristic of the Church that Velimirović emphasizes is holiness.³² Holiness, as a qualitative pillar of the Church’s identity, corresponds to the oneness or unity of the Church as its quantitative characteristic. Holiness, as the core of ecclesial identity, which derives from Christ’s holiness, differentiates the Church from any other institution or social group.³³

Buchenau also accuses Justin Popović of nationalism, or as he defines it, religious nationalism. According to Buchenau, a key role in Popović’s acceptance of this religious nationalism was played by Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, with whom Popović was close during his stay in Sremski Karlovci.³⁴ Buchenau believes that Popović saw Khrapovitsky as a living example of Russian messianism, a fictional form of which can be found in Dostoevsky. Buchenau further claims that Khrapovitsky presented Popović as the role model of a religious nationalist, who has a tendency towards civilizational ideas. However, Justin claims that all religious nationalisms, as well as Slavophilism itself, are mere chauvinism unless they carry and proclaim Orthodoxy to the world, clearly referring to Khrapovitsky’s advice to chauvinists and nationalists not to read the ninth article of the Creed, which mentions faith in the one, holy and catholic Church, because faith in the nation excludes faith in the Church.³⁵

In his early works, most of them published in the magazine *Christian Life (Hrišćanski život)*, Justin Popović criticizes nationalism in the Church. In his famous article “The Internal Mission of Our Church”,

³⁰ Ibid., 94–95.

³¹ Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology*, 11.

³² Velimirovic, *The Agony*, 125.

³³ Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology*, 12.

³⁴ Klaus Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren. Orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien, 1850–1945* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2011), 127–138

³⁵ Justin Popović “Tajna ličnosti Mitropolita Antonija i njegov značaj za pravoslavno slovenstvo,” *Bogoslovlje* 14/1 (1939): 49–50.

Justin claims that the Church is a God-man organism rather than a human organization and, as such, cannot be divided according to national lines.³⁶ He claimed that, on their path through history, many local churches, including the Serbian, had been reduced to agents of nationalism and urged church representatives to cease to be servants of nationalism and become high priests of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.³⁷ According to Justin, the goal of the Church is “supra-national, universal, panhuman: to unite all people in Christ, regardless of nationality, race, and class.”³⁸ Justin does not stop at identifying the task of the Church and proceeds to give concrete guidelines on how to achieve that task and the goal of uniting all people. According to Justin, asceticism is the one and only path to the spiritual growth of individuals and the organic unification of the entire Church. Faith, as a supranational and universal feat, is the first degree on that ascetic path, which should be supported by prayer and fasting. Then comes love, followed by meekness and serenity, which produce patience and mercy as the final stages on the path of spiritual growth.³⁹ By following this path, the ascetic overcomes individualism as love of oneself, nationalism as love of his people, materialism as love of the sensual world and begins to love all people, including his enemies. Thus, the ascetic realizes the Christian ideal of catholicity, through which everything is united in Jesus Christ and the Church as his Body.⁴⁰ Similarly to Nikolaj, Justin invokes the Nicene formula of the Church and emphasizes its uniqueness and catholicity, which are incompatible with national division and self-sufficiency. However, when he speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ, unlike Nikolaj, Justin primarily refers to the Orthodox Church, and thus his criticism is directed not so much at European nationalisms but primarily at Serbian and, to some extent, Greek nationalism.⁴¹ On the one hand, Justin rejects nationalism and

³⁶ Justin Popović, “Unutrašnja misija naše Crkve (realizacija Pravoslavlja),” *Hrišćanski život* 9 (1923), 285–290: 287.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 288–289.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

the national emancipation on which the Balkan churches built their ecclesial identity and replaces it with ascetic practice as the only possible identity element of the Church. Asceticism, according to Justin, removes separation and opens the door to the full unity of all. On the other hand, through the very notion of the Body of Christ, which has clearly defined boundaries, Justin draws a line between the Orthodox Church and its otherness, regardless of whether that otherness refers to other Christian churches or secular society.

Both authors feel a deep need to highlight nationalism as a danger to the Church's identity and strive to establish the Church's identity on the traditional postulates formulated during the early Ecumenical Councils. Nikolaj Velimirović places the critique of nationalism in the Church very broadly, drawing a historical parallel between the early Church and the divided churches in Europe. While the early Church skillfully sailed between the Scylla of Jewish nationalism and the Charybdis of Roman imperialism, the modern European churches succumbed to the temptations of nationalism and imperialism. Seeing the new reality of the Serbian Church united in the Belgrade Patriarchate, Justin Popović's critique of nationalism in the Church was much narrower than Nikolaj's. That is why, unlike Nikolaj, who cannot invoke asceticism as a common element of all European churches, Justin invokes the Orthodox tradition of the East, in which asceticism is the fundamental element of identity. Both authors use the image of the Church as the Body of Christ and call for church unity and catholicity. However, since the image of the Church as the Body of Christ and the mentioned features of the Church had different meanings at different times, which are the results of specific historical circumstances, both authors were forced to fill these images with meanings relevant to Christians, Europeans and early twentieth-century people. As it is known from organizational studies that organizational identity is built in communication with others,⁴² both authors, intuitively following this rule, establish the identity of the Church in relation to Europe as the other-

⁴² Blake E. Ashforth & Fred A. Mael, "Organizational identity and strategy as a context for the individual," in *Advances in strategic management*, Vol. 13, ed. J. A. C. Baum and J. E. Dutton (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1996), 19–64.

ness of the Church. At the same time, the image of the Church as the Body of Christ serves as a constant filled with new identity elements.

Construction of Europe and the counter-narrative

The bloody war that ravaged Europe gave birth to a very bleak image of this continent. The desire to find the causes that pushed Europe into war led authors to re-examine the European social values that emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, Buchenau sees Nikolaj's and Justin's reflections on the post-1918 European identity and values as a form of anti-Westernism. In his 2011 book *On Russian Tracks: Orthodox Anti-Westerners in Serbia, 1850–1945*, Klaus Buchenau explores how Velimirović and Popović adopted Russian anti-Westernism and animosity towards the West and Europe.⁴³ Buchenau does not see Velimirović's and Popović's consideration of European identity as a criticism of the internal antagonisms that led Europe to the First, and later, to the Second World War, which was very common among other religious and secular European thinkers of that time, but exclusively as a form of anti-Westernism. Similarly, Stefan Rohdewald, in his book *Gods of the Nations* from 2014, argues that Saint Sava, Saint John of Rila and Saint Clement of Ohrid, who are considered the patron saints of Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia respectively, are the national gods of those Orthodox nations.⁴⁴

In a series of lectures held at British universities during the Great War, Nikolaj harshly criticized European secular values. In the mentioned lecture, *The Agony of the Church* (1917), priest-monk Nikolaj claims that the cause of the war was the de-Christianization of Europe and the de-Christianization of the European church⁴⁵ and that the war laid bare the impoverished state of Europe.⁴⁶ According to Nikolaj, the agony of the European Church and, consequently, the whole of Europe was caused, among other things, by Protestant individualism, which advocates the theory of salvation as an individual endeavor and not an

⁴³ Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*.

⁴⁴ Rohdewald, *Götter der Nationen*, 512–546.

⁴⁵ Velimirović, *The Agony of the Church*, 100.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

effort of the entire community.⁴⁷ In this way, individual, and ultimately national, interests were placed at the center of human aspirations and efforts, and the basic idea of the church as serving others, sacrificing for others and doing good for others was rejected as superfluous.⁴⁸

In another lecture, *The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*, delivered at King's College London on the 9th of January 1920, Bishop Nikolaj stated that the European civilization would not last long unless it returned to the Christian religion, which had been its center and principal guide for nineteen centuries.⁴⁹ In a short reconstruction of European identity, Nikolaj ponders three reasons for Europe's decline: individualism, rationalism and humanism. Individualism is problematic for Nikolaj because it treats salvation not as an effort of the entire Christian community but as an individual undertaking.⁵⁰ Rationalism, or the faculty of reasoning, is an uncertain foundation for building a civilization, because it reduces human beings to just one of their faculties, failing to consider them as a whole.⁵¹ According to Nikolaj, the third chief pillar of modern Europe is humanism, which, by rejecting Christianity, opened the door to various European ideologies, whether political, scientific or economic.⁵² Contrary to the constructed image of Europe, Nikolaj creates the projected image of the Church in Europe. He replaces individualism with *sabornost* (the Serbian version of the Russian word *sobornost*) or catholicity as the permanent and immutable feature of the universal Church. In contrast to Alexei Khomiakov and the Russian Slavophiles who conceived the notion of *sobornost* in contrast with Roman Catholic legalism and Protestant rationalism, Nikolaj opposes *sabornost* to individualism, not only personal but also sectarian and national.⁵³ In his critique of rationalism, Nikolaj argues that logic or

⁴⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁹ Nikolaj Velimirović, "The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe," in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela Episkopa Nikolaja u XIII knjiga*, Vol. 3 (Šabac: Manastir Svetog Nikolaja 2014), 744.

⁵⁰ Velimirovic, *The Agony*, 92–93.

⁵¹ Velimirović, "The Spiritual Rebirth," 677.

⁵² Ibid., 686–687.

⁵³ Nikolaj Velimirović, "San o slovenskoj religiji," in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, Vol. 4, 319.

reason should not precede love but follow it.⁵⁴ Drawing on Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Vladimir Solovyov and in response to the European humanistic project, which, according to Nikolaj, achieved its most profound expression in Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*, he develops the idea of the pan-human and pan-humanism.

A number of Nikolaj's ideas, formulated as a counter-narrative to the secular image of Europe and directly inspired by the Russian religious renaissance, were elaborated in the works of Justin. In addition to Dostoyevsky's critique of the Enlightenment, Justin adopts other ideas from Russian religious philosophy, such as the notions of integral or "living" knowledge, all-unity, and Theo-humanism. Linking these ideas with the teachings of the ancient Church Fathers, he contrasts them with European rationalism, individualism and humanism. Justin borrows the idea of integral knowledge from Russian religious thought, but unlike both the Russian religious thinkers and Nikolaj, he attempts to prove its continuity with the monastic and ascetic tradition of the Christian East, particularly with authors such as Macarius of Egypt and Isaac the Syrian. Another Russian idea that Justin "baptizes" in the patristic tradition is the idea of all-unity, which he connects with the notion of *sabornost* as "organic unity" in the Church. In contrast to Solovyev and in accord with Khomiakov, Justin develops the idea of all-unity not as a metaphysical ideal but as concrete liturgical and catholic ecclesiality. The central idea in Justin's thought is that of the God-man. He formulates it on the basis of the dogma of Chalcedon regarding the indivisible unity of two natures of Christ, and partly in opposition to modern European humanism. Justin argues that European humanism stands for a revolt against the recognition of godliness in the human being, while the God-man liberates the forces of godliness in that same human being, imprisoned by the tyranny of humanism, and empowers them to realize themselves in their immortal fullness.⁵⁵ According to Justin, the realization of all human potential and the true unification of God and human beings are possible only in the Person

⁵⁴ Nikolaj Velimirović, "Vera i nacija," in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, Vol. 3, 401.

⁵⁵ Justin Popović, "Highest Value and Last Criterion in Orthodoxy," in: Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1994), 70–71.

of the God-man because he is a personal unity of two natures, one divine and one human.

For both authors, the image of Europe they construct, by using humanism, rationalism and individualism as its basic identity elements, serves as a model with which they contrast their image of the Church. Although both thinkers use the traditional image of the Church as the Body of Christ, which allows them to clearly draw boundaries in relation to ecclesial otherness, this image is filled with new identity elements such as *sabornost*, integral knowledge, and All-man or God-man.

***Svetosavlje*, historical revisionism and sites of memory**

The identity of the Serbian people was maintained as a Christian Orthodox identity for centuries under Ottoman rule, and belonging to the Orthodox Church represented a national commitment. During the struggle for national liberation in the nineteenth century, the Serbian people, in accordance with the European ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, redefined their identity, going from a community rooted in faith and common memory to a community based on the same language.⁵⁶ The latter especially contributed to the establishment of the idea of Yugoslavia and the creation of a common state of South Slavs. However, the acceptance of the view that language, not religion and memory, is the basis of the nation's identity, deeply undermined the ecclesial identity and raised the question of the Serbian church's role in the new society. For this reason, Nikolaj and Justin propagate a reverse process, which includes the building of a new Yugoslav society as a community not based on language but on common faith and memory. The first element of such a community is the faith, which is Christian and common to the vast majority of Yugoslav peoples, while the second element is the common memory that they were trying to construct based on an alternative interpretation of history. In the center of this new historical interpretation or construction of memory is the person of Saint Sava Nemanjić. According to Nikolaj and Justin, Saint

⁵⁶ Ković, "Znamenja pobjede, uzroci poraza," 160.

Sava inextricably linked the medieval Serbian state to the Church of Christ. For that reason, Nikolaj and later Justin wanted to construct *Svetosavlje* (which roughly translates to Saint-Savanness or the legacy of St. Sava) as a Christian-national platform, which would not only re-root the Serbian Church in Christocentrism but would also provide a new identity for the newly established state of South Slavs.

Nikolaj's and Justin's project of revising existing history and constructing a different memory can perhaps be explained by the French historian Pierre Nora, who distinguishes between collective memory and history (the differences between the German terms *Geschichte* and *Historie*).⁵⁷ According to Nora, memory permanently appears as a connection between us and the eternal present, establishing itself in relations to the sacred, while history is actually a representation of the past, which abolishes the memory of the sacred.⁵⁸ Nora's distinction between historical memory and history is also comparable with the difference between tradition, as sacred history, which as an icon of the eternal eschatological "today" is always reaffirmed by the present, and history constructed by means of a fragmented past. Miloš Ković applies this methodological principle to Serbian history, first distinguishing between continuous collective memory and history and then pointing out the continuities and discontinuities within this historical memory of the Serbian people.⁵⁹ According to Ković, Saint Sava, the Holy Prince Lazar, the Battle of Kosovo and the Kosovo Covenant, and the subsequent sufferings of the Serbian people represent not only a way out of the historical reality to the transcendent realm and a clear message of Christian identity, but also the key historical sites of memory for the Serbian people that make them distinct from other Christian and Orthodox nations.⁶⁰

Nikolaj and Justin construct Serbian sacred history on the basis of these sites of memory, and in such a sacred history, Saint Sava plays the central role, not only as a representative of the Serbian people before

⁵⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory) (1989): 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁹ Ković, "Znamenja pobjede, uzroci poraza," 155–157.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

God on the eschatological level⁶¹ but also as a historical figure. Nikolaj especially emphasizes the work of Saint Sava in the context of the Serbian and Yugoslav national idea, reinterpreting the existing historical memory to the detriment of historiography.

The Serbian national idea, as an idea of national liberation, which began in the nineteenth century, remained one of the identity pillars of the Serbian people. The Serbian church, which often mounted uprisings against the foreign invaders, kept the idea alive in the people's memory. Another goal of the Serbian national program, in addition to liberation, was unification. The basic role and task of the Church, by its very conciliar nature, is to gather its spiritual children, wherever they may be, and therefore that was the task of the Serbian Church too. In that respect, the political idea of Yugoslavia as the unification of the South Slavs coincided with the idea of the Serbian Church in its efforts to unite all its scattered jurisdictions and believers under one institutional umbrella. The idea of *Svetosavlje* certainly aimed at uniting all Orthodox Serbs who lived in the newly formed Kingdom,⁶² but it was also broader than that and supported the idea of Yugoslav unification. That is why the idea of *Svetosavlje* proposed by these two authors, especially Nikolaj, should be seen as an idea that promotes the creation of that common Yugoslav identity, both ecclesiastical and national. In this regard, Nikolaj revises the existing history and constructs an alternative history based on the sites of memory with the aim of establishing a new identity of the Yugoslav people.

Contemporary German historiography often underlines the connection between the concept of *Svetosavlje*, as the most distinctive offspring of the Serbian interwar theology, and National Socialism, i.e. fascism. Buchenau draws a parallel between Nikolaj Velimirović's concept of *Svetosavlje* and Nazism on the basis of ideological similarity. First, Buchenau claims that Nikolaj's arrest by the Germany troops in 1941 was due to his pro-British orientation, but he denies that this ori-

⁶¹ Cf. the poem "Nebeska liturgija" (Heavenly Liturgy) by Bishop Nikolaj, in which the author describes an imaginary conversation of Saint Sava with God, in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, Vol.11, 592–599.

⁶² Radmila Radić, "Serbian Christianity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Orthodoxy*, ed. Ken Parry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 238.

entation included ideological closeness to the liberal and democratic traditions of Great Britain.⁶³ Buchenau often repeats that Velimirović had a covert plan closely related to the goals of Serbian nationalism, the ideas of *Svetosavlje* and the Kosovo Covenant.⁶⁴ Thus, Buchenau argues that Nikolaj's pro-British orientation stemmed from the days of the First World War and that he saw in Great Britain a powerful protector of Serbian and Yugoslav state sovereignty.⁶⁵ Second, although Buchenau admits that Nikolaj does not explicitly mention the notion of *Svetosavlje*, many ideas exposed in the anti-Semitic work *The Words to the Serbian People through the Dungeon's Window* have, according to Buchenau, ideological similarities with National Socialism. Similarly to Buchenau, Stefan Rohdenwald links Nikolaj Velimirović to fascism through Dimitrije Ljotić,⁶⁶ who also propagated the idea of *Svetosavlje* as an "ethno-philosophy."⁶⁷

In the early works of Nikolaj, the reference to Saint Sava served the purpose of unifying not only the Orthodox Serbs who lived in the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes but also the Catholics – Croats and Slovenes. Such references provided a platform for creating a common Yugoslav identity and political and ecclesial unity. In the context of the Yugoslav project, Nikolaj underlined the historical role of Saint Sava in linking the medieval Serbian state and nation with the Church. According to Nikolaj, the common national struggle and suffering of the Yugoslav people was inspired by the same Christian spirit that animates both the Orthodox and the Catholic faith.⁶⁸ For Nikolaj, the cause of WWI was the de-Christianization of Europe's Church, which failed to act in accordance with holiness as its basic principle.⁶⁹ He claimed that the national ideal of liberation and unifica-

⁶³ Klaus Buchenau, "Svetosavlje und Pravoslavljje. Nationales und Universales in der serbischen Orthodoxie," in Klaus Buchenau, *Kampfende Kirchen. Jugoslawiens religiöse Hypothek* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006), 28.

⁶⁴ Buchenau, "Orthodox values and modern necessities."

⁶⁵ Buchenau, "Svetosavlje und Pravoslavljje," 28.

⁶⁶ Rohdewald, *Gottes der Nations*, 516, 544.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 546.

⁶⁸ Nikolai Velimirovic, *Two Churches and One Nation* (New York: Živa Crkva, 1915), 14.

⁶⁹ Velimirović, *The Agony*, 124–125.

tion was best expressed through the idea of Yugoslavism, while the ecclesial ideal should be realized through the notion of holiness. Nikolaj places Saint Sava at the very beginning of the common Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian history, as continued by Patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević, Karadjordje Petrović, Ljudevit Gaj, Valentin Vodnik, Ban Jelačić, Njegoš and Štrosmajer.⁷⁰ According to Nikolaj, Saint Sava reconciles Yugoslavism and holiness, the two ideals that the new Yugoslav kingdom and the Yugoslav Church should strive to attain. His selective approach to history and construction of historical sites of memory was to promote the ideal of holiness, once accomplished in national Yugoslav history. He opposed this ideal to the secular and pro-European aspirations of the new state.

Although this might seem odd, especially taking into account the subsequent Concordat crises, for Nikolaj, *Svetosavlje* and Savian nationalism formed the foundation for the Yugoslav national and ecumenical project. Nikolaj opposed the Pope's power over Catholics in Yugoslavia because he saw it, like the ecclesial authority of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate over the Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, as an expression of the imperial policy in the form of ecclesial imperialism. For Nikolaj, therefore, *Svetosavlje* was both a political and an ecumenical project. As a political project, it began as an anti-imperialist struggle for the political liberation and unification of Yugoslav peoples, while as an ecumenical project, it was meant to enable liberation from the ecclesial authority of Rome and Constantinople, the dominant ecclesial powers of the time, and establish a common Yugoslav Church.

In his lecture "Nationalism of Saint Sava", delivered on the 20th of March, 1935, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy at the Kolarac People's University in Belgrade,⁷¹ Nikolaj proposes the role that Saint Sava should play in the Yugoslav project. This lecture represents also a continuation

⁷⁰ Velimirović, "Two Churches and One Nation," 5–8.

⁷¹ Nikolaj Velimirović, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save." The lecture was published under the same title in an excerpt from the Orthodox Library, published by the Association of Serbian Orthodox Clergy of the Archbishopric of Belgrade and Karlovac (Belgrade, 1935, 29), and then in its entirety in the journal *Misionar* 1 (1938): 2–10. Cited from Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, Vol. 9, 305–318.

of the debate that Nikolaj had with the Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, Antun Bauer, who denied the importance and role of Saint Sava in the joint Yugoslav project.⁷²



Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović cuts the feast bread—*slavski kolač*
[probably in Kraljevo in 1936] (Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)

Nikolaj defines all the work of Saint Sava on the establishment of the autonomy of the Serbian Church in relation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and his efforts to strengthen the medieval Serbian state through the idea of nationalism. According to Nikolaj, the nationalism of Saint Sava “encompasses the people’s church, the people’s dynasty, the people’s state, the people’s education, the people’s culture and the people’s defense”, and the basis and center of this nationalism is the

⁷² Nikolaj Velimirović, “Primedba na Okružnicu Presvetlog Gospodina dr Bagera, nadbiskupa zagrebačkog,” *Glasnik SPC* 2/9 (1935), 25–28. The text was reprinted and published as “Svetosavska godina: Sveti Sava i savremena Jugoslavija,” *Vardar* 12/2 (1935), 1–2.

people's Church.⁷³ Referring to Christ's message to the apostles to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19) and to the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles at Pentecost to speak languages other than Hebrew, Greek and Latin, Nikolaj believes that the necessities of the national church and the language of the national church was proclaimed in the Gospel and by the apostles. Although he does not explicitly say which of the two is the national church and which the international church, which he criticizes, it is obvious that the national church is the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church is the international church. However, Nikolaj's criticism is not directed against the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia but against its dependence on Rome. He appeals to the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia to establish its independence from Rome, following the example of Saint Sava, who made the Serbian Church institutionally independent from Constantinople. Nikolaj's resistance to the signing of the concordat between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Holy See in the summer of 1937 should also be viewed from this perspective. By recognizing papal authority, the Catholics in Yugoslavia renounce, according to Nikolaj, not only their independence but also the evangelical and apostolic foundations of the national church. He therefore mentions the example of the Serbs, who, led by Saint Sava, moved the center of their church from Constantinople to Žiča and replaced Greek priests and the Greek liturgical language with Serbian clergy and language.⁷⁴

Nikolaj constructs *Svetosavlje* or, more accurately, Saint-Savian nationalism, as an evangelical platform that should serve as a model for the establishment of the national church. This nationalism, unlike the nationalism that originated from the Enlightenment and the secular tradition, is rooted in faith as its fundamental principle. According to Nikolaj, the nationalism of Saint Sava is a) evangelical, because it protects the integrity of the human person and supports its perfection, and b) organic, because it protects the individuality of the nation from

⁷³ Velimirović, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save," 306.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

mutating into imperialism or dissolving into internationalism.⁷⁵ By promoting holiness as the highest personal and ecclesiastical ideal, this kind of evangelical nationalism, according to Nikolaj, becomes a barrier to chauvinism towards other nations. Thus, for Nikolaj, all people on earth, regardless of blood, language and religion, are one people of God and brothers among themselves.

With this lecture about Saint Sava and Saint-Savian nationalism as a common identity platform, Nikolaj attempted to save both Yugoslavia as a state and the ecumenical project in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav project began as an anti-imperialist project of liberating all Yugoslav peoples from foreign political power. Nikolaj transfers the same principles of the anti-imperialist struggle to the church level, deeming the jurisdiction of the Roman Pope over the Catholics in Yugoslavia an expression of imperial policy. The legacy of Saint Sava, i.e., *Svetosavlje*, only confirms this principle of struggle against the imperial aspirations of certain church centers of power.

Philosophy of life and *Svetosavlje*

Unlike Nikolaj's writings from the mid-1910s to the mid-1930s, which mostly refer to the Saint-Savian ideal as the basis for building Yugoslav social and religious unity, Justin's references to Saint Sava are not limited to the cause of Yugoslav unity but aspire to proper ecclesial identity. Buchenau claims that Justin's *Svetosavlje* has more in common with the *Svetosavlje* of the 1930s than with Velimirović's understanding of *Svetosavlje*, because Justin's *Svetosavlje* implies anti-Westernism and anti-ecumenism not so evident in Nikolaj.⁷⁶ Buchenau also draws a link between Justin and the fascist movement ZBOR, arguing that the movement tried to consolidate its intellectual dominance at the Theological Faculty through Justin, Dimitrije Najdanović and others in the inter-war period and thus suppress liberal and leftist tendencies.⁷⁷ Moreover, according to Buchenau, Justin took advantage of the anti-liberal edu-

⁷⁵ Ibid., 309-310.

⁷⁶ Buchenau, „*Svetosavlje* und *Pravoslavljje*,“ 37.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 38.

cational reforms implemented by Milan Nedić's collaborationist government to deal with his leftist opponents at the Theological Faculty of the University of Belgrade under the guise of preaching *Svetosavlje*.⁷⁸

Although Buchenau identifies Justin's *Svetosavlje* with anti-Westernism and anti-ecumenism, its main feature is asceticism. He argues that only the Saint-Savian determination to persevere in ascetic struggle can save the Serbian episcopate and priesthood from being immersed in nationalism and materialism, respectively. He solves the dilemma of whether the new Yugoslav society should be oriented towards the West or East by offering the example of Saint Sava, who directed the Serbian national soul, divided between the two worlds, towards the God-man Christ. Similarly to Nikolaj, Justin identifies the Christian orientation of Yugoslav society with a *tertium quid* or a *dritte Raum* between the East and the West.⁷⁹ Unlike Nikolaj, for whom, in a wider cultural sense, the East was Asia and the West was Europe, and in a narrower ecclesiastical sense, the East was the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the West was the Holy See of Rome, Justin remained vague on this issue. He contrasts the Saint-Savian God-man with the European man but does not mention anything in the East that could be understood as the antithesis of the European man in the West.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Marxist ideas spread throughout the University of Belgrade, and in 1932 a group of students from the Faculty of Theology launched a journal called *Svetosavlje* in order to fight the dissemination of revolutionary ideas among the students.⁸⁰ Justin, who had been an assistant professor at the Faculty of Theology from 1935 onwards, reacted to the emergence and spread of these ideas in his article "Rastko and Contemporary Serbian Youth" published in the journal *Svetosavlje*.⁸¹ As he had earlier contrasted the Saint-Savian God-man with the European man, he opposed in this article the Saint-Savian God-man to the new Soviet revolutionary man. Justin sees Ras-

⁷⁸ Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 443.

⁷⁹ Tanja Zimmermann, *Der Balkan zwischen Ost und West Mediale Bilder und kulturpolitische Prägungen* (Köln: Böhlau, 2014), 8–13.

⁸⁰ Jelena Grbić, "Svetosavlje – omen za numen pravoslavlja," *Sabornost* 7 (2013): 149.

⁸¹ Justin Popović, "Rastko i savremena srpska omladina," *Svetosavlje* 12 (1935): 58–61.

tko, as Saint Sava was called before he took his vows, as the greatest revolutionary among the Serbian or Yugoslav people because he rebelled not against social and political injustice but against death and in the name of the eternal and immortal.

At the end of the 1930s, in his sermon “A Fight for the Serbian Soul”, Justin emphasizes that only by following Saint Sava and his faith in Christ can the Serbs defeat the communist (red international) and the capitalist-fascist (yellow) international. He stood up against Dimitrije Ljotić’s fascist movement ZBOR for recruiting some members of the Orthodox clergy. He warned those clergymen that if they, as priests of the Saint-Savian Church, resorted to violence to achieve their goals, they would immediately become inquisitors and, like the medieval Roman Catholic Church, reduce Christianity to the inquisition.⁸²

At the end of the 1930s and especially during the Second World War, Saint Sava and *Svetosavlje* remained in Justin’s immediate focus. The result of this interest is a work published in 1953 under the title *Svetosavlje kao filozofija života* (*Saint-Savanness as the Philosophy of Life*). When thinking about this title, a reader’s or listener’s attention often lingers on the notion of *Svetosavlje*, while the phrase “philosophy of life” is usually taken as self-evident. However, the notion of the philosophy of life in Justin is somehow more mysterious than the very notion of *Svetosavlje*, about whose origin, meaning and purpose one learns from the work itself.

Bogoljub Šijaković notes that the notion of philosophy of life, in the form of irrationalism or anti-rationalism, appears as a response to the spiritual crisis caused by WWI, as well as a reaction to positivism and neo-Kantianism.⁸³ Šijaković mentions Henri Bergson and Oswald Spengler as the authors whose philosophies of life, intuitionism and critique of the spiritual crisis of Western culture strongly influenced Yugoslav and Serbian intellectuals, including Justin. The critique of rationalism pursued by interwar Serbian authors was directed not against reason as such but against very particular trends in German rationalism. As

⁸² Justin Popović, “Svetosavsko sveštenstvo i političke partije,” *Žički blagovesnik*, 12 (1940): 20–24; 2 (1941): 16–21.

⁸³ Bogoljub Šijaković, *Svetosavlje i filozofija života* (Novi Sad: Pravoslavna reč, 2019), 18.

Irina Deretić argues, the Serbian philosopher Miloš Djurić, on whose work Justin drew, criticized the absolutization of the process of thinking and its logical categories.⁸⁴ This philosophical tendency was evident in the “panlogism” of the neo-Kantians of the Marburg School (Hermann Cohen, Ernst Cassirer, Paul Natorp), the “axiologism” of the neo-Kantians of the Baden School (Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert) and the phenomenology of the Göttingen schools (Edmund Husserl). The Serbian interwar critique of rationalism was focused on the claims of German rationalist schools that it is possible to reach absolute reliable knowledge through transcendental categories and apodictic judgments, like in logic and mathematics. For Serbian interwar critics of rationalism, including Justin, life escapes such knowledge closed in its own categories. Therefore, Justin leant towards Henry Bergson and his vitalism or, to use his own term, “philosophy of life”.

The phrase “philosophy of life” appeared in Justin’s writings long before the work *Svetosavlje as the Philosophy of Life* was published. It can be detected in his philosophical and theological writings from the late 1910s. The phrase “philosophy of life” appears in Justin’s Oxford dissertation “Philosophy and Religion of F. M. Dostoyevsky” from 1919 as “evangelical, orthodox philosophy of life,” which Justin identifies with philosophy of prayer because it arises from constant prayer.⁸⁵

Justin establishes the philosophy of life not on intuition, like Bergson, but faith and prayer. In this regard, Justin relies on the early Greek Church Fathers, like Gregory of Nyssa, who equated monastic and ascetic life with the notion of philosophical life (φιλοσοφικός βίος).⁸⁶

In his book on *Svetosavlje*, Justin relies, at least in its structure, on Nikolaj’s position, revealed in several of his articles written during the

⁸⁴ Irina Deretić, “Zašto je Miloš Djurić filozof,” in *Miloš N. Djurić – klasično nasledje na razmedji tradicionalnog i modernog: zbornik naučnog skupa održanog 21. decembra 2017. u SANU i na Filozofskom fakultetu Univerziteta u Beogradu*, ed. Zlata Bojović (Beograd: SANU, 2021), 110–111.

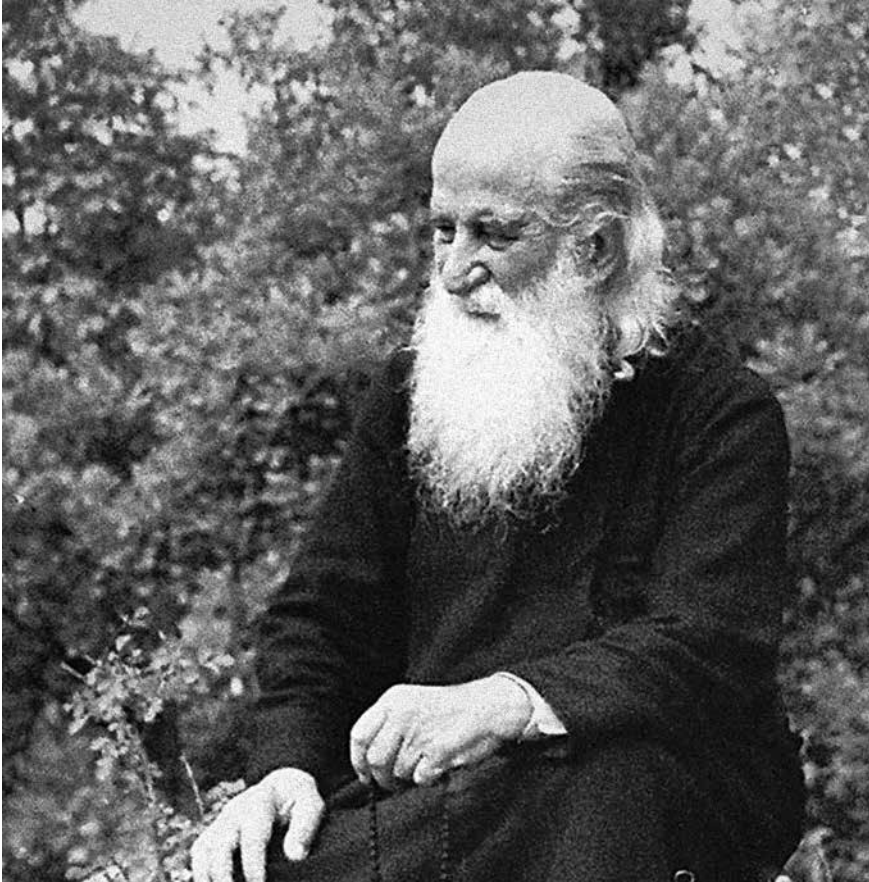
⁸⁵ Justin Popović, “Filosofija i religija F. M. Dostojevskoga,” *Hrišćanski život* 4 (1923), 162–207: 184.

⁸⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate (=De Virg)*, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, Vol. VIII/1, ed. J.P. Cavarinos (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 248. The English translation of “On Virginitate” by V. W. Callahan is available in: *St Gregory of Nyssa, Ascetical Works* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 3–78: 6

1930s. As mentioned above, Nikolaj points out that, when drawing on Saint Sava, one should also take into account his visions of the church, state, education, army, family, art, culture and monasticism.⁸⁷ Justin's book is split into chapters that discuss Saint-Savian philosophies of the world, progress, culture, society, values and criteria, and education.⁸⁸ According to Justin, the Saint-Savian philosophy of the world is based on two principles: 1) the world is an epiphany; 2) mankind is called to serve God (p. 191). In his treatment of Saint-Savian philosophy of progress, Justin claims that man is truly human only through the God-man, the only one who linked progress with human immortality (207). According to Justin, Saint Sava founded Saint-Savian culture by leading medieval Serbia not towards the East or towards the West but towards the God-man (211-213), who is perfect unity and *sabor* of God and man (219). In monastic fashion, Justin identifies the evangelical virtues, such as faith, love, hope, prayer, fasting, and meekness, by which humans attain the likeness of Christ, with the instruments of the Saint-Savian philosophy of culture. According to the Saint-Savian philosophy of society, society should adapt itself to the Church as its eternal ideal. In fact, the Church should be the God-human Person of Christ, extended through space and time. In the chapter "Saint-Savian philosophy of values and criteria", Justin argues that the God-man is the highest value, since he was the only one who solved the problem of life and death, showing in his personality "the embodied and hypostasized immortality and life eternal". Finally, in the last chapter, Justin expounds the Saint-Savian philosophy of education, based on the principle that the God-man, as the perfect God and the perfect man, should be the ultimate goal and purpose of education. Finally, he concludes that Saint Sava, as a saint perfected by the God-man, is the greatest enlightener of the Serbian people, because for Justin education is essentially devoted to facilitating holiness.

⁸⁷ Nikolaj Velimirović, "Veliki jubilej naroda srpskog – Proslava sedamstogodišnjice smrti Svetog Save," in *Kalendar Srpske pravoslavne Patrijaršije* (Beograd, 1935), 74–77; Velimirović, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save," 308–309.

⁸⁸ Justin Popović, "Svetosavlje kao filosofija života," in Justin Popović, *Sabrana dela oca Justina u 30 knjiga*, Vol. 4 (Beograd: Naslednici oca Justina i manastir Čelije kod Valjeva, 2001), 175–266.



Archimandrite Justin Popović in the monastery of Ćelije in the 1970s
(Courtesy of Boško Bojović, Paris)

The teaching of *Svetosavlje* expounded in *Svetosavlje as the Philosophy of Life* is cleansed of all ideological elements. When referring to Serbian national history, he omits all events that are not evangelical or connected with Christ, but he does not minimize the national character of *Svetosavlje*.⁸⁹ Like Saint Sava himself, who wrote the *Vita*

⁸⁹ Neven Vukić, "Saintsavaism(s) and Nationalism: An Overview of the Development of the Serbian Orthodox Phenomenon of Saintsavaism, with a Special Focus on the Contribution of Justin Popović (1894–1979)," *Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context* 50 (2021): 95.

of his father Simeon the Myrrh-gusher in order to demonstrate that the ideal of holiness is achievable by members of his nation, Justin refers to Saint Sava and his work as the historical realization of universal Christian principles under nation-specific conditions and recommends that work as worthy of being emulated in pursuit of holiness. For Justin, pursuing any other national or ideological goal other than Saint-Savian holiness means failing to achieve one's divine-human calling.

Svetosavlje, anti-Communism and anti-Semitism: Dimitrije Najdanović and Djoko Slijepčević

Dimitrije Najdanović (1897-1986)⁹⁰ and Djoko Slijepčević (1909-1993)⁹¹ were also interwar theoreticians of *Svetosavlje* but, unlike Niko-

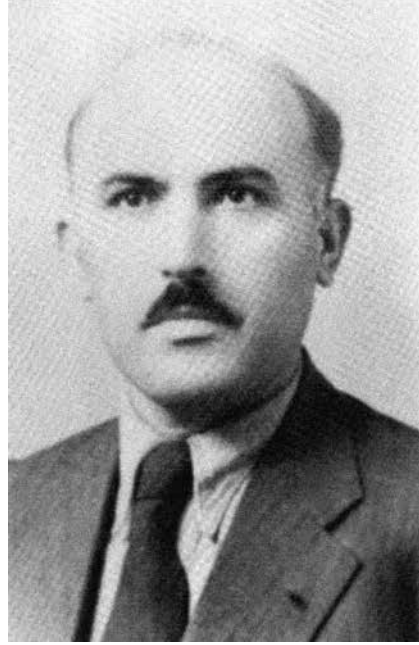
⁹⁰ The most relevant studies on Dimitrije Najdanović are: Željko Z. Jelić, "Dr Dimitrije Najdanović (1897-1986)," in *Filosofija istorije I. H. Fihtea i drugi spisi*, ed. Željko Z. Jelić (Beograd: Jasen, 2003), 509-511; Dragan Subotić, *Ličnosti srpske desnice 20. veka: pregled konzervativnih političkih portreta, ideja i pokreta*, Beograd: Institut za političke studije, 2006; Bogdan Lubardić, "Srpska religijska filosofija u XX veku: ličnosti, ideje, tokovi," in *Srpska teologija u dvadesetom veku: istraživački problemi i rezultati*, Vol. 4, ed. Bogoljub Šijaković (Beograd: PBF, 2009), 7-56: 14.

⁹¹ The most relevant studies on Djoko Slijepčević are: Nemanja Andrijašević, "O životu i radu Djoka Slijepčevića sa bibliografijom njegovih radova od 1944," *Symplexis* 1 (2018): 61-79; Id., "Objavljivanje članaka prof. dr Djoka Slijepčevića u Južnoafričkoj Republici," *Bogoslovlje* 77/2 (2018): 110-125; Id., "Prof. Dr Djoko Slijepčević u Švajcarskoj 1948-54," *Crkvene studije* 16 (2019): 359-378; Id., "Rad prof. dr Djoka Slijepčevića u Institutu za jugoistočnu Evropu (Südosteuropa Institut) u Minhenu 1955-1975," *Tokovi istorije* 1 (2019): 111-144; Id., "Život i rad prof. dr Djoka Slijepčevića u Saveznoj Republici Nemačkoj 1954-1993," *Bogoslovlje* 79/1 (2020): 97-127; Id., "Prepiska vojvode Momčila Djujića i prof. dr Djoka Slijepčevića," *Crkvene studije* 19 (2022): 385-403; Dimitrije Kalezić, "Istorija Crkve u radovima Djoka Slijepčevića," in *Srpska proza danas: Pero i Djoko Slijepčević - život i djelo*, Zbornik radova, ed. Radoslav Bratić (Beograd, 1998), 155-160; Id., "Dr Djoko Slijepčević kao crkveni istoričar. Čovek - institucija," *Nova Iskra* 48 (1997): 43-45; Predrag Puzović, "Sećanje na Djoku Slijepčevića," *Bogoslovlje* 2 (2002): 275-278; Id., "Dr Djoko Slijepčević (1907-1993) - Biografija i bibliografija," *Bogoslovlje* 1-2 (1992): 103-116; Id., "Dr Djoko Slijepčević - istoričar SPC," in Predrag Puzović, *Prilozi za istoriju Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve* 3, Beograd, 2006, 265-271; Id., "Biografija Djoka Slijepčevića (1907-1993)," in *Srpska proza danas: Pero i Djoko Slijepčević - život i djelo*, Zbornik radova, ed. Radoslav Bratić (Beograd, 1998), 261-264; Radomir Popović, "Dr Djoko Slijepčević - istoričar Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve," *Bogoslovlje* 2 (2002): 269-274; Dragan Subotić, "Djoko

laj and Justin, their theological enterprise served an ideological and political purpose and was closely connected to their political activities as members of Dimitrije Ljotić's movement ZBOR.



Dr. Dimitrije Najdanović [circa 1940]
(Wikimedia Commons. Internet source:
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Dimitrije_Najdanovic.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dimitrije_Najdanovic.png))



Dr. Djoko Slijepčević (Courtesy of the
Facebook page Vlada narodnog spasa. In-
ternet source: [https://www.facebook.com/4
12112732215408/photos/a.418895611537
120/4347005235392785/?type=3](https://www.facebook.com/412112732215408/photos/a.418895611537120/4347005235392785/?type=3))

Similarly to Velimirović and Popović, who obtained their theological and philosophical education at European universities, i.e. Halle, Bern, Geneva, Oxford and Athens, Najdanović, after studying theology and philosophy at the University of Belgrade, defended his doctorate in philosophy in Berlin at the dawn the Second World War. According to his own testimony, Najdanović coined the term *Svetosavlje*,⁹² and

M. Slijepčević: *istoričar Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve (1908–1991)*,” in Dragan Subotić, *Organska misao Srba u XIX i XX veku 1*, Beograd: Preobražaj, 1999, 437–442.

⁹² Dimitrije Najdanović, *Svetosavlje i Pravoslavlje* (Beograd: Nova Iskra), 30; Grbić, “Svetosavlje – omen za numen pravoslavlja,” 150.

a group of theology students, including Djoko Slijepčević, founded under his influence the journal *Svetosavlje* in 1932 as the newsletter of the student association of the Orthodox Theological Faculty, University of Belgrade. Almost every issue of the journal included an article by Dimitrije Najdanović. Thus, in the article “Saint-Savian Paralipomena” (Svetosavska paralipomena), Najdanović criticizes the desecrating way in which both patriotic and non-patriotic history portrays Saint Sava, underlining that only through *Svetosavlje* the Slavic ethnos could be transformed into Christian ethos.⁹³ For Najdanović, *Svetosavlje* was “the maximum sanctification of the national moment” and “the sublime process of Orthodox messianism” in which the messianic ideology is revealed.⁹⁴ According to Najdanović, through the stage of Saint-Savian activism, the nation is synthesized into a holy organism, i.e. “a holy nation.”⁹⁵ In Najdanović’s works from the early 1930s, there is no dichotomy between Yugoslav and European culture. The *Svetosavlje* that Najdanović proclaimed had to provide conditions for the renaissance of life, man, soul and logos, as certain philosophical schools were trying to do on the European level, because, according to Najdanović, there is an essential similarity between the sanctification of the people and the emanation of the logos.

In 1933, Najdanović, together with the philosopher Vladimir Vujić, founded the magazine *Road (Put)*, which after two years of publication, i.e. from 1935, continued to be published under the name *Christian Thought (Hrišćanska misao)*, under the editorship of Djoko Slijepčević.⁹⁶ In the work “Prolegomena of Religious Politics” (Prolegomena religiozne politike) from 1936, Najdanović lashed out at Marxism, as well as at democratic liberalism, which, according to him, tends to replace religion.⁹⁷ Therefore, according to Najdanović, the political struggle in his time appeared as a “struggle for religion”, in which Christianity could not remain indifferent in its struggle for the state.⁹⁸ Najdanović glori-

⁹³ Dimitrije Najdanović, “Svetosavska paralipomena,” *Svetosavlje* 2 (1932), 62–67: 63.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹⁶ Grbić, “Svetosavlje – omen za numen pravoslavlja,” 150.

⁹⁷ Dimitrije Najdanović “Prologomena religiozne politike,” *Hrišćanska misao* 5 (1936), 68–72: 69

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69–70.

fies Carl Schmitt's political theology and sees the Christian struggle not as divided along confessional lines because, according to him, the struggle for the state cannot be the subject of a political group, nation or race, but there must be Christian pan-activism in the defense of the state.⁹⁹ At the end of the article, by following Bergson, Najdanović concludes that all anthropology is sociology and all sociology is anthropology, and every true study of human being and society is individual-socialism.¹⁰⁰ Such an attitude of Najdanović may be understood as his critique of National Socialism. In the article "Philosophy of Companionship" (*Filozofija druželjublja*) from the same year, Najdanović points out that democracy, communism and fascism all destroy an individual and society because they introduce "individualistic nihilism", "stupid atomism" and "murky and obscure bioracism" into the idea of friendship.¹⁰¹ According to Najdanović, the goal of every community is to be transformed into a church-organic collective.¹⁰² In this period, he understood Christianity, especially in its ascetic ethos, as a political force that can oppose the dominant ideologies of his time: liberal democracy, communism and fascism. His ecumenical orientation grew into a Christian universalism, which he hoped would become a barrier to the aforementioned ideologies. The circle of his European ideologues is not as wide as in his earlier works, and in addition to Bergson, who remains Najdanović's role model, Carl Schmitt, a prominent member of Hitler's National Socialist Party at the time, is also mentioned.

The concordat crisis that shook the Yugoslav capital and the Serbian church in 1937 certainly changed Najdanović's ecumenical orientation, as can be seen from his later works. Thus, in the article "All Quiet on the Western Front" (*Na zapadu ništa novo*) from 1938, Najdanović wrote about the demolition of over a hundred Orthodox churches in Poland, claiming that Orthodoxy in Poland was wedged between the hammer of "the inquisitorial crusade of the Black Caesar in Rome"

⁹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰¹ Dimitrije Najdanović „Filozofija druželjublja,” *Hrišćanska misao* 10 (1936), 141–144: 142.

¹⁰² Ibid.

and the anvil of “Judeo-Bolshevism of the Jewish-Bolshevik Russia.”¹⁰³ He also criticizes “Romano-Germanic” Europe for not hearing the voices of those crying in the European desert.¹⁰⁴ In the 1939 article “Schism or Parliamentary Unity,” he discusses the situation in Yugoslavia. In an article written in the apocalyptic spirit of the war in Europe, Najdanović, who was then pursuing his doctoral studies in Berlin, highlights the dangers looming over the Balkans: “communist Satanism,” “mammonism of all categories, and capitalism as the most serious of all,” “the renewed twilight of Slavism” and “the terrible frenzy of Jewish anti-Christian nihilism”.¹⁰⁵ However, the greatest problem, in his view, is the disunity of Balkan Orthodoxy. Therefore, he proposes “intensive and urgent coordination of Orthodox Church forces in the direction of Balkan unanimity” as a measure to preserve Balkan Orthodox freedom.¹⁰⁶ Najdanović opposes *Svetosavlje* and Saint-Savian commitment to the communism of love of Karl Marx, whom he also calls the “Judeo-communist great rabbi.”¹⁰⁷ In the article “The Myth of Slavic and National Russia” (Mit o slovenskoj i nacionalnoj Rusiji) from October 1940, Najdanović continues to criticize what he terms “Judeo-communism.” According to him, this is the ideology of communism preached by Karl Marx.¹⁰⁸ However, Najdanović mentions Marx primarily as a Jew, whom other Jews accept as the new Moses. He argues that the Jews spread Marx’s teachings in their press in order to bring “disorder into the Christian world” and “destroy the main fortress of Christ on earth – Holy Russia.”¹⁰⁹ That is why Najdanović calls for the de-Semitization of Russia and the removal of 90% of Jewish power from Russian government structures.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Dimitrije Najdanović “Na zapadu ništa novo,” *Pregled Eparhije žičke* 10 (1938), 3–7: 4–5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁰⁵ Dimitrije Najdanović, “Raskol ili saborno jedinstvo,” *Hrišćanska misao* 11–12 (1939), 2–6: 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Dimitrije Najdanović “Mit o slovenskoj i nacionalnoj Rusiji,” *Žički blagovestnik* 10 (1940), 8–13: 11.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Djoko Slijepčević was a close associate of Najdanović and the editor of the journal *Christian Thought* (*Hrišćanska misao*) founded by the latter. In contrast to Najdanović, Slijepčević did not use term *Svetosavlje* much in his works, but rather a notion of traditional spirituality and morality. Slijepčević graduated from the Faculty of Theology of the University in Belgrade in 1934, and obtained a PhD degree from the same faculty in 1936. He spent two years as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Berlin, specializing in Serbian ecclesial history. In 1938, he was appointed a professor of Serbian church history at the University of Belgrade, where he taught until 1945. Like Najdanović, Slijepčević was a prominent member of the People's Movement ZBOR led by Dimitrije Ljotić and a fervent supporter of the quisling Government of National Salvation headed by General Milan Nedić.

In his early essay "Intelligentsia and the People" (*Inteligencija i narod*) from 1936, Slijepčević draws a very sharp line between educated intellectuals, who, in his words, serve the cult of reason and follow western culture and science and the so-called man of the people, who has retained a physical and spiritual bond with the Serbian people. Thus, in this article, Slijepčević appears as critic of the West, the cult of reason, and the tradition of enlightenment, fused with urban culture, and a supporter of the peasantry, still firmly entrenched in traditional morality and spirituality.¹¹¹ In the article "Ecclesial and Educational Problems" (*Crkveno-prosvetni problemi*), Slijepčević suggests that an educated theologian must be an ideological activist.¹¹² In his opinion, such a theologian should become a proponent of the Orthodox ideology of life, with dogmatic, as well as social, cultural and ethical content. In the article "The Most Important Problems of Our Time," Slijepčević claims that only two kinds of human beings exist: Marxists and anti-Marxists.¹¹³ The Marxists, he argues, are a product of western humanism and the so-called 'Faustian' renaissance, while the anti-Marxists are those who follow Christ in every respect.

¹¹¹ Djoko Slijepčević, "Inteligencija i narod," *Hrišćanska misao* 2/1 (1936): 1–2.

¹¹² Djoko Slijepčević, "Crkveno-prosvetni problemi," *Hrišćanska misao* 2/4 (1936), 57–59: 57.

¹¹³ Djoko Slijepčević, "Najvažniji problemi našeg vremena," *Hrišćanska misao* 3/2 (1937), 22–24: 24.

In the article “On the Zeitgeist” (U znaku vremena), Slijepčević deals with what he saw as the two greatest problems of his time, the problem of person and the problem of community. He asks what the priority should be, forming a human being as a free and creative person or creating a collective that sees itself as the supreme value.¹¹⁴ He concludes that the former should be of the highest priority.

In the 1937 article “The Social Moment in Spiritual Creation” (Socialni moment u duhovnom stvaranju), Slijepčević claimed that social philosophy, art and literature of his time became an instrument of socialist and communist doctrines and rationalist and materialist humanism. He maintains that true social engagement should be led by a spiritual impulse and the creation of a moral, spiritual person should prevail over the emancipation of the working classes.¹¹⁵ Slijepčević’s article “Response to *Katolički list* [Catholic Bulletin]” (Odgovor *Katoličkom listu*) tackles a slightly different topic than his earlier articles, focusing on the relationship of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia with National Socialism, on the one hand, and the Orthodox Church, on the other hand. Slijepčević accuses the Vatican and the Catholic Church in general of having good relations with both USSR and the Third Reich. He claims that the internal cosmopolitanism of Catholicism impedes the independent and free spiritual growth of Christians, while the Orthodox nationalism of Serbs and other Orthodox peoples encourages spiritual growth and the realization of Christian ideals.¹¹⁶ In Slijepčević’s article “New Anti-Religious Policy in the Soviet Union” (Nova antireligiozna politika u Sovjetskoj Uniji), one can detect some anti-Semitic elements. For instance, Slijepčević identifies atheism with Semitism and contrasts it with Christianity. His criticism focuses on the Soviet Constitution, which guarantees both freedom of religion and freedom to disseminate anti-religious propaganda. Slijepčević stated that the anti-religious policy pursued by the Organization of Active Atheists and its director, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, a Bolshevik revolu-

¹¹⁴ Djoko Slijepčević, “U znaku vremena,” *Hrišćanska misao* 3/6-7 (1937), 95–96: 95.

¹¹⁵ Djoko Slijepčević, “Socialni moment u duhovnom stvaranju,” *Hrišćanska misao* 3/11-12 (1937), 155–156: 156.

¹¹⁶ Djoko Slijepčević, “Odgovor *Katoličkom listu*,” *Hrišćanska misao* 4/1-4 (1938), 23–24: 23.

tionary of Jewish descent, led to the closure of 673 monasteries and proclaiming Christians as enemies of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷

As mentioned above, both Najdanović and Slijepčević were prominent members of the People's Movement ZBOR led by Dimitrije Ljotić. As Rastko Lompar noted, ZBOR represented a synthesis of two complementary but different impulses: on the one hand, the integral nationalist, secular, intellectual dissatisfaction with the condition of the state and the nation, and on the other, spiritual dissatisfaction with the state of morality in the society.¹¹⁸ Najdanović and Slijepčević were representatives of the second stream in the ZBOR movement, the one focused on morality and spirituality. For Najdanović, ZBOR represented a powerful bridge between the eternal principles of the racial, biological and spiritual structure of the people and the contemporary imperatives.¹¹⁹ In the article "Our Social Thought", published in *Our Road* (*Naš put*), the organ of the People's Movement ZBOR, Slijepčević describes ZBOR as a movement that brought rebirth and national awakening for a new, truly just and social order of life.¹²⁰

Unlike Velimirović and Popović, who can hardly be shoehorned into the constructions of contemporary German historiography, in terms of anti-Semitism, Najdanović and Slijepčević certainly fit those descriptions. However, Najdanović and Slijepčević cannot be said to have been the main bearers of a certain historical process, although they indeed played significant roles in the theological and philosophical circles of interwar Belgrade, because they founded and edited the most important Christian periodical and had a large number of followers. The opportunistic shrewdness attributed to Velimirović and Popović can hardly be found in Najdanović and Slijepčević. Both Najdanović and Slijepčević were nationalists but not proponents of Serbian nationalism, as German authors suggest. They were, as Slijepčević formulates in the case of Dimitrije Ljotić, Orthodox Serbs in a narrow ethnic and

¹¹⁷ Djoko Slijepčević, "Nova antireligiozna politika u Sovjetskoj Uniji," *Hrišćanska misao* 4/12 (1938): 146–147.

¹¹⁸ Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej: Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice 1935–1945* (Beograd: Catena mundi 2021), 129.

¹¹⁹ Dimitrije Najdanović, "Naše znamenje," *Otađbina* 6.1.1937.

¹²⁰ Djoko Slijepčević, "Naša socijalna misao," *Naš put* 28, 21.9.1939, 1.

confessional sense, but integral Christians and convinced Yugoslav nationalists in a broader sense.¹²¹

As can be seen from his works, Najdanović writes passionately about what he believes in, even though the object of his faith is disintegrating before his eyes. From the beginning of the 1930s, Najdanović's faith in the synthesizing power of *Svetosavlje* goes hand in hand with faith in European philosophical teachings, from Rickert to Bergson and Dilthey to Husserl. Najdanović lives the spirit of the new Europe and, in his eyes, there is no dichotomy between the Holy Spirit and Europe, which are one. However, already in the mid-1930s, Najdanović's faith in European philosophy was shaken by the European political reality, which, according to him, reflected nihilistic individualism represented by liberal democracy, machanicism represented by communism, and bio-racism represented by fascism. Therefore, Najdanović calls for pan-Christian activism in the fight for a universal Christian state. Najdanović, who during those years resided in Berlin, where, under the mentorship of Nicolai Hartmann, he wrote his doctorate on Immanuel Hermann Fichte (son of the famous philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte),¹²² did not think highly of German fascism, whose National Socialism and bio-racism he saw as a threat to Europe and the world. Already at the end of the 1930s, faith in the universal Christian spirit disappeared, and Najdanović turned to Balkan Orthodoxy as the only hope. At the same time, liberal democracy, capitalism and fascism cease to be as much of a danger to the world as communism, which he sees as the product of a Jewish conspiracy against Christianity. Therefore, in his eyes, Orthodox Christianity becomes the highest value, and his main enemy is Judeo-Bolshevism. Najdanović identified the Jewish high priests who persecuted Christ in the New Testament with the communist ideologues of Jewish origin who persecuted Christianity in Russia.

In contrast to Najdanović, Slijepčević was from the beginning skeptical towards the West and western culture, as well as western Christians, especially Roman Catholics. Slijepčević accused the Roman Cath-

¹²¹ Djoko Slijepčević, *Jugoslavija uoči i za vreme Drugog svetskog rata* (Minhen: Iskra, 1978), 71.

¹²² Šjaković, *Svetosavlje i filosofija života*, 54.

olic community of Yugoslavia of refusing to work with the Orthodox community towards Yugoslav unity.¹²³ Therefore, Slijepčević did not pass through different phases like Najdanović did, from embracing western philosophy and fusing it with *Svetosavlje* to forming a pan-Christian coalition to contain the danger of communism and atheism. For Slijepčević, Western capitalism, German National Socialism and Soviet atheism were equally dangerous, because all of them suppressed the traditional forms of Christianity. He proposes traditional and national morality and spirituality, which can be identified with *Svetosavlje*, although he does not use this term. Finally, not unlike Najdanović, Slijepčević ultimately reached a position of anti-Semitism, which did not have the elements of bio-racism present in German anti-Semitism of this time. He portrayed Jews as the leaders and inspirers of the Bolshevik revolution, the enemies of Christianity, especially its traditional Orthodox forms rooted in the national being.

Conclusion

The interwar period can certainly be considered the most creative era in the history of Serbian religious philosophy and theology. This creativity was the result of the social and political circumstances, including the two world wars with catastrophic consequences, the creation of the state of South Slavic peoples, and the relations between the churches in Europe and Yugoslavia. Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović, teacher and student, attempted to offer some answers to the burning questions of their time. For them, as religious thinkers and clerics, the most important question was: "What is the Church, what makes the Church, and in which way does it manifest itself in time?" Then, for them as engaged European intellectuals, the next question was: "What is Europe, and what are the causes of the two wars in Europe?" Finally, for them as national leaders and civil servants of the newly established state of South Slavs, the third question was: "On what principles should the new Yugoslav state be built?" The question of the identity of the Church arises before them with all of its ferocity, because

¹²³ Djoko Slijepčević, "Odgovor *Katoličkom listu*," 23–24.

it shows that the identity underpinnings on which the ecclesiality, i.e., the “churchiness” of the Serbian church, but also other Orthodox and non-Orthodox European churches was built began to collapse. Thus, the liberation and national emancipation that the Serbian church wholeheartedly advocated became an obstacle to its identity. When the once scattered jurisdictions of the Serbian Church came under the institutional auspices of the Belgrade Patriarchate, it became crystal clear that the national idea and nationalism could not be an identity pillar of such a Church, because, as a kind of particularism, they defied the universal nature of the Church. Although the emancipatory and liberating nationalism of the Yugoslav peoples brought about the liberation and unification of those peoples, the nationalism and imperialist pretensions of the European peoples led to the First World War at the same time. Therefore, both authors stand up against Serbian nationalism as the identity foundation of the Serbian Church and see the European nationalisms as a consequence of the de-Christianization of Europe. Both authors contrast the image of the Church established on the ideas of *sabornost*, integral knowledge and the God-man with the image of Europe characterized by individualism, rationalism and humanism. Aware that the identity of the Church can no longer be constructed according to medieval patterns, such as the rule of the episcopate, nor according to the modern concept of *vox populi*, Nikolaj and Justin fashion the image of the Church exclusively on Christological material. In this way, Christ, the All-man and the God-man, becomes the basic principle and cornerstone of the Church, enabling it to preserve its identity despite any changes, or better said, in accordance with them. Thus, on the one hand, the constant and unchangeable nature of the Church is recognized, because the source, head and center of its unity is the unchangeable and eternal God, i.e. the God-man, and on the other hand, they acknowledge the constant variability of the Church, conditioned by the communion of its members with Christ and each other. Unlike the Church, which finds its identity in Christ for both authors, modern Europe builds its identity in opposition to Christ. By commencing from these two prepositions, that is, the rooting of the Church in Christ the God-man and the humanistic underpinnings of modern Europe, Nikolaj and Justin develop their idea of *Svetosavlje*,

which at the same time represents a reinterpretation of existing history. As the mainstay of the historical memory of the Serbian people for several centuries under foreign rule, Saint Sava and his work form the basis for the project of transforming the Yugoslav nation from a community based on common language into a community sharing the same faith and memory. At the same time, *Svetosavlje* becomes the principle of renewing the ecclesiology of the Serbian Church, not in accordance with the principles of national emancipation but on evangelical and ascetic grounds. In the works of these two authors, *Svetosavlje* becomes a practical and, within the limits of time and space, realized ecclesial and national principle, i.e., idealized model from the past, presented as the future and desired image of Yugoslav society organized on Christian principles. *Svetosavlje* is thus a kind of eschatological goal to which the Yugoslav state and society, equated with the Church, should strive. Although Saint Sava is an example from national history, *Svetosavlje* is deprived of any national admixture not established and confirmed in the Gospel. In the works of these two authors, especially in Justin's, national history is reduced to sites of historical memory that carry an exclusively Christian ethos and thus become moments of sacred history, because holiness is the basic principle by which historical events are measured. Unlike Nikolaj, who, at least to an extent, acknowledges the importance of lower forms of societal engagement on the path to holiness, Justin insists on asceticism as the only criterion of the personal and communal endeavor. For Justin, individuals and the whole society should be guided by the acquisition of Christian or holy virtues, which makes them members of the Church, i.e. members of the Body of Christ. *Svetosavlje* is thus divorced from the national principle, because its center is dislocated from the nation and its history and aimed at eschatology or the transcendent reality beyond history. *Svetosavlje* is connected with the national principle only insofar as the eschatological orientation has dominated history. However, neither for Nikolaj nor for Justin does *Svetosavlje* become an abstract principle or an elitist endeavor; instead, it is realized in concrete church communities. They offer *Svetosavlje* as a means of individual salvation, but also as a projected national goal. With the crisis of the Yugoslav national idea and the ensuing turmoil in the church

and the state, before the Second World War, *Svetosavlje* became more and more an intra-church principle and less and less a social one.

In contrast to the *Svetosavlje* of Justin and Nikolaj, the *Svetosavlje* of Najdanović and Slijepčević was mainly an ideological tool in the political struggle of the late 1930s. Both theologians, later ordained priests of the Serbian Church, were prominent members of the ZBOR movement led by Dimitrije Ljotić. Thus, for them, *Svetosavlje* was not a national platform that aimed to bring together different elements of Yugoslav society, but rather an instrument of political and ideological struggle. Although the *Svetosavlje* of Najdanović from the mid-1930 had some pan-European and pan-Christian elements, it was continually reduced in its universalist and inter-confessional scopes towards the Second World War. The *Svetosavlje* of Najdanović and Slijepčević was stripped completely of the personal strife for holiness, through ascetic struggle, proposed by Nikolaj and Justin, and it became rather an expression of right-wing extremism, which characterized ZBOR. At the dawn of the Second World War, the *Svetosavlje* of these two authors had two distinctive elements, anti-Communism and anti-Semitism, which were also the main enemies of ZBOR. Najdanović and Slijepčević maintained that communism was inspired and implemented by Jews, and thus they created a fusion of Christian and biblical anti-Judaism with anti-communism, which opposed *Svetosavlje* as an expression of the traditional spirituality and morality of the Yugoslav, in particular Serbian, village.

As an intellectual project widely conceived in the interwar period, *Svetosavlje* is certainly one of the most creative and impressive Christian political theologies that emerged in Europe in the twentieth century.